



UPDATE

July/August 2015

A bi-monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve Veterans. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to Barry.Venable@va.gov



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Calendar of Events

Friday, July 3—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday.** St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed in observance of Independence Day, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

Saturday, July 4 (4 p.m.)—**The American Celebration Parade**, Brainerd, MN. Come and see St. Cloud VA's Mobile Audiology Clinic in the parade!

Monday, July 6 & August 3 (9:10-9:30 a.m.)—Listen to the **Veterans Affairs Radio Show** on KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3.

Tuesday, July 7 & August 4 (Noon-1 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Group** at the St. Cloud VA in Building 48, Room 204, and Brainerd CBOC via Vtel. Support group for family Caregivers of Veterans from all eras. Contact Jessica Behrends at 320-252-1670, ext. 7283, for more information.

Tuesday, July 7 & 21; August 4 & 18 (Noon-2 p.m.)—**Veterans Law Clinic** at the St. Cloud VA in Building 28, Room 126. Free legal consultation for Veterans for Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment.

Tuesday, July 7, 14, 21 & 28; August 4, 11, 18 & 25 (3-5:30 p.m.)—**Farmers Market**, St. Cloud VA, wind turbine gravel parking lot (NE corner of campus). Looking for fresh, nutritious food to stay healthy? The Farmers Market is the place to go! Public welcome. Visitors to the VA campus are asked to follow the posted speed limits, to respect the privacy of Veteran patients, and are reminded that photography on VA property without prior approval is prohibited. The Farmers Market is sponsored by the Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Office and the Employee Wellness Committee in a joint effort with the Veterans Canteen Service. A portion of proceeds from the market is returned to Veterans through the Veterans Canteen Service.

Thursday, July 9 (10 a.m.-9 p.m.)—**Aitkin County Fair**, 632 Minnesota Avenue North, Aitkin, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be available to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Calendar of Events

Monday, July 13 (1 p.m.)—**Bob Bell**, author of *Un Moving Four Ward*, is speaking in Building 96 at the St. Cloud VA. Having suffered an accident in the dorms while a student at St. John's University, Bob became a quadriplegic. Bob will be speaking about tales and tips for keeping perspective despite life's challenges.

Tuesday, July 14 (4 p.m.)—**Annual Patio Party**, Clearwater Travel Plaza, 950 State Highway 24, Clearwater, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be available to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Tuesday, July 14 (9-10 a.m.); Wednesday, July 15 (6-7 p.m.); or Wednesday, July 22 (2-3 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Line**. Free education and support for Caregivers—right from your home phone! Topic for July is *Advance Care Planning*. To register, call Jessica Behrends at 320-252-1670, ext. 7283.

Wednesday, July 15 & August 19 (8:10-8:45 a.m.)—Listen to **Voices for Veterans Radio Show** on WJON AM 1240.

Wednesday, July 15 (10 a.m.-3 p.m.)—**Veterans Career Fair**, Earle Brown Heritage Center, 6155 Earle Brown Drive, Brooklyn Center, MN. All former and current members of the U.S. military are welcome. Staff from the St. Cloud VA Human Resources department will be available to discuss career opportunities.

Wednesday, July 15 (1:30 p.m.)—**Quarterly Memorial Service**, St. Cloud VA Chapel, for Veterans who have recently passed away.

Thursday, July 16, & Friday, July 17 (9 a.m.-9 p.m.)—**Sherburne County Fair**, 13372 Business Center Drive, Elk River, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be available to discuss health care services and eligibility.

Friday, July 17 & August 21 (Noon-2 p.m.)—**Southwestern Minnesota Veterans Law Clinic** at the Montevideo CBOC. Free legal consultation for Veterans for Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal issues will be discussed. Please call 320-403-1051 to schedule an appointment.

Tuesday, July 21 (8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.)—**Community Mental Health Summit**, Holiday Inn, 75 South 37th Avenue, St. Cloud. Community mental health provider organizations, advocates, Veterans and their family members are invited. The summit will promote awareness and use of VA mental health resources and help Veterans gain access to local services. Breakout sessions include identifying collaborative opportunities; homeless programming/services; and Veterans family issues. To register or learn more, contact Julie Wolf at Julie.Wolf@va.gov.

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, July 22 (1-9 p.m.)—**Isanti County Fair**, 3101 Highway 95 NE, Cambridge, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be available to discuss health care services and eligibility.

Saturday, August 1 (8 a.m.-3:30 p.m.)—**VA Summer Games**, St. Cloud VA. Open to all Veterans enrolled at the St. Cloud VA! Badminton, horseshoes, weightlifting, 1 mile walk/run, billiards/pool. Wheelchair and ambulatory divisions. See flyer on page 11 for event times. Registration packets can be obtained [here](#) or in Building 48, Room 16. Registration is due by July 22. Contact Leah Egan at 320-252-1670, ext. 6180, for more information.

Monday, August 3 (9 a.m.-3 p.m.)—**Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Class**, St. Cloud VA, location details available upon registration. Male and female Veterans with a history of MST are invited to attend. Class will provide information on common experiences and problems; effects of trauma on relationships and health; treatment options; what helps with the healing process; and available resources. Veterans can talk to their mental health provider to register or, if not currently in treatment, contact Joy Finkelson at 320-252-1670, ext. 6398.

