MGVAMC To Honor Our Dedicated VA Volunteers This Wednesday

VA could not fulfill its mission - without the kind and generous support from our VA Volunteers. This week, medical center leadership will join VA Voluntary Service’s Tom Marshall and James Deen for an exciting luncheon and annual awards ceremony to honor our tremendous volunteers.

Wednesday’s event begins at 11:00a.m. and is being held again at the Ft. Wright / Mukogawa Commons building, depicted in some of the scenes at right, which included Medical Center Director Dr. Robert J. Fischer presenting the President’s Lifetime Volunteer Achievement Award to volunteer and Veteran Mike Zorn.

VA will recognize each volunteer with a service pin based on the hours they’ve accumulated, all while aiding Veterans, staff, and guests at Mann-Grandstaff VAMC. All volunteers in attendance for the luncheon and awards ceremony will also receive a ticket—qualifying them for a chance to win one of many outstanding prizes that can range from a new coffee pot to a smart screen TV or new power tools to home décor.

Many of MGVAMC’s volunteers have accumulated hundreds, and some - thousands of hours volunteering to help Veterans and VA. This year’s event will be somewhat bittersweet, because it will be the last for VAVS Chief Tom Marshall (USAF Ret.) who, after 40 years, will retire from federal service later this year.

The annual celebration for MGVAMC volunteers typically draws interest from staff, who attend the event to help honor and recognize the volunteers who assist their service line in support of the Veterans we all serve together. The event typically lasts from 11:00a.m. to about 1:00p.m. Thank you VA Volunteers!

Boiler Plant Construction Creates Impacts to Roads/Parking

Engineering Service’s Project Manager for construction of the facility’s new $20 million-dollar Boiler Plant predicts employee parking will be impacted through the summer and likely late into the fall because of necessary road and parking area closures that began today.

“We realize the project is having an impact on staff and patients, but we’re excited to modernize our facility by replacing a boiler plant that has been in service since the late 1940’s,” explained David Arment, P.E. (pictured above left with facility electrician Keith Otto). Construction is expected to last 18-months. In the meantime, facility leadership is looking into options to add parking, including the Joe Albi lot just beyond the fence line of the existing back lot for employees. Engineering Service began posting notices and a map of the closures last month, but many were caught by surprise when looking for a place to park today. Despite the project impacts, the Native American Veterans Healing Lodge will remain open and accessible through the Reserve Road entrance.
MGVAMC Leadership Profile: Meet Sarah Boardman, Executive Assistant to the Medical Center Director

In ten quick years of Federal Service, Sarah Boardman has embraced the many different challenges—and opportunities VA has presented her. She strives for success, has demonstrated a willingness to accept responsibility, and learned to realize challenges can also present new opportunities to learn and grow. Even more, she cannot wait to see what’s next!

“I truly believe in Servant Leadership,” she says, “and I strive to positively impact the experience of our leadership, my team, and our stakeholders.” Then she smiled and politely added, “But I am a work in progress.”

A University of Washington graduate, Sarah has already applied her Communications degree in variety of VA experiences at four different VA medical centers stretching from Texas, to Seattle, to Walla Walla and Spokane. She has spent time contracting for VA Care in the Community, Operations of a Veterans Canteen Service, a Program Support Assistant for Community Care, a Technical Career Field intern, and an Acting Chief of Health Care Administration—all before accepting her current role as Executive Assistant to Medical Center Director Dr. Robert J. Fischer upon his arrival just over a year ago.

MGVAMC Physical Therapy Team Supporting Veterans at VA Winter Sports Clinic

Dr. Patricia VanCurler, VA Physical Therapist stationed at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center is happy to share highlights from her duties supporting Veterans at the VA’s 2019 Annual Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass, CO. She says, “It is a remarkable experience and so great to see this team grab hold of the opportunities afforded them.” Click here for link to Veteran Brent King of Spokane enjoying the snow!

In her own words, here’s Trish’s views on the importance of the clinic and how Adaptive Sports are improving the lives of Veterans and their future: “A world leader in rehabilitation, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic provides nearly 400 profoundly disabled Veterans with training and rehabilitation every year. Veterans with TBI’s, spinal cord injuries, visual impairments, amputations and other severe disabilities are challenged to overcome perceived limitations through adaptive skiing, sled hockey, scuba diving, rock wall climbing, education and other activities,” explained VanCurler. She also shared how Mann-Grandstaff VAMC had 7 veterans participating in the national event. Beyond receiving skilled specialty instructions in their chosen activities, they are learning how to travel with a disability, growing in their ability to interact with others, building support systems and identifying ways to continue their growth of skill and confidence when they return home.”

I CARE Awards

Day in and day out, our campus streets, sidewalks, entry ways, stairs and parking lots were managed by the our Grounds Crew who were up early at “O’ Dark Thirty” keeping our VA campus safe!

At far right above, Engineering Service Chief Brian Henneman (USAF Ret.) introduces the Grounds Crew to MGVAMC leadership at morning report – where each were presented an I CARE Award and recognition for their collective efforts to ensure safe access for our Veteran patients, volunteers, guests, and VA employees – NICE!

The Winter of 2018-’19 dropped 50” of snow on Spokane, slightly less than average. However, the challenge was keeping ahead of the nearly 30” of snow that fell in February alone – something that hasn’t happened in over 100 years!
NOVA Nurses Welcome MGVAMC Staff to Join in on Lilac Parade Fun - May 18th!

