Inside this edition:

2: Healthy holiday cooking in Hammond
3: Project Legacy
4: Baton Rouge Town Hall
6: Program expands services to Veterans
7: Mental Health special yoga class
8: Donor provides served Thanksgiving meal to Veterans
10: Veterans build a better FUTURE
12: 2015 Homeless Veterans stand down
14: Dentistry receives $120,000 grant for homeless Veterans
Healthy holiday cooking in Hammond

By Tyler Grimes

Employees of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System hosted a healthy holiday cooking demonstration for Veterans and their families at the Hammond Community Based Outpatient Clinic Nov. 17.

The purpose of the event was to teach Veterans about healthy eating for the holidays, according to Loree Doyle, SLVHCS registered nurse.

“It was similar to a shared medical appointment where Veterans with similar health concerns could share in a group discussion about their concerns,” Doyle said. “This program was the first of its kind in Hammond where a live cooking demonstration took place.”

The Veterans also had a chance to sample some food and try a few recipes that were not part of their eating habits.

“Some had never had kale. Some did not know how to prepare brussel sprouts except to boil them,” she said. “This adds variety to the diet.”

Veterans also got to try red and green spinach salad with a homemade vinaigrette dressing, roasted turkey with homemade cranberry sauce and pumpkin spice cookies.

Trionne Burrell, clinical dietitian, was also part of the event and explained that the food people consume is extremely important to overall health and wellness.

“Food can be your medicine or it can be your poison. Each meal you get to choose,” Burrell said.

After trying the food, some of the attendees said they plan to make the recipes at home.

In addition to enjoying some healthy meals, the Veterans also told Doyle that they cannot wait to attend another cooking demonstration and based on the positive feedback, she said she and Burrell will be planning healthy eating events in the future because of how impactful these are.

“To teach healthy cooking techniques and introduce Veterans to new food items shows that healthy foods can taste great,” Burrell said.

Gina Hontiveros, Hammond CBOC manager and registered nurse, indicated that these type of events help to reinforce the importance of Veterans taking ownership of their health care.

“We supply the medication, education and support but they must choose to be part of the plan as well in order for it to work optimally,” Hontiveros said. “It was win-win. The patients loved it, and the staff was more than happy to be able to share their knowledge and expertise.”

“Food can be your medicine or it can be your poison. Each meal you get to choose.”
- Trionne Burrell, clinical dietitian
Construction of our new medical center is about 85 percent complete and many Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System employees have added activation activities to their day-to-day tasks.

For a team of SLVHCS clinical, biomedical and communications staff, activation includes selecting and purchasing equipment to make patient care more streamlined.

On Nov. 19, about 35 staff gathered to learn about the latest options for internal communications systems. The equipment is designed for use in both inpatient and outpatient units to alert clinic staff quickly when patients have certain needs.

“Our goal is to see our first patient in the new medical center by the end of 2016,” said Fernando O. Rivera, SLVHCS medical center director. “But we will not see a patient there until we make sure it is safe to do so.”

One way to do that is through timely communication and that means selecting the most appropriate equipment.

In addition to purchasing millions of dollars’ worth of equipment and supplies, integrated project teams and services are also developing work flows and coordinating with each other to ensure every facet of patient care is safe and efficient and the phased move in is efficient.

“We haven’t had inpatient facilities in over 10 years,” said Rivera. “So our staff is visiting other health care facilities to learn current best practices and develop processes and procedures based on the latest trends.”

For our Logistics, Police Service, Safety, Emergency Management, Facilities and other employees, their activation planning turned into action right after the holidays. The inpatient building and the patient parking garage were completed and turned over in the last week of December 2015 and in the first week of January 2016 furniture deliveries began.

“Employees from these services will be the first to move to the new spaces at the site, but before they can, furniture, phones, computers and other equipment must be installed,” said William Baker, Project Legacy deputy chief.

With a little bit of thought, it is easy to imagine the desks, phones and computers needing to be installed, but there are a host of other things that go into making the buildings usable, Baker said.

“A lot of planning went into moving this first group of employees,” said Baker. “I think we’ve got a good handle on scheduling and organizing the move. There will be challenges, but we are prepared and ready to take delivery of furniture and equipment and begin the installation process.”
Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System held a town hall Dec. 14 at American Legion Nicholson Post 38 in Baton Rouge, La. Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE, SLVHCS medical center director, spoke with many of the Veterans and their family members before the event began and then went on to open the presentation with a guided conversation about access to health care improvements, the status of the new medical center under construction in New Orleans and recruitment efforts.