Sunday, August 9 (Noon-4 p.m.)—**Benton County Fair**, 1410 3rd Avenue South, Sauk Rapids, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be available to discuss health care services and eligibility.

Tuesday, August 11 (9-10 a.m.); Wednesday, August 19 (6-7 p.m.); or Wednesday, August 26 (2-3 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Line**. Free education and support for Caregivers—right from your home phone! Topic for August is *Caring for a Loved One with Complex Medical Needs*. To register, call Jessica Behrends at 320-252-1670, ext. 7283.

Saturday, August 15 (8-11:30 a.m.)—**Expo for Seniors**, River's Edge Convention Center, 10 Fourth Avenue South, St. Cloud. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be available to discuss health care services and eligibility.

DID YOU KNOW

- The only 15 letter word that can be spelled without repeating a letter is uncopyrightable.
- Facetious and abstemious contain all the vowels in the correct order, as does arsenious, meaning “containing arsenic.”

QUOTATION OF THE DAY

“I needed a password eight characters long so I picked Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.”
- Nick Helm

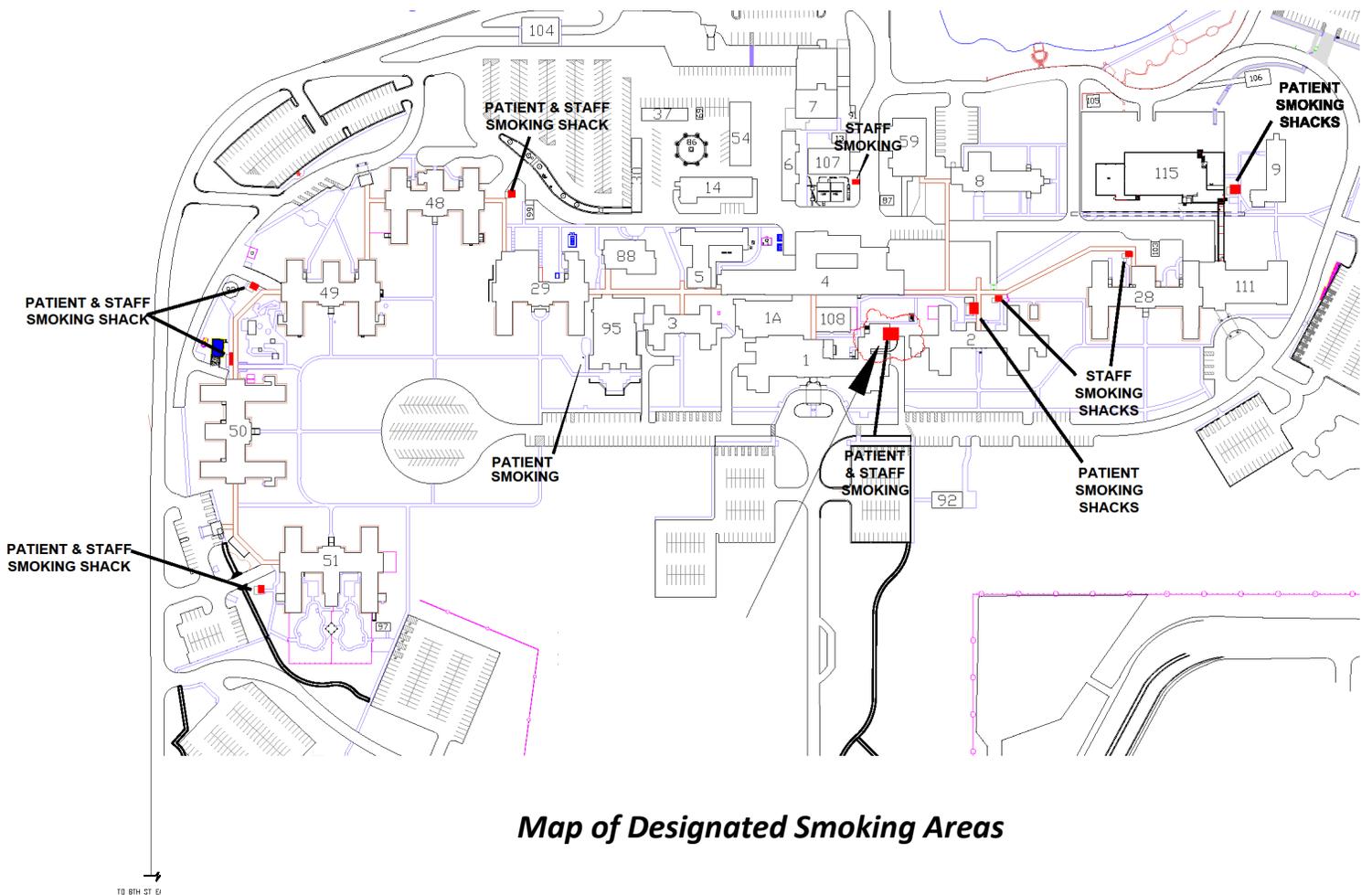
Tobacco Use Policy Updated

In the interests of better health, we've updated the campus smoking policy. The policy applies to everyone—Veterans, employees, volunteers and visitors. Key features include:

- No tobacco use in any building.
- All tobacco use is restricted to designated smoking areas (see map).
- No smoking in vicinity of oxygen delivery.

