Vietnam veterans honored, some for first time

Informal, weekly gathering of north suburban veterans keeps growing in number

By Julie Ewart
Lovell FHCC Chief of Communications and Public Affairs

Two days before Thanksgiving, about 80 Vietnam War-era veterans were honored, thanked and presented pins for their military service by senior Lovell Federal Health Care Center leaders in a special 50th Anniversary Commemoration service. It took place at the regular Tuesday morning gathering of veterans in the party room at a Dunkin’ Donuts in north suburban Niles.

"You're going to hear the word 'thanks' a lot today," said FHCC Director Dr. Robert Buckley. "I don't think, in your lifetime, that you've heard that word enough. Buckley, who retired from the Navy as a captain, compared Vietnam veterans' homecomings to his own return home from a deployment to Iraq as an emergency physician. "I couldn't go anywhere without people buying me a coffee or a drink," he said. "Even if people didn't agree with the war, they were grateful to us. The guys from Vietnam didn't get that, for the most part."

Navy Capt. Gregory Thier, FHCC commanding officer and deputy director, described the experiences of his father-in-law, an Air Force veteran, who flew more than 365 missions over Vietnam as a Forward Air Patrol pilot of single-engine prop planes. They were very slow and low missions that were "very, very dangerous," he said.

"He lost a lot of brothers-in-arms. He survived, but still feels anxiety for not being able to protect them all," Thier said. "I am thankful to all of you for doing all you could to protect each other. He made it home because of folks like you. Thanks to veterans like you, I met my wife - who was born after he returned - and I have my kids."

Blood Donor Processing Division at FHCC has long history

Navy recruits and trainees have supported frontline warfighters with vital blood products for decades

By Jeffery Diffy
Armed Services Blood Program Public Affairs Specialist

From the days in the 1970s of picking up recruits in a bus and driving them to the Great Lakes Blood Donor Center, to the ongoing blood drives at Recruit Training Command Ship 06, the Blood Donor Processing Division has always relied on the recruit and trainee populations of the Great Lakes Naval facilities.

The arrival each day of whole blood from the drive site to the Blood Donor Processing Division begins the beehive of processing and shipment preparation. In 2004, the Naval Hospital Great Lakes Blood Donor Center began operations at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (FHCC). With the new name of the Blood Donor Processing Division, operations never skipped a beat, and the mission to ensure the availability of blood and blood products to the forward-deployed warfighter continues.

The Blood Donor Processing Division (BDPD) recruit blood drives are the main focus of blood collections in Great Lakes. The BDPD is one of only two Department of Defense sites to freeze blood products.
By Dr. Robert Buckley
Lovell FHCC Director

Perhaps you’ve started hearing adjectives such as “holistic” and “integrative,” and the phrase “Whole Health for Life” in conversation here at Lovell FHCC, at an appointment or from another patient. Maybe you’ve heard we have new, free classes, such as yoga and Tai Chi, for patients and staff, or maybe you know we are training our providers in battlefield acupuncture and hiring chiropractors. Or maybe you are searching for alternatives to opioids for pain management, and you’ve attended our “Pain University.” While Whole Health encompasses many exciting complimentary and integrative therapies, such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness and biofeedback, and many alternative ways to combat pain, it’s much more. It’s not an initiative, “flavor-of-the-month” program, or special training for staff but rather an altogether different way of approaching health care. It reflects a cultural shift in the health care philosophy of the Department of Veterans Affairs that benefits all our patients and staff, military and civilian.

It starts with the basic question of “What matters to you?” It’s a bold new approach to health care that empowers and equips people to take charge of their health, healing, and well-being and live their fullest lives. It’s a shift from disease management – away from asking “what are your symptoms?” – to posing the question: “What do you want out of life?” There is education involved, for patients and their caregivers as well as our staff members – but not just because we want them to implement Whole Health across the hospital. Staff members, too, are included in Whole Health, because we want them to live their best lives as well. While much of Whole Health is based on patient self-empowerment, self-healing and self-care, we realize most of us need a little help to make important changes such as this. That’s why we are training staff and developing coaches to introduce you to Whole Health concepts and help you do what’s called a “Personal Health Inventory,” or PHI. The PHI is your personal road map to Whole Health.