He also discussed the Veterans Choice Program and addressed individual concerns from Veterans and family members in attendance. SLVHCS leadership and staff from Health Administration Service, Human Resources Management, Transition and Care Management, Voluntary Service, My HealtheVet and other programs were available to assist.

One hundred fifty-three people attended the event, including Veterans, their family members, and representatives from VA offices in and around Baton Rouge.

“It’s great to see everybody here,” said Rivera. “We have these town halls so we can give you information, but the best part is the one-on-one interaction we get to have.”

Rivera and the other employees spent time before the presentation shaking hands, getting to know people who had come to the town hall and assisting with any concerns. One question from a Veteran was, “What is being done to address the communication breakdown between VA, Veterans and health care providers referred by the
Rouge town hall

Veterans Choice Program.” Rivera spent several minutes explaining about the opening of the new telephone referral center in Jefferson Parish and how SLVHCS is developing a closer relationship with the third party administrator who networks Veterans with care outside of the VA system.

“We now have several of their employees working in our spaces,” Rivera said about TriWest, the third party administrator. “This is one example of how we are developing a closer association with them in order to handle problems as they come up.”

SLVHCS town hall meetings give Veterans, their families and other interested members of the local community an opportunity to meet with VA leaders, ask questions and share concerns about their health care or benefits. Town hall meetings also give Veterans an opportunity to directly speak with VBA staff about benefits claims.

The next SLVHCS town hall will take place at 6 p.m. Jan. 20 at the Slidell City Auditorium, 2056 2nd St., Slidell, La.

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Director Fernando O. Rivera meets with Veterans at the town hall meeting in Baton Rouge Dec. 14. (Photo by Hillary Rustine)

“IT’s great to see everyone here. We have these town halls so we can give you information, but the best part is the one-on-one interaction we get to have.”

- Fernando O. Rivera, SLVHCS medical center director

Fernando O. Rivera, SLVHCS medical center director, speaks to Veterans during the Baton Rouge town hall meeting Dec 14. (Photo by Hillary Rustine)

Eligibility for VA health care was on the minds of many of the Veterans, and SLVHCS employees were at the town hall to provide answers. (Photo by Anne Marino)
The Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn Program recently got a new name and with that change, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System now provides case management to a larger number of Veterans and active duty service members under this program.

As of Oct. 13, the OEF/OIF/OND Program became the Transition and Care Management Program, which provides care to all Veterans enrolled in the health care system who have served in the military since Sept. 11, 2001, not just those who were in combat, according to Eleanor Chapital, TCM Program manager.

One of the reasons for the name change is to help patients with understanding the services the program provides.

“This change will assist in identifying all post-9/11 Veterans and service members who enroll in our system and ensure they are screened for case management services,” Chapital said. “This screening provides a comprehensive overview of patients’ identified needs, and assists in expediting care as they transition from active duty to civilian status.”

The screening process helps Chapital and her team identify Veterans who are currently enrolled, but who have not had a comprehensive case management screening, and may not be receiving services and benefits they rate but do not know how to access. In addition to educating Veterans about the new program, the TCM team works with SLVHCS staff to help them understand the changes and how services are impacted.

Enrolled Veterans and service members who do not meet the program criteria for case management by the TCM team, or those who do not want case management services will be referred to their respective patient aligned care teams.

“One thing that has not changed about the program is the TCM team members or their commitment to caring for Veterans and service members,” Chapital said.

“I feel this change will have a positive impact on the provision of care to this population,” she said. “In addition, it will enhance the collaborative and collegial relationships we have fostered within SLVHCS, our educational affiliates and the community at large.”

For more information about the TCM Program, contact Eleanor Chapital at 504-412-3700 ext. 8490 or via email at Eleanor.Chapital@va.gov.
You’ve been living in your body your whole life. You’ve got more experience with its unique characteristics than anyone else on this planet. Doesn’t it make sense that you should also be the most important manager of its maintenance?

Studies conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health show a positive outlook contributes to a longer, healthier life. While some are more comfortable with a less than optimistic approach to life, statistics show that happiness impacts health.

The 5,000-year-old practice of yoga is one way Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System is helping Veterans learn a positive approach to managing their health.

“When I came here three and a half years ago, there had been a pilot study looking at the benefits of yoga in Veterans with PTSD,” said Dr. Karen Slaton, SLVHCS’ Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology department in New Orleans.

When Slaton came here in 2012 as a psychologist in the ambulatory mental health clinic, she also brought her experience as a certified yoga instructor with her. Since that time, she has been offering classes to Veterans. After three years she still advocates yoga as an avenue to wellness.