In support of the policy, the majority of the smoking receptacles (ashtrays on a stick) throughout the campus have been removed. The reason for this action is that these receptacles contributed to the mistaken belief that people are able to smoke wherever the receptacles are located. Please move to one of the designated locations to use tobacco. Thank you.

Interested in quitting? Talk to your primary care provider today!



Map of Designated Smoking Areas

The logo for the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014. It features the text "The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014" in a white, serif font, centered on a dark red rectangular background.

We continue to work to improve access to care for our Veterans, and are able to schedule approximately 95% of patients within 30 days of the date clinically determined by a physician. For some medical specialty care areas we currently do not meet timeliness goals, and in some cases certain services are not available at the St. Cloud VA.

When care is not available timely or when care is not available within VA, we have used traditional Non-VA medical care to ensure eligible Veterans get the care they need.

Now, another method is available so Veterans can get care in their community when care is not available through the VA. Called "Choice First," this new initiative makes the Veterans' Choice Program available to all eligible Veterans when services are not available in the VA.

Veterans Choice Program

In general, Veterans are eligible for the Veterans' Choice Program if they were enrolled as of August 1, 2014, and meet one of the following criteria:

-- The Veteran is told that he/she will need to wait more than 30 days for an appointment from the date clinically determined by his/her physician or, if no such date is provided, the Veteran's preferred date, or;

--They live more than 40 miles from the nearest VA facility measured in driving distance based on the fastest route (not the shortest route).

These Veterans may continue to call the Veterans' Choice Program contractor directly at (866) 606-8198 to arrange care.

Choice First

Choice First is an enhancement to the Veterans' Choice Program that revises current Non-VA medical care coordination processes to incorporate a Veterans' Choice Program option earlier in the referral hierarchy when care is not available within VA facilities.

When care is not available within VA facilities and the Veteran meets the basic Veterans' Choice Program eligibility criteria then the Veteran is now considered "Choice First eligible," and Choice First provides another resource for them to access care in the community.

How Choice First Works

When a routine (non-urgent/non-emergent) Non-VA care consult is written by a VA provider and the requested care is not available at St. Cloud, our Referral Center will contact the Veteran directly to determine eligibility and offer care through the Choice First initiative.

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--If the Veteran wants to use the Choice First initiative then the Referral Center will notify the Choice Program contractor. Veterans should wait 5 to 7 days after notification of Choice First program eligibility from the VA, then call the contractor at 866-606-8198 to make an appointment.

For urgent/emergent service, returned authorizations and non-Choice eligible Veterans we will continue to use traditional Non-VA Care processes to ensure Veterans get the care they need.

Important Reminders:

—All Veterans' Choice Program care must be pre-authorized.

—The Veterans' Choice Program does not cover all conditions. Excluded services include: nursing home care, hospice, long-term acute hospitals, homemaker and home health aide services, chronic dialysis treatment, dental care, pediatric services, durable medical equipment including eyeglasses, non-urgent/non-emergent medications and C&P exams.

—If the care you are receiving through the Veterans' Choice Program is not related to a Service Connected (SC) condition, and you have other health insurance, it is possible you will incur out-of-pocket cost expenses. The contractor will discuss this possibility with you, and we recommend you follow up with your insurance carrier to verify how this may affect you. Please note that Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE are not considered other health insurance for purposes of the Veterans' Choice Program. Also, please note that if you are VA copayment required, those copayments still apply.

Enrolling a Community Provider

Veterans can request care through a specific provider, but that provider must be enrolled in the Veterans' Choice Program. If the Veteran does not request a specific provider, the contractor will use an eligible provider.

Veterans wanting their local provider(s) to enroll as a Choice provider should pass along the following information to them.

For Medicare providers, it is easy to become a network provider for the Veterans' Choice Program. Simply go to the contractor's website at <https://www.hnfs.com/content/hnfs/home/va/home/provider/options-for-providers/become-a-veterans-choice-participating-provider.html> and complete and submit the provider agreement template found on the website. If community providers have any additional questions for Health Net, please visit the website previously noted or call 1-866-606-8198 and select option 2.

VA Expands Disability Benefits for Air Force Personnel Exposed to Contaminated C-123 Aircraft



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) published a new regulation that expands eligibility for some benefits for a select group of Air Force Veterans and Air Force Reserve personnel who were exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange through regular and repeated contact with contaminated C-123 aircraft that had been used in Vietnam as part of Operation Ranch Hand (ORH).

VA published this regulation as an interim final rule so that it could immediately begin providing benefits to eligible Air Force Veterans and Air Force Reserve personnel who submit a disability compensation claim for any of the 14 medical conditions that have been determined by VA to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald made the decision to expand benefits following receipt of a 2015 report by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) on [Post-Vietnam Dioxin Exposure in Agent Orange-Contaminated C-123 Aircraft](#). This VA-requested report found evidence that as many as 1,500 to 2,100 Air Force and Air Force Reserve personnel who served as flight, medical and ground maintenance crew members on ORH C-123 aircraft previously used to spray Agent Orange in Vietnam were exposed to the herbicide.

