



"PROUDLY SERVING AMERICA'S VETERANS"

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Takin' it to the Streets

For two weeks in July, dozens of Jackson VA employees toured seven Mississippi cities in 10 days conducting free health fair clinics for Veterans. Dubbed the "Tell A Veteran/Bring A Veteran Mississippi Mobile Clinic Tour," the primary goals of the tour were to increase awareness and enroll Veterans for VA healthcare. The event received positive media attention throughout Mississippi. "Connecting Veterans to the health benefits they have earned is a top priority," said Medical Center Director Joe D. Battle. "We will continue to reach out to Veterans and their families, and anyone who has a vested interest in helping us help Veterans." Over 800 Veterans attended the free health fairs and over 100 were vested into the VA healthcare system. Plans are underway to host free VA health fairs and enrollment events at college campuses, local businesses and targeted Veterans populations such as Vietnam and Vietnam-era Veterans to honor the 40th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, January 23, 1973. Special thanks to our healthcare partners CR Associates and Wesley Health Systems for making this a truly memorable and effective event for Veterans. And, of course, to the numerous volunteers who donated time and services for this event. Thank you!



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Area Veterans place in National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Competition



Medical Center Director Joe D. Battle presents a Gold Medal and G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center commemorative coin to Veterans Ricky Ward and Janice Hughes. Mr. Ward received his Gold Medal for short-short story and Ms. Hughes received her Gold Medal in Sculpture. She has been invited to attend the National festival in Boston in October.



Medical Center Director Joe D. Battle presents Air Force Veteran Carl Jordan with a Silver Medal and a commemorative G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center coin. Mr. Jordan took a 2nd place nationally for his kit-colored drawing, "My Philosophy of Life."

About the Festival

Nationwide, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities use the creative arts as one form of rehabilitative treatment to help Veterans recover from and cope with physical and emotional disabilities. Across the country each year, Veterans treated at VA facilities compete in a local creative arts competition. The competition includes 53 categories in the visual arts division this year that range from oil painting to leatherwork to paint-by-number kits. In addition, there are 120 categories in the performing arts pertaining to all aspects of music, dance, drama and creative writing. A national selection committee chooses first, second and third place winners among all of the entries. Select winners are invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival each year.

The Veterans invited to participate in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival are selected winners from the 2012 national competition.

The 2012 Festival will be hosted by VA Boston Healthcare System and held in Quincy and Boston, Massachusetts.

For more information about competing in the NVCAF, please contact Recreation Therapist, Cathy Roy at ext. 5011.



VA Employees Receive National Recognition



Dr. Joe Jacobs, M.D., staff Radiologist at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson, Ms., was named the Physician of the Year by the American Association of Physician Specialists at their 60th annual conference held in June in Los Angeles. Dr. Louis Sullivan, former Secretary of Health under President George H.W. Bush, presented the award. Dr. Jacobs is also the great-nephew of former Mississippi congressman G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery.



Katherine Dixon-Gordon, Psychology Resident, received the APA Division 18 – VA Section Outstanding Trainee Award. The Outstanding Trainee Award is given to a student at any stage of Psychology education. The Committee looks favorably upon accomplishments during VA training. During her time at the VA, she has worked with Evidence-Based Psychotherapy and the Addictive Disorders Treatment Program.

James Theres, Public Affairs Officer received three VHA Communication Awards in 2012.

- 2nd Place in feature writing for his story “Starting Over.”
- 2nd Place in speech writing for the Veterans Day speech.
- 3rd Place in Media Relations (broadcast) for the positive news coverage of the 2012 Veterans Job Fair.



Dr. Robert Stall, M.D., staff Physician at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson, Ms., was recently named Teacher of the Year by the University of Mississippi Medical Center Pain Fellowship, Department of Anesthesia.



I first met Michael Kabat at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Denver, Colorado in 2010. Back then, he was limited to participating in a powerchair. I saw him again this summer at the Wheelchair Games in Richmond, Virginia. I was stunned by the change. Still wheelchair bound, Michael now had enough strength in his arms to wheel himself around. I often think of him and the challenges he has over come. I am so honored that his story received recognition this year having placed 2nd in the Feature Writing category for the 2012 VHA Communications Awards.