You may choose to learn about the PHI as part of our two-hour Introduction to Whole Health class. Or you will be asked to do a PHI in your provider’s office, and he or she will get you started on your Whole Health journey.

We’re training our providers to implement a Whole Health “approach” in their clinics, including a national class in January right here at the FHCC. We’ve hired a Whole Health manager, developed a Whole Health Directory of wellness classes and resources such as weight-management (MOVE!) and smoking cessation programs, and support groups for stress management and mental health issues.

Whole Health is personalized, and puts you, the patient, in the center of your care. Partner with us and explore your mission, aspiration and purpose (MAP). The goal is to positively impact health care outcomes and improve your health care throughout your life.

Lovell FHCC now a Smoke-Free campus

In the interest of protecting the safety and health of the entire Lovell Federal Health Care community, the North Chicago hospital and all FHCC clinics went smoke-free Oct. 1, 2019.

This action was prompted by Veterans Health Administration Directive 1085, which requires all VHA health care facilities to be smoke-free for patients, visitors, contractors, volunteers, and vendors, and employees. The policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, or any other combustion of tobacco, including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens or e-cigarettes.

There is overwhelming evidence that smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke creates significant medical risks, and a growing evidence suggests that exposure to third hand smoke creates additional risks to safety and direct patient care.

The FHCC is not alone in recognizing the importance of creating a smoke-free campus.

Navy personnel already were prohibited from smoking on the FHCC campus, based on Department of Defense policies. The smoke-free policy impacts all Department of Defense policies. There is overwhelming evidence that smoking cessation programs: • Group cessation classes are available to all VA and TRICARE beneficiaries; call 224-610-5788. • Employee Health offers smoking cessation counseling for VA civilian staff, call 224-610-4215. • Fisher Clinic (Dental) in Building 237 on Naval Station Great Lakes offers a smoking cessation program for active duty members; call 847-688-3331. • FHCC’s main pharmacy in Bldg. 133EF has a walk-in counseling program for all TRICARE beneficiaries. • FHCC’s health promotion coordinator can set-up on-site tobacco cessation seminars for all FHCC and Naval Station Great Lakes units and offices; call 224-610-8081.

The Veterans Quiltline, at 1-855-784-8838, provides live smoking cessation support from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday, with voice mail off hours. A military and veteran online quit program at https://tricare.mil/ucanquit2 offers support via live chats.

This policy change is the right thing to do to help ensure a healthy future for all. The FHCC's Smoke Free Campus contacts are David.Reid@va.gov, and Diana.JohnsonGrimmer@va.gov. More tools are available at the text messaging Become a Smokefree Veteran website, https://veterans.va.gov/sf.

Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

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For correspondence, write to: Lovell FHCC Communications Department 3001 Green Bay Rd. North Chicago, IL 60064 Or, call: 224-610-3744 www.lovell.fhcc.va.gov

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The Apollo

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Thier: 'How can you best invest in your health through prevention?'

By Captain Gregory Thier
Deputy Director/Commanding Officer

Often attributed to founding father Benjamin Franklin is the adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” although a variation of that old saying can be traced back to Erasmus, a 15th century philosopher. Regardless of who first coined the phrase, there’s little question this advice is just as relevant now as when it was first uttered. So it should come as no surprise that preventive medicine is a vital cornerstone of the healthcare systems managed by the Defense Health Agency and the Veterans Health Administration. Preventive health resources are also foundational to Lovell Federal Health Care Center’s Whole Health initiative, detailed in the director’s column on page 2.

As a family physician, I often tell patients they are in control of their own health when it comes to preventive medicine. They may choose to participate in it or potentially pay for it down the road with their less-than-ideal health. We can’t predict or stop all potential bumps in the road that impact health, but we can make wise decisions in anticipation of many common hurdles.