“Opening up eligibility for this deserving group of Air Force Veterans and Reservists is the right thing to do,” said Secretary McDonald. “We thank the IOM for its thorough review that provided the supporting evidence needed to ensure we can now fully compensate any former crew member who develops an Agent Orange-related disability.”

Under this new rule, Air Force and Air Force Reserve flight, medical and ground maintenance crewmembers who served on the contaminated ORH C-123s are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides during their service, thus making it easier for them to establish entitlement for some VA benefits if they develop an Agent Orange-related presumptive condition. In addition, for affected Air Force Reserve crew members, VA will presume that their Agent Orange-related condition had its onset during their Reserve training. This change ensures that these Reservists are eligible for VA disability compensation and medical care for any Agent Orange-related presumptive condition, and that their surviving dependents are eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation and burial benefits.

The interim final rule can be found on the Federal Register: www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection. VA will immediately begin processing claims and issuing benefits to eligible Air Force crew members.

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VA encourages Reservists who were assigned to flight, ground or medical crew duties at Lockbourne/Rickenbacker Air Force Base in Ohio (906th and 907th Tactical Air Groups or 355th and 356th Tactical Airlift Squadron), Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts (731st Tactical Air Squadron and 74th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron) or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, International Airport (758th Airlift Squadron) during the period 1969 to 1986, and developed an Agent Orange-related disability to file a disability compensation claim online through the joint VA-Department of Defense web portal, eBenefits (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/>).

VA also has identified several active duty locations where ORH C-123 aircraft may have been used following their service in Vietnam. Active duty personnel who served in a regular USAF unit location where a contaminated C-123 was assigned and who had regular and repeated contact with the aircraft through flight, ground or medical duties during the period 1969 to 1986, and who develop an Agent Orange-related disability, also are encouraged to apply for benefits. For more information on applying for these benefits, including the affected units, Air Force Specialty Codes and dates of service for affected crew members, and a listing of Agent Orange-related conditions, visit www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/agentorange-c123.asp.

In order to avoid unnecessary delay of benefits, claimants should annotate “(C-123)” after each Agent Orange related disability in *Part II, Block 14* of [VA Form 21-526](#) or *Section I, Block 11* of VA Form [VA Form 21-526EZ](#) when filing on eBenefits. Example: Diabetes (C-123). If claimants have any of the following documents, they should be attached to their application:

- Discharge, separation papers (DD214 or equivalent)
- USAF Form 2096 (unit where assigned at the time of the training action)
- USAF Form 5 (aircraft flight duties)
- USAF Form 781 (aircraft maintenance duties)
- Dependency records (marriage & children's birth certificates)
- Medical evidence (doctor & hospital reports)

VA will process all claims related to C-123 exposure at the St. Paul, Minnesota, VA Regional Office. Claims not filed through eBenefits should be mailed to the following address (or faxed to 608-373-6694):

Department of Veterans Affairs
Claims Intake Center
Attention: C123 Claims
PO Box 5088
Janesville, WI 53547-5088

Individuals with specific benefit questions related to herbicide exposure on C-123s may call VA’s special C-123 Hotline at 1-800-749-8387 (available 8 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST) or e-mail VSCC123.VAVBASPL@va.gov.

Save the Date

St. Cloud VA ☆ ☆

4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud

September 19, 2015 from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.

3RD ANNUAL
**VETERANS
RENDEZVOUS**

HONORING SERVICE
EMPOWERING
HEALTH

All Veterans, Service Members, their families and friends are invited for a day of music and fun. Connect with other Veterans and learn how the St. Cloud VA and its programs can benefit you.



Do you know of family members, friends or neighbors who have difficulty using their telephone? Do they have trouble hearing, speaking or have a physical disability that prevents them from using a standard telephone?

The Minnesota Telephone Equipment Distribution Program (TED) can provide special telephone equipment at NO CHARGE to Minnesota residents of all ages who qualify.

Types of Equipment available include:

- Telephones that make voices sound louder and clearer
- Devices that make the phone ring louder or have a lamp flash when the phone rings
- Hands-free speaker phones for people who have trouble holding a handset or dialing
- Captioned telephones so users can read what callers say
- TTY for deaf or speech-impaired callers
- Equipment for people who are deaf, deafblind or have other special needs
- Big button, hearing aid compatible cell phone

Presentations and/or demonstrations are also available at no cost to agencies, staff, and residents about our services and types of equipment that are available to help individuals.

Please call Karen toll free at 1.800.456.7589 for more information or visit our web site at mn.gov/dhs/ted-program. Email: dhhs.stcloud@state.mn.us

The Telephone Equipment Distribution Program is funded through the Department of Commerce – Telecommunications Access Minnesota (TAM) and administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.



Summer Games

Part of *VA Summer of Service!*

**Open to all Veterans
enrolled at the St. Cloud VA!
Wheelchair & Ambulatory
divisions.**

Water and first aid service available. Lunch on your own.

EVENTS INCLUDE:

- Badminton
- Horseshoes
- Weightlifting
- 1 Mile Walk/Run
- Billiards/Pool

August 1, 2015

8 a.m. Registration

9 a.m. Opening Ceremony

10 a.m. Events Start

**1p.m. Final Competitions
start**

2:30 p.m. Awards Ceremony

Registration

**packets can be picked
up in the**

**Fitness Clinic in
Bldg. 48, Rm. 16.**

For more info contact

Leah Egan at

320-252-1670 x6180

**HONORING SERVICE
EMPOWERING
HEALTH**

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, disability, age, marital status, public assistance status, familial status or sexual orientation. Upon request, accommodations will be provided to allow people with disabilities to participate in all VA programs and activities.