“First of all, I like it because it’s self-management. In primary care mental health, which is where I am now, and behavioral medicine, we want to teach people to manage their own health issues,” Slaton explained.

Giving Veterans choices in how they manage their own well-being reinforces feelings of positive empowerment – another Harvard study finding contributing to a longer, healthier life.

Yoga classes for Veterans are made available through the mental health clinic here and via video proctoring at clinics throughout southeast Louisiana.

“Right now, they can access it through mental health, through their primary care provider or through their physical medicine provider,” Slaton said. “If they talk to their provider in one of those service lines, they’re interested and it’s clinically indicated, that person can refer them.”
Donor provides Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving for most of us is an opportunity to spend time with family and friends while enjoying a lot of food. For some, including Veterans in southeast Louisiana, having a nice meal with loved ones is a luxury they cannot always afford.

Thanks to donations from the local community and dedication of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System staff, hundreds of Veterans had a chance to have a Thanksgiving meal at the Baton Rouge and New Orleans Community Based Outpatient Clinics Nov. 23 and 24.

The events came about after Cynthia White, Voluntary Service specialist, received a phone call from a donor interested in sponsoring a Thanksgiving meal for Veterans in need.

“The event started out being just in New Orleans and through the donor’s generosity we were able to host two events,” White said. “I worked with the donor, answering their questions about our event space, the number of Veterans, the flow of the day and other logistics.”

In addition, White worked with fellow staff members to coordinate the events and organize the many employees who volunteered to help.

One of those volunteers was Monica Vincent, SLVHCS social worker, who works with Veterans in the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program. She was a part of the planning committee and coordinated with providers to ensure room availability.

“It was important to me to participate in this event because it was a very generous gesture for an anonymous donor to actually want to make sure that our Veterans would have at least one special holiday meal for Thanksgiving,” she said.

For Army Veteran and mother Pilar Crutchfield, the meal served at the Baton Rouge CBOC gave her a welcome

Staff at the Baton Rouge Clinic serve Veterans Thanksgiving meals, Nov. 23. (Photo by Hillary Rustine)
break from the challenges of motherhood and a chance to spend time with other Veterans.

“It gets kind of lonely every now and again,” Crutchfield said. “There are Veterans who don’t have family to spend time with during the holidays so this is a chance to touch base with those who don’t have that opportunity.”

In addition to enjoying the event, Crutchfield said she really appreciates the care she receives at SLVHCS.

“It was important to me to participate in this event because it was a very generous gesture for an anonymous donor to actually want to make sure that our Veterans would have at least one special holiday meal for Thanksgiving.” - Monica Vincent, SLVHCS social worker

“I love it here,” she said. “I have very attentive doctors, and I have regularly scheduled appointments. I can also call and get in pretty easily.”

Providing quality care and support for Veterans is something Jennifer Hannon, SLVHCS social worker, does by assisting homeless Veterans find housing and other help through events like the Thanksgiving meals. For these types of events, she spread the word to the Veterans she works with who are in need.

“I think the homeless population, in general, feel disenfranchised and marginalize,” Hannon said. “So an event like this is very meaningful because it’s nice food and we worked hard to decorate to be very welcoming to them. They may not get this kind of meal elsewhere.”

Caring for Veterans is more than just providing medical appointments. For many SLVHCS employees, it’s meeting their social needs as well.
Construction teams are busy building a 1.6 million square feet medical center to replace the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System hospital in the heart of New Orleans, which was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

For many in the local community, the arrival of the new Department of Veterans Affairs facility, scheduled to start seeing patients by the end of 2016, is a welcome sight for a city in the midst of rebuilding 10 years after the storm. The medical center will mean many new jobs in the state-of-the-art 200-bed tertiary care regional referral center. But for the Veterans involved with the construction, the replacement medical center has a deeper meaning.

“You put your heart into a normal job, but you know this one is something special,” said Dave Doar, former Marine Corps infantryman. “Being a Veteran, building something that’s going to help these guys who really need it, makes you feel really good about the work.”

Doar is an electrician who has been on the project for about a year and a half and says the progress he has seen in that time is extremely exciting. Many of the Veterans construction workers share a similar sentiment, Doar explained.

“Most of the Vets feel like we’re contributing to our own because we are building a good place that our guys really have needed for a while,” he said.

For Vietnam Veteran Mike Roberts, the build is an opportunity to continue his trade as a plumber, something that he did in the Navy some 40 years ago.

“It’s similar to being on an aircraft carrier, it’s a big job with a really good crew,” Roberts said. “Definitely the biggest job I’ve been on.”