STARTING OVER by James Theres



Michael Kabat, 60, a decorated Vietnam Veteran from Onalaska, is a people person. As a salesman of plumbing equipment throughout western Wisconsin he traveled many a road and stopped in often to just say hello, not only to his customers but the local clerk at a convenience store. If there was something special in their life, a birthday or anniversary, he remembered it, just to make them feel special. When he wasn't driving from destination to destination, Michael ran there. He competed in marathons and during the course of his adult life logged over 40,000 miles. Then one day in September 2008, while cross-training for a marathon, he crashed on his bicycle. Life changed. That fast. What do they say? In the blink of an eye.

"I was descending down a hill," said Michael, "and looked back toward my riding partners behind me. That's all I really remember."

Two weeks later, he awoke in a hospital bed with his family all around him. His son was squeezing his feet.

"You can't feel this, Dad, can you?" asked Michael's son.

"No," he replied.

"Dad, you're paralyzed."

Michael doesn't even remember his initial reaction to those words.

"Maybe it was 'wow' or something," he says.

He and his riding partners would later connect the pieces of the story that changed his life.

"I had gotten out in front of them quite a ways," said Michael. "After I looked back, I had fallen into a five-foot ditch on the side of the road. They rode right passed me, all the way to the YMCA. They were kind of curious where I was, but figured I would show up eventually."

The team had showered and when Michael didn't show up by then, they jumped into their cars and went looking for him. They saw his bicycle first.

"The back wheel was sticking up out of the high grass," he said. "They found me lying down in the ditch. I had been there for about an hour."

A flight for life helicopter flew Kabat to Gunderson Lutheran Hospital where he spent the next three months learning to cope with his injury and facing life as a quadriplegic.

"I've never looked at this injury as a punishment from God," said Michael. "It's just an extra crutch to bear."

Michael Kabat returned home to Onalaska in December 2008 just before Christmas. Ahead of him and his wife, Debbie, were mountains of major life changes. They had to adapt their entire tri-level home. Take out the stairs? Yes. Install an elevator? They did. Ceiling lift? Of course. Handicapped vehicle? Absolutely. Plans for the future? All changed.

"Try to imagine life the way you know it," said Debbie. "And then, suddenly, you are completely dependent on a caregiver. Everything has changed. This unfortunate accident didn't only happen to Michael, it happened to both of us."

By 2010, Michael had advanced far enough in his therapy that Recreation Therapists at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center recommended he consider attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Denver. Long before a Veteran attends an event of this magnitude or even before he goes home, providers, nurses and therapists focus on getting them back into the community first.

"We try to find out what makes them tick," said Brian Walker a Recreation Therapist for 20 years at the Milwaukee VA, who now serves as their Community Relations Manager, "our entire focus is getting the Veterans back into the community, not the hospital, which includes different challenges like getting through doors or how to use transportation."

Getting a Veteran to attend the games is more of a long range goal—certainly one suited for Michael's competitiveness.

"We try to get the novice or a Veteran with a newer injury to come to the games," said Walker. "To see it, to experience it. The games really show the VA at their best."

Attracting 580 athletes in Denver in 2010, a new record for the games, Michael Kabat was one of twenty-one Veterans with spinal cord injuries attending the games representing the Milwaukee VA. He competed in four events (motorized wheelchair rally, motorized slalom, power chair 200 relay and power chair soccer) earning a gold medal in the motorized wheelchair rally, an event held at INVESCO Park, the home of the Denver Broncos. Although a strong competitor, this year's games in Denver were more about camaraderie than competition.

"The games are just awesome," said Michael. "I'm really inspired. I've learned so much about things I didn't know about living in a wheelchair and I met so many great friends."

Since that fateful day in September, there have been good days and bad, some certainly easier than others. But throughout, Michael has remained positive maintaining his sense of humor. He is still known to friends as "Mustard Mike" and plans to visit soon the new mustard museum in Middleton, Wisconsin which recently relocated from Mount Horeb. He is certain there will come a time when he will run again.

"I'll run another marathon in heaven," said Michael flashing a big grin.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games are the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world. It is a multi-event sports and rehabilitation program for military service Veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations, or certain neurological problems. Athletes in the Games compete within three divisions -- Masters (over age 40), Novice (first-time competitors in the Games), and Open (all others, or those who chose to compete in this category). They also compete within classes according to the level of their physical ability, with three quadriplegic-level classes (IA, IB, and IC), and four paraplegic-level or amputee classes (II, III, IV, and V). The Games are presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), and were hosted this year by the Hunter Holmes VA Medical Center in Richmond, VA and will be hosted next year by the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, FL.