How can you best invest in your health through prevention? The list below is by no means comprehensive, but it’s a good start to seriously consider in 2020.

1. Along with being good for self-esteem, maintaining a healthy weight minimizes risk for serious health conditions, including diabetes and heart disease. The MOVE! Weight Management program focuses on healthy eating, being active and making behavior and lifestyle changes that will improve your overall health. For more information about the FHCC’s MOVE! program, call 224-610-7137.

2. Smoking is no longer allowed on the FHCC campus, but it’s up to individuals to quit smoking, vaping and chewing tobacco products, which are linked to a variety of cancers, emphysema and other serious diseases. Quitting is literally the number one thing you can do for your overall health. To learn about FHCC resources for tobacco cessation, call 224-610-5788 (VA patients); 224-610-0801 (DoD/TRICARE patients), or 224-610-4215 (FHCC staff). Or check out www.lovell.fhcc.va.gov/about/Smoke_Free_Campus.asp.

3. Are you and your family up-to-date on immunizations? We are fortunate to be alive at a time when there are immunitizations to prevent or minimize effects of many potentially serious diseases like the flu, shingles, measles and many more. The best source of information about the shots you and your family need are Primary Care providers in either the PACT clinic (VA) or the Medical Homeport clinics (DoD). It’s flu season, and specific information about flu shots is at https://www.lovell.fhcc.va.gov/Influenza_Season.asp.

4. Health screenings are available that allow many serious illnesses to be detected and treated early. From screenings that are part of normal pediatric checkups to mammograms, colonoscopies, and eye and dental exams, medical screenings help us to stay healthy and live longer. Again, Primary Care providers are the best sources of information about the screenings appropriate for you and your family. However, you can directly schedule some preventive screenings without going through primary care providers, including optometry (224-610-5440 or 224-610-7153) and mammography (224-610-7647 or 224-610-7642). A list of all services available for direct scheduling is at https://www.lovell.fhcc.va.gov/contact/direct_scheduling.asp.

5. Most importantly, please schedule an annual (at a minimum) exam with your primary care provider when you’re not sick to get preventive recommendations and other guidance tailored for you, based on your own unique medical needs. VA patients can call 800-393-0865 to make appointments with their Primary Care providers, and TRICARE patients may call 800-941-4501 for a same day or future appointment with Internal Medicine, Family Practice, or Pediatrics provider. More information about making appointments is at https://www.lovell.fhcc.va.gov/patients/appointments.asp.

Donated blood supports Fleet (cont.)

In 2010, the former North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the former Naval Clinic Great Lakes integrated to become the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center. Marti Pope, Assistant Division Head, Blood Donor Processing Division, has seen all the changes that have taken place over the past fifteen years. Her ongoing commitment to policy, procedure and product purity has been the catalyst that has made the team cohesive and created change.

She stated, “The one constant in blood banking is change. Many avenues of change occurred over the past 15 years with a new Officer in Charge every three years and completing the merger of the Veterans Affairs with the Navy in 2010. We also became one of the subject matter experts on glycerolization in the past 15 years,” Pope said.

“In addition, the BDPP has implemented production of Low-Titer Group O Whole Blood to their required quotas to better assist the war front casualties,” Pope said. “FHCC BDPP is the biggest Whole Blood Low-Titer O producer in the Navy. Recently, the BDPP validated the production of pre-storage pooled cryoprecipitate for submission to the Food and Drug Administration for licensure. Changes continue with quota increases and decreases reflecting our involvement in ongoing campaigns.”

Naval Lt. Cmdr. Steven Clifford, now division head of the BDPP, has the helm for the future and has the following forward-looking goal for the BDPP: Pathogenic Reduction Technology for plasma components.

“The Lovell FHCC BDPP is one of two Dept. of Defense facilities that freeze blood for the Navy Fleet and support frozen blood depots around the world. Service men and women are receiving blood all the time during operations overseas,” Clifford said.