Roberts, a plumber foreman from California, has worked on the 30-acre site since 2013 and he’s seen mounds of dirt become multi-story structures. Witnessing the progress is one of the reasons he wants to stay here and see the construction through until the end and the doors are open.

“I have a lot of friends who are Vets, and they need a place like this. I’ve met a lot of people since I’ve been down here and they can’t wait to come here,” Roberts said.

To native Louisianans like Doar, seeing the city being rebuilt through construction projects like the medical center is exactly what the area needs.

“People see cranes up in the sky and they say ‘they’re rebuilding,’” he said. “It’s progress.”

“Take this building for example,” he says while standing in the newly-renovated Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System administrative building, once the home of Pan American Life Insurance. “This place was kind of rundown; look at it now.”

The refurbished 1950s era building is also the location of the SLVHCS recruitment center where more than 1,000 candidates recently came for a job fair.
Doar, the second of three generations to have served in the military, joined the Marines in 1982. He followed in his father’s footsteps, a Navy Veteran who served during World War II. Today, Doar’s son continues the family’s tradition by serving in the Air Force.

“I thought it was my obligation (to serve) and my dad and my son felt the same,” he explained.

Being involved with the project, Doar hopes the new hospital will be a place of healing for Veterans returning home, who are dealing with mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

“A place where my son could get help if he ever needs it,” he said.

To Veteran Mark Stevenson, working on this construction job is giving him a way to gain new knowledge and skills in the construction field while also building a medical facility he plans on using himself. Stevenson, once a Soldier, recalls overhearing a co-worker’s conversation about the job and took time to express what the project means to him on a personal level.

“I said ‘hey, you’re not just building a hospital, you’re building my hospital,” he said. “So, let’s do it right.”

While in the Army, he worked on a surface-to-air nuclear missile system in Germany in the early 1980’s.

“When I was there, the wall was still up and Czechoslovakia was still communist,” he said. “A lot of (things) were different than they are today.”

Stevenson has lived in Southeast Louisiana for about five years and comes to VA for his health care needs. He says he has received excellent care and looks forward to being a patient at the medical center when it opens.

“It’s the biggest project I’ve worked on and I’m interested to see how it plays out,” he said. “And see how it actually goes into operation.”

Before joining the crew on this build, the 15-year construction worker and Louisiana resident was involved in a rebuilding effort in New Orleans. Stevenson helped build homes for victims of Hurricane Katrina, a project he says he is very proud to be a part of.

“The work was very rewarding,” Stevenson said. “Giving someone who hasn’t had a home for years a place to live; it was really nice to see them get back into a home.”

Most of the Veterans these three have met on the site have expressed pride in doing their part for their fellow Veterans.

Fernando O. Rivera, SLVHCS medical director, said the new hospital will be a place where Veterans will come for outstanding health care and treatment.

“Our Veterans need and deserve the best health care possible,” Rivera said. “Our new medical center will be a place where our Veterans will want to come because they know the excellent-level of patient care they will receive.”
Veterans line up to check out the annual Homeless Veterans Stand Down Oct. 24 at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System in New Orleans. (Photo by Anne Marino)

Having a roof over your head and clothes to wear is something many take for granted, but for the homeless Veterans who attended the 2015 Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Homeless Veterans Stand Down on Saturday, Oct. 24, food, clothing and access to resources could not have come at a better time.

Veteran Jane Gardner, who was in the Navy from 1978 to 1981, was homeless, and the job she thought she had lined up the day before didn’t materialize.

“I don’t have anything,” Gardner said. “I thought I had a job yesterday, but they called me to say they didn’t need me after all.”

Coming to the stand down meant Gardner could get a flu shot, check on the status of her disability claim, get some food and clothing and see what other resources were available to her.

Her first stop was to check on her disability claim. She met with Veterans Benefit Administration employee Cynthia Marquez, and it made Gardner’s day.

“We had already reviewed her claim and gave her a disability rating,” said Marquez. “And, we have been depositing payments to her account since July.”

Unbeknownst to Gardner, her disability check was being deposited into an account she thought only had eight cents in it, and the address VA had for her was no longer accurate, so she didn’t know her status.

“Call your bank,” said Marquez. “See if your deposits made it to the account.”

Sure enough, the money was there, and Gardner could jump start her future.

“Now I get to see my grand baby who is six months old and get my car back,” she said. “I’ve never seen her, and I’m going to make a plane reservation the first thing Monday.”

While Gardner’s story is unique, helping Veterans was the goal of the day.

