



"PROUDLY SERVING AMERICA'S VETERANS"

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Issue 3

December 2011

# We Made History

**Petal Native First Mississippi Veteran to Receive Bionic Foot**



Orthotics/Prosthetics Technician Gaylord Collins makes adjustments to Vietnam Veteran Steve Hendrick's bionic foot. Hendrick is the first Mississippi Veteran to receive the BiOM.

## THE BIONIC MAN

The first time he tried it on; tears welled up in his eyes.

"It felt like my real foot," remembered Vietnam Veteran Steve Hendrick. "It was a very good day."

The "it" Hendrick was referring to is the iWalk BiOM, a cutting edge piece of technology that is the world's first bionic ankle system that utilizes robotics to replicate the muscles and tendons to replace the action of the foot, Achilles tendon and calf muscle. This advanced prosthetic technology, clinically proven to normalize walking, will improve the quality of life for Veterans with below the knee amputations. On December 8, 2011, Hendrick became the first Mississippi Veteran chosen to receive a BiOM and felt honored on behalf of all Veterans who served in Vietnam. "I want this day to send a message to all disabled Veterans," said Hendrick. "Never lose hope."

The BiOM costs between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and is designed for Veterans who want to continue to live a very active life. It runs on a lithium polymer battery and must be charged daily.

"Funding is not an issue," said Cassandra Hall, Chief of Prosthetics at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center. "Medical requirements and activity level are some of the issues we look at."

Hendrick lost his left leg in 2000 after years of struggling with blood clots. Doctors were forced to amputate when gangrene set in.

"You don't realize what you got, until it's gone," lamented Hendrick.

Using Bluetooth technology, representatives from BiOM, Dana Samocha and Stephanie Porter, along Orthotics/Prosthetics technician Gaylord Collins from the Jackson VA, programmed Hendrick's BiOM with an Android phone, while he was walking down the hallways of the VA Medical Center. After the programming was complete inside, Hendricks and the team of medical professionals went outside to try it out on different terrain.

"We're setting the parameters as he changes speed and his gait," said Samocha. "It will know what he wants to do before he does."

After walking up and down an incline and then testing the new 'bionic' foot on grass, Hendrick declared victory.

"I'm convinced," said Hendrick with an ear to ear smile. "I haven't walked on a real foot in fourteen years."



(The old prosthetic foot, left and the BiOM, right)

# "NEVER GIVE UP HOPE!"

—Vietnam Veteran, Steve Hendrick, the Bionic Man

## The Bionic Handoff—how it went down



**9:45 a.m.** — Vietnam Veteran Steve Hendrick showed up for issuance of his cutting-edge BiOM on Thursday, December 8. It was "off with the old."



**10:01 a.m.** — A quick overview from the iWalk team, the company that invented the BiOM.



**10:13 a.m.** — Jackson VA Orthotics/Prosthetics Technician Gaylord Collins made some calibrations.



**10:26 a.m.** — Mr. Hendrick took "her" for a test run in the hallway.



**10:37 a.m.** — We spread the word about our first "bionic" man at the Jackson VA.



Complimentary Ticket

BIG Thanks!



Un-conditional Love is a beautiful thing. Unfortunately, it's also a rare thing. Maybe that's what makes it so special when you get a chance to see it first-hand. So it was on the night of December 8, 2011 when over 30 students from the **Mississippi School for the Blind** came to sing Christmas carols for our Veterans. They gave our Veterans as much Love as they had and our Veterans gave it all back!



Chief of Staff, Dr. Kent Kirchner, Chaplain Christopher Gueydan and Jackson VA Toys for Tots Coordinator, Connie Mejia present Sergeant Vasquez with **1,114 toys, \$521.00 dollars and 7 bicycles.** Hooah!



\$48, 530.00

Thank you... Thank you... Thank you...