Clifford added, “The Lovell FHCC is on the cutting edge in blood manufacturing in the Dept. of Defense and in the country by submitting the first request for FDA-licensed pre-pooled storage cryoprecipitate units. This FDA licensed technology will better support Trauma Surgeons in the field to rapidly transfuse an adequate dose of cryoprecipitate to patients in a mass bleed situation.” Furthermore, Clifford said FHCC BDPP is pursuing bringing on Pathogenic Reduction Technology for cryoprecipitate in the spring of 2020, “in time to provide longer shelf-life to pre-pooled storage cryoprecipitate units, which will allow units to be provided at the point of injury in a pre-hospital care setting. While the passage of time has created an ever-changing surrounding environment, the BDPP has maintained consistency and continued delivering blood and blood products down range to Dept. of Defense affiliates. The past and present management teams have provided the leadership needed to successfully span the past 15 years.

Daily beehives of activity kick off at early-morning muster and culminate in spontaneous teamwork each day as the blood arrives. These teams were built from the inside out and today are a key component to the success in Great Lakes of the Armed Services Blood Program. To learn more, link online to https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Combat-Support/Armed-Services-Blood-Program. Also visit Facebook: www.facebook.com/
Daisy Awards recognize nursing excellence

Congratulations to the September Daisy Award winner RN Marie Medina, Primary Care/PACT (Patient Aligned Care Team). The patient who nominated Medina said she saved his life. “I was checking in to meet my new doctor, and Marie told me that I should go to the ER right away. I did, and I was admitted to the hospital for stroke. She was a life-saver that morning. Other medical workers had seen me in passing but did not notice the signs. I am very grateful for her service.”

The other Daisy Nominees were as follows:
- RN Belinda Santos – Emergency Department
- RN Renato Arceo – Cardiology Clinic
- RN Emelda Escalante – 134 - Restorative Care
- RN Rommel Manubutan – Surgical Services
- RN Katrina Mullings – Occupational Health

Also recognized were members of the nursing team who received “Be Extraordinary Everyday” (BEE) nominations:
- Audrey Keys – Mental Health
- Althea Morton-Miller – Internal Medicine
- David Hammell – Domiciliary, Building 7

The Daisy Award program provides recognition of the clinical skills and compassion nurses provide to patients and families.

All Hazards Team trains for emergency response

The scenario was a patient was exposed to a nerve agent, and the Lovell FHCC All Hazards team was tested on its ability to quickly, and carefully respond.

The three-day First Receiver Operations Training involved classroom and field training for the approximately 20-person team, which could be called on to react in the event of emergency on the hospital grounds or at one of the clinics.

On the third day, the team sets up a tent outside and is tested on decontamination procedures in a field environment.

All Hazards Team is open to all FHCC staff. An A team practices in the spring in May; the B team practices in the fall, in September. The team works with the facility emergency manager, and logistics to locate and perform maintenance on all the supplies necessary to operate a decontamination tent.

The next training will be in May, 2020. If you are interested in the All Hazards Team, call RN Dennis Cruz at 224-817-1235 or email him at dennis.cruz@va.gov.

- Jayna Legg

The FHCC All Hazards Team conducted three days of classroom and field training in September. The training event concluded with a timed exercise requiring the use of a decontamination tent. The All Hazards Team trains two times a year to keep up members’ certification. It is open to all FHCC staff members. The training was provided through Navy Medicine, and conducted by DECON, LLC. (Photos provided by RN Dennis Cruz)
Dozens of Vietnam veterans receive 50th anniversary pin (cont.)

While many regular attendees of the weekly Niles gathering are Vietnam War-era veterans, Dennis Nilsson, a founder of the informal social meeting, was a little surprised by the strong interest in the 50th anniversary commemoration ceremony, part of a national 13-year observance that began in 2012.