Registration packets are also available at our web site: http://www.stcloud.va.gov/features/Reg_Packet.pdf

New EC & R Medical Director

Please welcome Christopher H. Churchill, D.O., as the Medical Director, Extended Care & Rehabilitation, St. Cloud VA Health Care System. Dr. Churchill assumed his new duties on May 17, 2015.

Dr. Churchill earned his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from Des Moines University-Osteopathic Medical Center, Des Moines, Iowa, in 2002. He completed his Internal Medicine Residency at Riverside Methodist Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, in 2005.



Dr. Churchill entered VA service in 2012 as a Primary Care Physician at the Chalmers P. Wylie Ambulatory Care Center, in Columbus, Ohio, and most recently served as Staff Physician, Extended Care & Rehabilitation, St. Cloud VA Health Care System.

He has a variety of experience in differing care settings and is board certified in Internal Medicine and Hospice and Palliative Medicine. A native of Nebraska, Dr. Churchill is an 18-time NCAA All-American in swimming as an undergraduate attending Kenyon College, in Gambier, Ohio.

Community Mental Health Summit



To promote awareness and to address the mental health care needs of Veterans and their family members, community mental health provider organizations, advocates, Veterans and their family members are invited to attend this year's Community Mental Health Summit on July 21, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at the Holiday Inn, located at 75 South 37th Avenue, St. Cloud.

The summit will promote awareness and use of VA mental health resources, help Veterans gain access to local services, and build healthy communities for Veterans and their families by providing a forum for participants to exchange information.

Several special breakout sessions will be held in conjunction with the Summit, including: identifying collaborative opportunities; homeless programming/services; and Veterans family issues.

To register or learn more about the 2015 Mental Health Summit contact Julie Wolf via email at Julie.Wolf@va.gov.

Share your Health Records with VA and Non-VA Providers

If you visit non-VA health care providers the VA's Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Health Exchange makes it easier for your team of health care providers to coordinate and manage care.

With VLER Health Exchange, VA and non-VA health care providers can securely share certain parts of your health record electronically.



That means both your VA and non-VA health care providers can securely access information on your allergies, health problems, medications, and more. This should help you and your health care providers avoid the need to fax, mail or carry paper health records from one provider to another.

It also means VA and non-VA health care providers can access more of your key health care information in near real time, instead of days or weeks — enabling them to quickly make informed decisions that result in better care. Participating in VLER Health also may:

- Give your provider immediate access to more of your health care information.
- Reduce your chances of having duplicate procedures done.
- Increase your safety by providing a more complete medical record, such as a list of your medications and allergies.
- Save you time and money.
- Improve your health outcomes by empowering you.

You can watch [Connect Your Docs](#) to learn about VLER Health Exchange.

You can watch [How to Connect Your Docs](#) to learn how to safely and securely share your health records.

Privacy

VA is committed to protecting your privacy. Both VLER Health Exchange and VLER Health Direct use secure technologies for information sharing between VA and non-VA providers. Only non-VA health care providers and organizations that have partnership agreements with VA and are part of VA's approved, trusted network may receive VLER Health information.

Un Moving Four Ward

On Monday, July 13, at 1 p.m., in Building 96, the author of *Un Moving Four Ward*, Bob Bell, will be speaking about tales and tips for keeping perspective despite life's challenges. All enrolled Veterans are invited to attend.

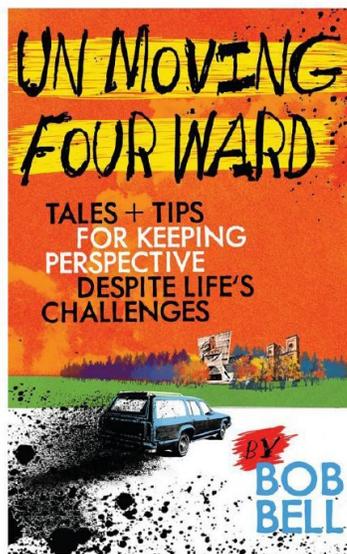
During his freshman year of college, Bob's neck was broken by a full nelson wrestling hold while roughhousing. The injury damaged his spinal cord, and he's spent the last 24 years as a quadriplegic. His spirit, however, was not damaged. And his journey since then, both literally and metaphorically, has been truly awe-inspiring.

After his injury, Bob returned to Florida but re-enrolled at St. Ben's/St. John's in the spring of 1992 and graduated in 1994, just one year behind his classmates.

Following graduation, Bob became a certified public accountant, worked in Arthur Andersen's Minneapolis office in its tax department and obtained a law degree. He then moved to Washington, D.C. to work at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Next came New York where he fulfilled his dream of working on Wall Street as a securities lawyer.

Prior to joining the faculty at St. Ben's/St. John's, Bob volunteered for six months in Central America. Bob enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, teaching, and traveling. Bob says he now has the absolute greatest job in the world.