***“Just hanging with the  
cool cats  
in the  
Community Living Center...”***



**CFC Pet Photo Contest Winners**

<u>Coolest:</u>	#6 Pinky Taylor
<u>Most Exotic:</u>	#8 Pierre
<u>Craziest:</u>	#9 Tango
<u>Most Fashionable:</u>	#16 Charley
<u>Most Unusual:</u>	#19 Pierre
<u>Cutest:</u>	#23 Basz
<u>Most Cuddly:</u>	#32 Cotton Cuddle Soft
<u>Most Funny:</u>	#39 Brosier

**“Best in Show” #23 Basz**



Sebastian “Basz” Jean-Francois was born September 8, 2011 and was adopted by the Dillon family on November 4, 2011. Sebastian is a smart, loving, and playful Yorkshire Terrier. He spends most of his days bouncing, jumping, chewing shoe heels, and nipping toes. Sebastian enjoys watching television, sitting on the sofa with his Mom, collecting leaves in the yard, and sitting on the front porch the watching traffic. He likes to play with the grandchildren and walks around on his hind legs, showing off. Sebastian completed four weeks of potty training school and graduated *Summa Cum Laude*.

**“HEEEEEERE’S...JOHNNY! *HEY THERE, CHARLEE GIRL*”**  
*Story by Artaynis Ma’at Carter*

To many, an animal can have a profound healing effect. Take for instance our two extraordinary kitty cats, Johnny Cash and Charlee Girl, who make their home in our Community Living Center (CLC). They love unconditionally, cheer Veterans up when they are down and give a new meaning to gratitude. And they’re really a cool couple of cats who know their way around the VA with ID badges to prove it.

“Yep, Johnny, checks out everything,” said Recreation Therapist, Cathy Roy. “He makes his security rounds and rides the elevators to each floor. He also knows how to jump up and set the electronic eye. He taught himself that.”

Besides being curious and adventurous, Johnny Cash is a guardian angel for our Veterans.

"He sleeps where he wants," laughed Roy. "Sometimes the residents come up to me and exclaim, 'Johnny's sleeping in my bed!' They get really excited about it."

A while back, one Veteran resident really took a liking to Johnny. They became very close. Johnny would make the rounds rolling around in his wheelchair. They did this for years, then, sadly for Johnny, the Veteran passed away. Johnny would often sit by his door waiting for him. He began sleeping in the Veteran's chair, until he finally realized he wasn't coming back. That's what you call dedication. Or maybe Johnny is just giving back the love he has received from Veterans after all these years.



*(Johnny Cash chillin' in the Community Living Center.)*

"We got Johnny Cash by way of a veterinarian's office," added Tracie Rushing, a Registered Nurse in the CLC. "He got hit with a weed eater and someone dropped him off at the vet's office. They heard that we wanted a cat, so they gave him to us."

If having one cat snuggle up with Veterans is cool, then having two of them is even better. Enter: Charlee Girl.

"When Charlee Girl first came to the V.A.," said Becky Parker, Program Support Assistant in the CLC. "She let Johnny know right away that she was in charge. He would check her out, keep his distance. But then, they became friends and started to care for one another. That's when the cuddling and grooming began."

When visiting the CLC on the first floor of the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center, don't forget to stop by and say hello to our two wonderful felines, Johnny Cash and Charlee Girl. But remember, they are family; so when you leave, please be careful to read the sign:

**Thank you for visiting our Community Living Center.  
As you exit, please make sure our cat, Johnny Cash isn't behind you!**

Utica Middle School, December 1



Veterans Health Fair, December 8



Nursing Holiday Party, December 8



## Holiday Tree 2011



Holiday Tree Lighting, December 9



Volunteer Holiday Party, December 15



Annual Holiday Party, December 16



Check out the calendar of events at:  
[www.jackson.va.gov](http://www.jackson.va.gov)



## Employee of the Month-December 2011

### Tina Jackson

Congratulations to the Jackson VA Employee of the Month, Tina Jackson. Ms. Jackson is a Program Analyst in Patient Care Services. She has been detailed to the Education Department since June 2011. The Sonny G had a few questions for Ms. Jackson.