“We wanted to see if there was enough interest to go forward with today’s ceremony, so we asked our veterans to raise their hands if they’d not yet been a part of one of these events or received one of the pins,” Nilsson said. “A lot of hands flew in the air. This means a lot to them.”

Veterans who served on active duty at any time during the period of November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975, regardless of location, are eligible to receive a lapel pin. For more information, see https://www.vietnamwar50th.com.

The Vietnam War Veteran commemorative pin is part of a national-wide recognition of Vietnam War Veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, and many other government and community organizations. (Photo by Julie Ewart)

Veterans Treatment and Assistance Court grants second chances

By Jayna Legg
Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Army Veteran Maurice Wood says he has been on a long journey, part of which has been behind bars – more than once.

A troubled past involving drugs has landed the Waukegan resident in jail several times, and now he hopes for the last time, thanks to 19th Judicial Circuit of Lake County, Ill. Veterans Treatment and Assistance Court.

Wood recently completed VTAC and graduated in a public ceremony with family, friends and dignitaries in the audience. VTAC is a collaborative effort with the courts and Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Justice Outreach programs – in this case, Lovell FHCC in Lake and northern Cook counties. VTAC provides an opportunity for veterans and active duty members involved in the justice system to have their needs addressed through treatment interventions, instead of incarceration.

“VTAC has given me a second chance at life. Life is too short, and I always end up going to prison. So, I gave myself a chance.”

Veteran Maurice Wood
VTAC graduate

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Common questions:

Q. Tell us a little bit about TOL Secure Messaging?
A. It’s a web-based secure message service that can replace unnecessary phone calls and save patients, providers and care team members time. Patients can use it when it’s convenient for them 24/7. No more playing phone tag.

Q. Who can use Secure Messaging?
A. All beneficiaries. Anyone seen at Fisher clinic can use Secure Messaging.

Q. What types of messages can a patient send to their care team and do they go directly to the doctor?
A. Appointment Requests, Lab Result Inquiries, Rx Renewals, Message to Care Team, Message to Office Staff, Web Visits. Most messages will initially go to a care team member, and they send it on to the provider if necessary.

Q. How quickly can a patient get a response to their secure message?
A. Initial response should be within one business day. Resolution within 72 hours.

Q. How does one register for Secure Messaging?
A. Two ways. A patient can register for an account and search for their provider or a patient can get an invitation from a care team member to register. Either way, the patient will need to set up an account to get started.

TRICARE Online Secure Messaging tips streamed during town hall

Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Active duty service members, dependents and military retirees: Why waste your time with unnecessary visits and phone calls to get information from providers you could get by email? The answer is that you don’t, with TRICARE Secure Messaging!

Lovell FHCC staff members, Lt. j.g. Ashley Parker and RN Jose Colon recently sat down for a live-stream Q&A at Fisher Clinic to answer common questions about TRICARE Online Secure Messaging.

For more information about Secure Messaging, please visit www.tolsecuremessaging.com or go to the Lovell FHCC Facebook page to watch the town hall under “Videos.”

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Veterans Creative Arts Festival a route to healing and opportunity

By Jayna Legg
Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

They were nurses, pilots, cooks and more and were called WACS, WAVES, SPARs and WASPs. Young women seeking adventure and wanting to “do their part” volunteered during World War II and again in subsequent wars.

Four World War II women veterans and one who served in the Korean War were honored recently at the FHCC’s annual Women Veterans Luncheon at the Gurnee American Legion Post 771. More than 100 women veterans attended this year for a program that included FHCC Director Dr. Robert Buckley presenting certificates of appreciation to the women veterans.

“It’s been a lifelong privilege and honor to serve with women veterans, for many years, side by side,” said Buckley a retired Navy veteran.

Lorraine Knuth, Waukegan, who turned 99 in October, served in the Army (Women’s Army Corps) during WWII as a hospital cook at troop staging area Camp Stoneman in California. She said she enjoyed her service “immensely.”