Author **BOB BELL**



**Speaking
at the
St. Cloud
VA**

**July 13th
1:00pm
Building 96**

The St. Cloud Veterans Affairs Medical Center will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, disability, age, marital status, public assistance status, former status of sexual orientation. Upon request, accommodations will be provided to allow people with disabilities to participate in all VA programs and activities.

Bob earned his Juris Doctor degree from University of Minnesota Law School and Bachelor of Art degree in Accounting from College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University.

MOVE! Puts Marine Back in Uniform

Yvonne “Vonnie” Heckt is a 61-year-old Marine Corps Veteran who lives in Bertram, Minnesota. She’s quick to tell you that the adage “once a Marine always a Marine” applies to her.

Her service as a “secretary and bookkeeper” spanned 4 years in the early 1970’s, with assignments at Camp Lejeune and Henderson Hall, and time spent in the Marine Corps Reserve.

Although she is now decades removed from her Marine Corps service, the inner Marine emerged when she was challenged by some of her fellow Veterans at American Legion Post 12 in Long Prairie, Minnesota, who said she couldn’t get back into her old uniform.



Daughter Misty and Vonnie in April 2014



Vonnie in January 2015

“Fed up” with being out of shape, Heckt says “they made a bet with the wrong Marine.”

After the challenge was issued, Heckt worked on diet changes, enrolled in the MOVE! Home Telehealth program at the St. Cloud VA, and over the course of 8 months lost 38 pounds and 23% of her starting body weight. She also went from a size 16 dress size to a size 8!

To fit into her old Marine Corps jacket she had to have it taken in!

According to Heckt, those who challenged her “are now eating their words.”

Heck says the first 10 pounds were the hardest to lose, but over the course of time her motivation changed from simply winning the bet to embracing a healthy lifestyle and realizing many positive benefits to her overall health and well-being.

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MOVE! (Cont.)

The MOVE! Home Telehealth program was a key part of the weight loss process, she said. "Using the messaging monitor to weigh in every day really keeps you on your toes," she said.

When asked what the best part of her story is, Heckt is quick to reply that "I really want to help other Veterans lose weight."

MOVE! is a free weight management program designed to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off, and improve their health. The MOVE! program offers different options such as individual appointments, group classes, or home telehealth to better meet the needs of all Veterans.

MOVE! classes are taught on many different topics including: nutrition, physical activity, and behavior and lifestyle changes, and provides the opportunity to interact with other Veterans who are also working to control their weight. These classes are offered in St. Cloud, Brainerd, Alexandria, and Montevideo VA clinics.



Vonnie in her uniform, Memorial Day 2015. "The uniform grew," said Vonnie!



Vonnie and Luke Steinbach from the MOVE! Program, June 2015

Veterans electing to participate in MOVE! Home Telehealth are issued an in-home messaging monitor with an attached scale. The monitor provides weight management education in short daily lessons and also takes daily weights that are tracked by the Veteran's care coordinator at the VA.

If you are interested in the MOVE! Program talk to your primary care team. Veterans may also get more information by calling the Nutrition Clinic at **(320) 255-6376**.

St. Cloud VA Participating in “Summer of Service” to Bolster Community Engagement with Veterans

A new nationwide initiative – a “Summer of Service” – seeks the help of citizens in the central Minnesota area to strengthen the bonds between Veterans and the individuals and organizations serving Veterans here.



As part of this service, the St. Cloud VA hosted *Thanks for Freedom* on June 20. Held annually on the Saturday before Father’s Day, this event brings families and friends of inpatient Veterans together for some family fun. Sponsored by the Clearwater Legion Riders, a large crowd listened to the Gypsy Mafia band, drank root beer floats, rode a horse drawn trolley, experienced a petting zoo and played games.



Learn more about upcoming events by visiting www.stcloud.va.gov, liking [www.Facebook.com/stcloudvahcs](https://www.facebook.com/stcloudvahcs), or by listening to the Voices for Veterans program, airing the third Wednesday of each month at 8:15 a.m. on WJON (AM 1240), and the Veterans Affairs program, airing the first Monday of each month at 8:10 a.m. on KNSI (FM103.3/AM1450).



Special Lunch for Veterans

Prime rib for lunch? Yes, the Veterans at the St. Cloud VA had prime rib for lunch on Monday, June 22. The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and the Sons of the American Legion of the 6th District, Department of Minnesota, sponsored a prime rib lunch for all inpatient Veterans at the St. Cloud VA main campus. The meal consisted of prime rib, cheddar cheese twice baked potato, vegetables, and for dessert, a piece of strawberry cream pie.