Jackson VA Veterans share a good laugh just prior to the Opening ceremonies at the 2012 National Veterans Wheelchair Games held in Richmond, Virginia. (From l to r front row: Wayne Blackwell, Jerome Payton, Willie Harvey, back row: Public Affairs Officer James Theres, William Lafitte, Bennie Wansley and Jackson VA RN Denise Harvey.)





Student Volunteer and college bound Yasmin Cunningham, daughter of Nutrition and Food Service Chief Rosemary Greenwood, wrote about her experiences as a student volunteer at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center.



The Student Volunteer crew enjoying a “going-away” lunch on their last day.

T

he G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center is where I developed leadership, communication, organizational and other work-related skills. Working at the VA Medical Center has been an amazing experience. At the age of fourteen, I was assigned to work in Nursing Services as a student volunteer. As a student volunteer my duties included delivering mail, answering telephones, and filing documents. I also worked hands on with Veterans by assisting with feeding and special activities. Eventually, volunteering at the VA became more than just a summer program, it became a hobby. Over the past 5 years, I've accumulated over 500 hours of volunteer experience.

This year I was hired as a student trainee and was more than excited to spend another summer at the VA. I was assigned to work in MAS, one of the largest and busiest services at the VA. My primary duties included assisting with updating the New Patient Orientation Handbook, responding to and mailing letters regarding beneficiary travel for Veterans. I was nervous and anxious since this was my first “paid” work experience, but the great employees in MAS welcomed me as a part of their team. They were always very responsive to my needs and concerns.

My experience working at the VA will always be memorable, thanks to the people and friends that I have met through the years. I am most thankful to the Chief of Voluntary Service, Ms. Deborah Thomas, for inviting me to come back and volunteer whenever I had free time. Ms. Thomas and Embra Jackson are always encouraging me to do more, which is one of my main reasons why I enjoy coming back. I am also very thankful for Mr. Bernard Grant and my MAS family for adding to my professional experience and for making me feel appreciated.

BLESSED TO HAVE MEN AND WOMEN SUCH AS THIS

Cody Green was a 12-year kid in Indiana who was diagnosed with leukemia at 22 months old. He loved the Marines, and his parents said he drew strength and courage from the Marine Corps. As ...he bravely fought the battle into remission three times. Although he was cancer-free at the time, the chemotherapy had lowered his immune system and he developed a fungus infection that attacked his brain. Two weeks ago, as he struggled to fend off that infection in the hospital, the Marines wanted to show how much they respected his will to live, his strength, honor and courage. They presented Cody with Marine navigator wings and named him an honorary member of the United States Marine Corps. For one Marine, that wasn't enough ... So that night, before Cody Green passed away, he took it upon himself to stand guard at Cody's hospital door all night long, 8 hours straight.. **HONOR, DUTY, INTEGRITY** is who we serve!



Time is brain! Medical Center launches Code Gray Stroke Team

By Dr. Eric Undesser and Marsha Arnold

Nerve cells begin dying after 7 minutes of blood flow interruption. This makes quick identification of acute stroke patients critical for the best outcome. After several hours of stroke symptoms the risk of thrombolytic therapy greatly increases. As of June 1, this facility has implemented a Code Gray Team, a multidisciplinary group of clinical staff who evaluates and initiates treatment for acute stroke. The goal is to administer tissue Plasminogen Activator (tPA), a clot buster drug, within 60 minutes of identifying an acute stroke patient. The Veteran or patient is then transferred to the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) Comprehensive Stroke Center for post stroke monitoring. Stroke symptoms can vary depending on the brain area involved, but here are some warning signs: **facial weakness (one side of the face is drooping), weakness or numbness on one side of the body (dragging a leg or can't raise an arm), or speech or language changes (can't understand or speak funny)**. Don't wait. If the person is an inpatient call the Rapid Response Team or page 73, 7000 with your location to initiate a Code Gray. If the person is an outpatient, immediately take them to the Emergency Department. Thanks...and remember **Time is Brain!**



For more information on the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center's Wall of Honor, visit
http://www.jackson.va.gov/Wall_of_Honor.asp

Proudly Serving America's Veterans

{the expert's corner}

Ten Commandments of Leadership as outlined by Dr. Kent Keith.

as presented by

Lynn Ryan, Deputy Network Director, at the 2012 LDI Graduation

**People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.
Love them anyway.**

**If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.
Do good anyway.**

**If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.**

**The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.**

**Honesty and frankness will make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.**

**The biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.**

**People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.
Fight for the underdogs anyway.**

**What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.**

**People really need help but will attack you when you help them.
Help people anyway.**

**Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.**

THE S  NNY G

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