Knuth was the fourth female veteran to go on a Lake County Honor Flight, in 2017. Lake County Honor Flight presented a program at the luncheon to inform women veterans about upcoming Honor Flights to visit war memorials in Washington, D.C., including the Women in Military Service for America Memorial.

WWII Army veteran Adrienne Burke, a long-time resident of the Lovell FHCC’s Community Living Center, was a driver and was injured when she fell from a jeep.

Veronica Potter, Barrington, was honored for her service in WWII in the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve. A woman she worked with joined the Navy, and when Potter suggested to friends she might join the Marines, they derailed her. So in 1946, she did it. She served the duration of the war as a clerk.

Priscilla Artz, a Korean War Air Force veteran, served from 1954-57 as a statistical specialist at Strategic Air Command in Omaha. She “read a lot of career books before deciding, and I always wanted to serve.”

Bette Horstman, Morton Grove, was honored for her WWII service in the Army Nurse Corps. The FHCC volunteer served in 1944-46 in Saipan and remembers cold showers and “distasteful meals.”

Women Veterans Program Manager Dr. Irma Sharp said the luncheon “gathers our women veterans in one place to help them connect with each other and the services at the FHCC and in the VA, in general.”

Buckley and Sharp thanked the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary, for again sponsoring the luncheon. Past Post 771 Commander and Air Force veteran Terry Waddell-Moenter said the WWII and Korean War women veterans “paved the way ... I’m so grateful to them.”

Veterans Creative Arts Festival will be March 5, 2020, at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois. The deadline to enter is Feb. 14.

Artists, writers and performers can register in person at the FHCC, from 4-6 p.m., Feb. 10-14, in Bldg. 131, 1st Floor Recreation Activity Room. To qualify, patients must be enrolled for care at the FHCC. The categories are Music, Drama, Dance, Creative Writing and Visual Arts. Special recognition categories are available in each division for those who overcome significant physical or psychological limitations to participate in expressive and creative arts.

Veterans Creative Arts Festival a route to healing and opportunity

By Jayna Legg
Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Veteran Ellis Reed doesn’t remember a time when he wasn’t performing.

Reed’s family ran an Episcopal music camp. “There was always music around me,” he said. The Air Force veteran remembers as a child wanting “to rewire my brain and touch music.” He was in high school band, took music classes and sang.

This fall, he was invited to sing on a national stage. As a top finisher in the Lovell Federal Health Care Center’s 2019 Veterans Creative Arts Festival, Reed advanced to the national CAF. The first week of November, Reed and hundreds of other veterans performed in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

At FHCC’s Creative Arts Festival in March, Reed won over judges with his Irish ballad “Fair is the Rose.” At the time, Reed was residing in the FHCC’s homeless domiciliary. After some credit issues and other lows in his life, he had found himself homeless and in need of help.

One day he heard music while walking by Bourke Hall on the FHCC grounds and went in to investigate. FHCC Music Therapist Elizabeth LaCombe invited him to sing, and before he knew it, he was entering the FHCC festival.

“I didn’t even know it was a competition,” he said. “I could just sing and have it be my job that would be a dream,” he said.

Reed’s dream when he and a good friend joined the Air Force in 2007 was to be a Survival Evasion Resistance Escape (SERE) Specialist, but he was treated for heat exhaustion during training and couldn’t finish. He then was assigned to 62nd Air Maintenance Unit as a mechanic crew chief for the F16 air frame. He was discharged in 2009.

As part of the FHCC’s homeless veteran program, Reed started interviewing for jobs and saving to get an apartment. “I’ve been given an opportunity to have a bed, the ability to have food, talk to a therapist,” he said.

“Social workers and staff here are really great,” Reed said. “They are kind. They don’t placate anyone. They are willing to hear what others have to say.”

Music is his therapy, Reed said.

“But it’s more than that. It’s been said, ‘Music needs to live. It has to breath, and I want to be remembered for music or nothing at all.’ It’s like that for me.”

The FHCC Veterans Creative Arts Festival will be March 5, 2020, at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois. The deadline to enter is Feb. 14.