“We saw about 250 homeless Veterans and another 150 homeless residents of New Orleans,” said Jim Tardie, Homeless Veterans Program manager.
Added to this year’s Stand Down was the opportunity for Veterans to get free haircuts and manicures. Twelve students from Delgado Community College-Sidney Collier gave about 100 haircuts and 100 manicures throughout the day.

About 250 volunteers participated in the event, including corporate volunteers from Home Depot and AeroRocket.

“Many Veteran service organization representatives also participated,” said Cynthia White, Voluntary Service specialist. “Volunteers of American, Americorps, VFW, American Legion and Auxiliary, Military Order of the Purple Heart and Auxiliary, Daughters of the American Revolution and many others participated.

“Our volunteers make the Stand Down possible,” said White. “They give time, items and money. The Daughters of the American Revolution gave us $10,000 toward the Stand Down.”

“Food was donated by Volunteers of America, Fleur De Lis Catering, Jack & Jake’s Public Market, Coke, CC’s Coffee and Don’s Seafood,” White said.

The Homeless Veterans Stand Down is one way the community can join with SLVHCS to help Veterans in need,” said Tardie. “It’s a lot of work but well worth it.”
Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System was recently awarded part of a $120,000 homeless dental initiative grant for the nationwide Homeless Veterans Dental Program.

The money will be used to increase the accessibility of quality dental care to homeless Veterans enrolled in VA-sponsored and VA partnership homeless rehabilitation programs at locations throughout the U.S.

Statistics published in the American Journal of Public Health show that compared to those Veterans who did not receive dental care 30 percent more completed their homeless rehabilitation program, 14 percent more successfully found employment or became financially stable, and 15 percent more obtained permanent housing. These numbers clearly showed the value of dental care and hygiene to the welfare of Veterans trying to get back on their feet.

Last year, more than 18,000 homeless Veterans received VA dental care nationwide.

The funding will be used to offset fee-based services and lab work allowing the clinicians to focus on internal amenities.
Flu 38 - All

Seasonal Flu

What You Need to Know

Getting a flu shot can:
- Protect you, your family, and your friends from the flu
- Prevent severe illness and even death

A flu shot* is the best way to protect yourself against seasonal influenza (flu).

Seasonal flu is a respiratory illness that:
- Is caused by flu viruses that can change each year
- Spreads easily
- Occurs each year during fall, winter, and spring

How does the flu spread?
- When a person with the flu sneezes, coughs, talks, or laughs, the flu virus can spread into the air as droplets from their mouth or nose. These droplets can spread to people and surfaces within 3 to 6 feet.
- The flu virus can spread to your hands if you touch anything that has the virus on it. If you then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, you can get the flu.
- People may be able to spread the flu virus to others 1 day before they feel sick and up to 5 days after getting sick.

How can I protect myself from seasonal flu?
- Get vaccinated (flu shot or nasal spray) each year in fall or winter
- Avoid people who are sick
- Clean hands often
- Keep hands away from face
- Cover coughs and sneezes

Who should get a flu shot?
Anyone who wants to reduce their risk for becoming ill with flu! Ask where to get your flu shot.

Can a flu shot give me the flu?
NO. Some people get minor body aches, a headache, or a low-grade fever, but this is NOT the flu. Most people have none of these symptoms. There is no live virus in the flu shot so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot.

Each year in the U.S., the flu causes more than 226,000 HOSPITALIZATIONS and about 36,000 DEATHS.

Common Seasonal Flu Symptoms:
- Fever (usually high)
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat
- Feeling tired or weak
- Headache
- Muscle or body aches
- Stomach symptoms (mostly in children)

*Note: Flu vaccine is available as both a shot and a nasal spray.

www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn
www.publichealth.va.gov/flu
www.cdc.gov/flu
Veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care system and live less than 40 miles driving distance from the nearest facility may be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program. If they have difficulty reaching the closest VA medical facility for any of a number of reasons, listed below, they could qualify under the unusual or excessive burden eligibility determination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burdens</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Challenges</td>
<td>A Veteran needs to travel around a large body of water, over a mountain, or needs to navigate a similar geographic barrier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Factors</td>
<td>A Veteran’s trip to the closest VA medical facility is blocked by traffic conditions such as a road that is inaccessible to the general public, or a prolonged road closure, or by hazardous weather conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Veteran has a medical condition, as confirmed by the local medical facility’s Primary Care Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT Team), that impacts his or her ability to travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Condition</td>
<td>A Veteran could be determined eligible based on the nature, simplicity, or frequency of the care he or she needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This includes instances where a Veteran’s VA medical provider confirms that her or she requires an attendant to accompany him or her to a medical appointment either because of a medical condition or the type of procedure needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>