Spokane’s annual Armed Forces Day celebrations are always exciting as tens of thousands of people line the streets downtown to honor and celebrate the Lilac Festival’s Armed Forces Torchlight Parade – the largest night-time tribute to local military units and Veterans.

The annual event is always held on the third Saturday in May—and this year, proud members of MGVAMC’s Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) will march together through downtown from 7:30 - 10:00p.m. as part of the more than 100-entries in the parade.

Organizer Jenny Calkins, RN also indicates NOVA gladly welcomes any MGVAMC staff who would also like to participate in the event. The event is preceded by an All-Veteran BBQ on North Monroe earlier in the day on May 18.

NOVA Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
VA Emphasizing “MISSION Act” Differences from Veterans Choice Program

With continued debate circling the Washington D.C. Beltway about the new MISSION Act and whether it risks “privatization” of the agency and its programs, VA is sharing more information with staff and Veteran stakeholders about the new law to be fully implemented in June 2019.

Among the helpful tools, are a new four-page fact sheet, flyers, and internal SharePoint document library that can help distinguish what VA staff and Veterans should know going forward. Enacted by President Donald Trump last June, the VA’s “Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act” (MISSION Act) is an effort to strengthen VA’s ability to deliver Veteran-centric care in four key areas:

* Consolidating VA community care programs into a single program that is much easier to navigate.
* Expanding eligibility for Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.
* Strengthening VA’s ability to recruit and retain the best medical providers.
* Strengthening VA’s infrastructure.

For VA employees in particular, the MISSION Act improves ways to hire staff and keep staff onboard; Creates “Anywhere to Anywhere” telehealth linking Veterans with their care teams across state lines; Allows VA to lead with cutting-edge technology; and Enhances VA as a leader for U.S. health care. Other benefits of the MISSION Act include: Better staffing for stronger teams; Support tools for Patient Eligibility; Improved IT systems that ease workload, Education incentives; and creating Stronger Network to care for Veterans.

Veteran Chrystal Ortega Challenges Women to Seek Opportunities and Apply Lessons Learned

Veterans and staff at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center knew they were gathering for VA’s Annual Women Veterans Recognition event. They knew event organizer Carrie Daniel secured the commitment of Veteran Chrystal Ortega (USAF Ret.) who recently retired after a challenging and rewarding military career. What nobody expected, was Ortega’s candid remarks of the realities of military life, war, and the need for being strong in a male dominated force. Her speech inspired pride, laughter, and painful reminders of the tough lessons Veterans learn.

Having enlisted in 1994, Ortega recognized how demanding and real military life can be. On 9-11, she heard the roar of Air Force One overhead, escorted by fighter jets on fast approach to Offut AFB, in Omaha, Nebraska after the downing of the Twin Towers. She’s deployed to the Middle East war theatre to provide pilots with the latest intelligence for their combat missions. She would also be stationed in the Far East to maintain readiness in Korea. Whether in a helicopter or deep below ground in a missile silo, Ortega valued her lessons learned along the way. Follow this link to read her speech / see pics!

Quarterly NEO Resource Fair
This Wednesday, April 10th
Anytime between 1130-1230
Main hallway from Primary Care clinic to BHS
All are Welcome to learn more about your VA!

Click Here
Employee Newsletter “Wealth of Health”
Veterans, VA staff, and community members gathered to honor and remember the fallen, by challenging everyone to engage in Suicide Prevention efforts, as they brought their families, service animals, and energizing spirit to Spokane’s VA after marching nearly five miles from Riverfront Park to the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center. Upon arrival, participants were welcomed to a surprise BBQ reception in the facility’s Veteran’s Healing Garden.

At left below, Mike O’Flaherty, USMC Veteran and VA Volunteer takes a break from cooking as VA Dr. Quinn Bastian, Chief, BHS thanks him and the Marine Corps League, and Nez Perce Tribe for helping sponsor lunch.

At right, Andrew Holstine, USMC Veteran thanked VA, Veterans, family, and friends for supporting his Suicide Prevention march to VA.
Spokane’s VA Vet Center Honors Vietnam War Veterans During Annual Commemoration and Pinning Ceremony

“I’m the luckiest guy in the world,” said 71 year-old Vietnam War Veteran Ray Calhoun (USMC) as he addressed a room full of Veterans, family members, and guests gathered at VA’s Spokane Vet Center for the annual Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War.

“We had 41 of our troops killed in one battle, and the rest of us didn’t get out alive without being wounded that day,” recalled Calhoun – who earned a Silver Star along with a Purple Heart for helping others survive and escape the ambush by the North Vietnamese during a single battle in 1967. “I’ve been in group therapy for more than 20-years now, and I am grateful for it.”

Calhoun, like many attending the March 26th event at the Vet Center was delighted to see former South Vietnamese military Veterans also in attendance. “I’m just tickled to see this South Vietnamese contingent here with us today – and how well they’ve assimilated here. It gives all of us Vietnam Veterans here today something to feel good about.”

Fifty years after the war in Southeast Asia, America’s Vietnam War Veterans remain the largest population of Veterans seeking care through Vet Centers and VA facilities nationwide. “May we never forget where we came from,” explained Dave Baird, (USN Ret.) Vet Center Director who shared how Vet Centers evolved out of the need to serve Vietnam Veterans.

“We not only care about our combat Veterans, but also their families, and their children – who can all receive care here, because of the sacrifices they and their Veteran have made for all of us,” smiled Baird (pictured above right, as he and Vet Center’s Joe Dumlao (USAF Ret.) share 50th Anniversary Commemoration pins with Veterans, including special guests. Follow this link to view the full story.