SG: So, first off, congratulations on being named Employee of the Month.  
TJ: Thank you.

SG: Tell us a little bit about yourself.  
TJ: Well, I've been with VA for 16 years and have another 6 years with the USDA in Chicago, the Dairy Division. I have a wonderful husband and have been married for about 9 years.

SG: Chicago? Don't tell us.  
TJ: Yup, I'm a Bears fan.

SG: Well, let's continue anyway (laughter). How about some quick hitters? Favorite movie?  
TJ: The Godfather 1, 2 and 3.

SG: That's more than one. Favorite ice cream?  
TJ: Chocolate, love it to death!

SG: Favorite musician?  
TJ: Maze featuring Frankie Beverly.

SG: Hey, thanks for sitting down with us and congratulations again.  
TJ: Thank you.

SG: Go Packers!  
TJ: Yea, right!



## VA Voices: What's Your New Year's Resolution?



**Demetria Ridgway**  
Patient Care Services

*"I don't make any, because on January 2nd I forget 'em."*



**Juanake Gibson-Taylor**  
Quality Management

*"I don't really do them, but...I hope to have an even more blessed year this year than last."*



**Kenya Harris**  
Police Service

*"To get closer to Jesus than I was before."*



**Rita Osborne**  
Purple Clinic

*"My New Year's resolution is to be more Godly and the rest will fall into place."*



**Jeneice McClinton**  
Director's Office

*"To advance my career at the VA."*

Proudly Serving America's Veterans

# {the expert's corner}

**"To care for him who shall have borne the battle..."**

—Abraham Lincoln, March 4, 1865, Second Inaugural Address

He probably didn't know it then, but with those 10 words, one hundred and forty six years ago, President Abraham Lincoln created the mission statement for the Department of Veterans Affairs. It became the official motto in 1959, when VA Administrator, Sumner G. Whittier, installed two plaques with that phrase on VA headquarters buildings in Washington D.C. The mission statement is a stark reminder of exactly who it is we are here to serve...and why we serve them. It also sets the tone for a culture in which *outstanding Customer Service is every employee's mission.*



Dr. Deborah Bilbrew

So, what does outstanding Customer Service look and feel like? Here are some things to look for, in yourself, and others: effective communication, appropriate responses to customers' needs, valuing customers' worth and treating people with courtesy, confidence and enthusiasm. Outstanding Customer Service are not just words, but moreover, a culture, a lifestyle.

We should be proud of what we have accomplished as a medical center and we are always looking for fresh ideas to improve. Below are some Customer Service opportunities to get involved with and help make a difference:

- **Quarterly Customer Service Town Hall Meetings**  
Provides education and training to all employees;  
Provides updates on performance measures;  
Obtains input from staff on customer service issues/concerns for improvement.  
*(Next Customer Service Town Hall Meeting is scheduled for February 16, 2012 in Montgomery Hall starting at 7:30 a.m.)*
- **Customer Service Feedback**  
Via Veterans' Suggestions/Feedback boxes and VHA Shared Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys.
- **Quarterly Customer Service Newsletter (The Communicator)**  
Published on the Intranet. Newsletter includes training, performance measure data, staff recognition, and comments from Veterans about care and services received at the medical center.
- **Customer Service Rounding**  
Talk directly with Veterans and get feedback about care and services as well as gain stakeholders' input on needs and improvement.
- **Customer Service Fair**  
Scheduled in April 2012 to showcase types of care and services provided by the medical center for Veterans.
- **Customer Service Week Celebration**  
Scheduled annually in October to raise awareness about the importance of customer service; to thank staff for their support; and promote the medical center's commitment to customer satisfaction.



**Hearty Jackson VA welcome to Interim Medical Center Director, Joe Battle. Mr. Battle comes to us from the Orlando VA Medical Center. Welcome aboard!**

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The Sonny G is a monthly publication produced by the Public Affairs Office of the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center and is intended for employees, Veterans, volunteers and friends.

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