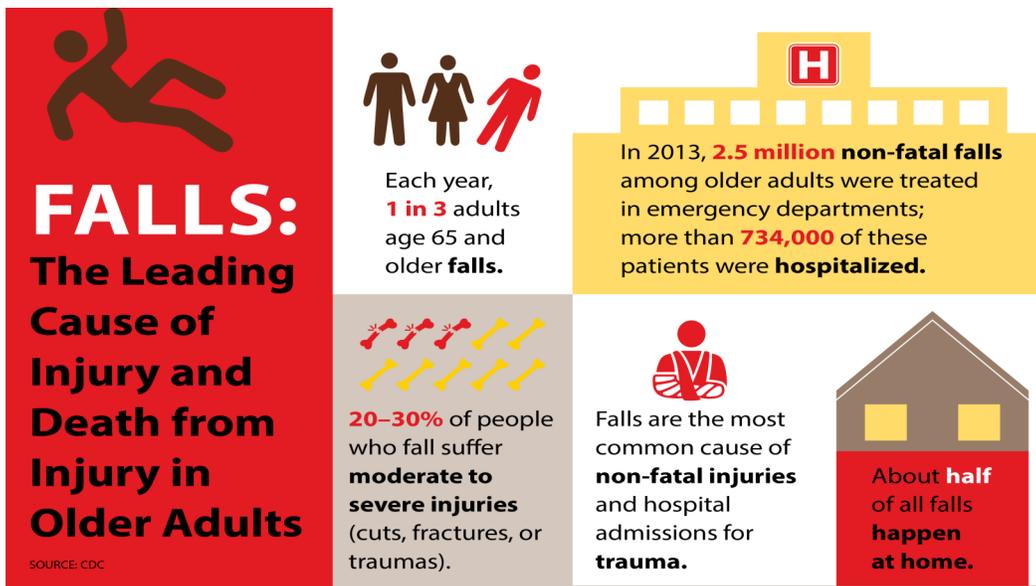
As an additional thank you to the Veterans, the American Legion handed out “Canteen Bucks” for Veterans to spend in the Canteen for food or at the facility store.



L/R: Peter Brick, resident; Carl Moon, 6th District American Legion Commander; Renee Bercheid and Laurie Wells, American Legion Auxiliary; and Richard Lyke, resident, receive their canteen bucks on Monday, June 22.

TODAY'S FACTS

- In Australia, the Number 1 topping for pizza is eggs.
- In Chile, the favorite topping is mussels and clams.
- In the United States, it's pepperoni.



www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Be_Safe_Prevent_Falls.asp



Helpful Tips to Prevent Falls

- Most fractures among older adults are caused by falls. The most common are fractures of the spine, hip, forearm, leg, ankle, pelvis, upper arm, and hand. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths.
- About half of all falls happen at home.
- If you or a loved one has fallen recently or has balance problems, consider the following home safety tips:
 - Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
 - Have grab bars put in next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
 - Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Hang light-weight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
 - Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
 - Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
 - Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
 - Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
 - Have handrails and lights put in all staircases.
 - Use mobility aids such as walkers or canes as needed for support.
- Engaging in regular physical activity, especially strengthening exercises, may reduce your risk of falling by increasing strength and balance.



BE SAFE:

Prevent Motor Vehicle Crashes



Did you know there are practical steps you can take to be safe? It is important to be safe and protect yourself from motor vehicle crashes. Read below to learn more about how to prevent motor vehicle crashes.

Are Veterans more likely to be in motor vehicle crashes?

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death in Veterans in the early years after they return home from deployment.
- Your military experiences may have taught you not to use seat belts. In civilian driving, seat belts can reduce your and your loved ones' chances of injury or death from a motor vehicle accident. Wear a helmet if you drive a motorcycle, even if your state's laws do not require it.

How do I prevent motor vehicle crashes and injuries?

- Don't drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs or when sleep deprived, or ride with somebody who is. Driving while impaired by drugs, alcohol, or sleep loss is dangerous and causes more than half of all motor vehicle crashes.
 - Don't text or talk on a cell phone while driving. Before using a cell phone, pull far over to the side of the road away from traffic.
 - Ask your health care team if you are taking any medications that can slow down your reaction time and put you at risk for motor vehicle crashes.

A Better Way to
LIVE

*Talk with your
health care team
about your goals.*

FOR THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION AND OTHER RESOURCES:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov. Go to the *Healthy Living* tab and choose "Be Safe"
- Veterans Health Library: www.veteranshealthlibrary.org, search "safe driving"

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.

www.prevention.va.gov

IB 10-627 P96662 June 2014

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Patient Care Services
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention



Military Sexual Trauma

No Longer a Victim: One Woman's Story of Surviving MST

Jessie Truitt had finally landed her dream job. She was 23 and working as an Army recruiter in DuBois, Pennsylvania—right in her hometown area. Diligent, conscientious and hard-working, she was named Top Reserve Recruiter for the Pittsburgh Recruiting Battalion in 2005.

In May of that year she and her husband celebrated when they learned she was pregnant. Three months later, in August, she was raped by her station commander.

“I had to see that man every day of my life for the next four months, until the Army approved my discharge,” Truitt said. “I felt alone. I felt ashamed. For the next six years, I didn’t tell a soul what had happened to me.”

During those six years she gave birth to two daughters, earned two bachelor’s degrees and one master’s degree and held down two jobs—a full-time position with the VA and a part-time one with the Department of the Army.

Autopilot

“I remember bits and pieces of those years,” she said, “but I don’t have any real memories. I was on autopilot, simply going through the movements of life and not really living it. Then, in 2011, I decided to step up and tell my story. I decided I wanted my life back.”

She told her husband what had happened to her. She told her best friend. She told her dad and the rest of her family. Then she headed for the VA in Butler County, Pennsylvania, to get help.

“My therapist told me that recovery would be a lifelong process and that it was possible for me to get my life back,” Truitt said. “She told me it wasn’t my fault. She told me I shouldn’t be ashamed of what happened to me.”

“One of the biggest things we offer is hope,” said Dr. Rowan Flamm, Truitt’s therapist at the Butler VA Medical Center. “I tell my patients that healing is neither fast nor easy. But it can be done. I tell them it’s a process, a learning journey, and to just stick with it. I also tell them that healing doesn’t always have to be painful.”

Flamm, a clinical psychologist, said she decided to form a military sexual trauma (MST) therapy group because she felt her patients needed more than just a weekly counseling session. They needed comradery. *Cont. next page*

“A lot of the women I was seeing in individual therapy told me they were feeling alone and isolated,” she said. “I realized we just didn’t have any kind of support system outside of the individual therapy, so I thought a group situation would be helpful. I wanted to offer my patients a place where they felt safe, a group that would support them. So I formed this group about six weeks ago. We meet once a week. We have women in their 20s all the way up to their 60s. We have women who were assaulted 30 years ago and are just now getting around to actively dealing with it. Then we have women who were assaulted within the last year.”

“My experience with this group has been amazing,” said Jessie Truitt. “We have made instant connections with each other. This group of women has given me strength. With them by my side, I truly know I am not alone.”

That’s exactly what Flamm was hoping for.

Safe Zone

“The group becomes your support, your connection to other Veterans who ‘get it,’” the psychologist explained. “Just as combat Vets ‘get’ each other, so do survivors of MST. We have six women who attend on a regular basis and two others expected to join. They all support each other. And if someone doesn’t show up for the group and they don’t call, we call them to make sure they’re okay.”

She added: “If you can find a place, even a small space to feel safe in, and people to feel safe with, it’s a start. You can gradually start expanding that safe zone outward, to where you start to feel safe in the outside world. Because if you can make friends in the therapy group, you can make friends outside the group.”

Flamm said MST affects everyone in different ways. “A lot of it depends on who your attacker was,” she observed. “Did a stranger attack you? Or was it your supervisor—someone you had to see every day? Was there just one attack, or multiple attacks over time? Was it just one attacker, or a gang of them? Everyone’s trauma is different, and everyone deals with the aftermath in different ways...

“For example, I have one woman in our group who’s gone from full blown PTSD to becoming a survivor. Over the last two years she’s worked really hard. She’s gaining strength, getting back to who she wants to be. It’s a wonderful thing to see...

“Then I had another patient who, for whatever reason, couldn’t move forward. Like some women who’ve been traumatized, she turned to drugs and alcohol as a way of getting out of her own head. Sadly, these are the ones we’re most likely to lose, and we lost her.

“Thankfully,” she added, “we have far more success stories than sad stories.” *Cont. next page*

The Sisterhood

“To see the women in this group and realize they really do ‘get it’ is the most effective treatment I’ve had,” said Jessie Truitt. “We’re all there to help each other. They have the same struggles I do. We are all parents and sisters-in-arms. We have the same anxiety issues and the same fears, the same trust issues.”

“In the group they can talk about their anxiety, their panic attacks, their depression, their nightmares, and all the other things that happen to victims of sexual assault,” Flamm said. “But they don’t just talk about their trauma. All sorts of things come up. Parenting is a big topic. Dating is another, and relationships in general. One woman in the group is estranged from her kids ...she talks about how she’s trying to reconnect with them, even though they live in another state now.”

Discussions can certainly get intense and dark, Flamm noted. But there are plenty of lighter moments to balance things out.

“Sometimes they have me laughing so hard,” she said with a smile. “I didn’t know there would be laughter in my MST therapy group. I expected occasional light chuckles as we talked about various things, but I didn’t know there would be side-splitting laughter sometimes. It’s surprising, but it happens. I think it surprises everybody in the group when it happens.”

The psychologist said the best part of her job is when one of her patients tells her they no longer feel the need for therapy.

“It’s a great feeling when that happens. It’s also rewarding when someone first discloses their trauma to me. I’m usually the first or second person they tell, and it’s an incredible privilege to be trusted with that. Once you tell someone about your trauma you’ve created an opportunity; you’ve started a journey. You’ve decided to take that first step toward becoming something other than what you currently are: a victim.”

Jessie Truitt couldn’t agree more.

“I joined the Army, had a career I loved, and then a bad man raped me and took it all away,” she said. “But I still have my husband and my two daughters and the rest of my family who love me for just being me. These are the things I focus on when life is getting me down.”

She paused, then added: “I’m not a victim any longer. I’m a survivor.”

To find out more about how the VA might be able to help you cope with a traumatic event in your life, visit www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/trauma.asp.

Have a question about VA benefits and services available to you? Contact the Women Veterans Call Center at 1-855.VA.WOMEN or visit them at www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/programoverview/wvcc.asp.



Military Sexual Trauma
Healing Starts with Knowing the Facts

“Going through a sexual assault is bad enough. Then to have this happen to me in my job as a soldier; it was really difficult because what happened to the unit support? Your fellow soldiers are supposed to have your back.”

The St. Cloud VA invites male and female veterans with a history of military sexual trauma to attend an **EDUCATIONAL CLASS in a supportive environment**. The class provides education and support for issues related to sexual trauma that occurred in the military.

The class will provide information on:

- Common experiences and problems
- Effects of trauma on relationships and health
- Treatment options
- What helps with the healing process
- Available Resources

“You can find the plan and techniques that work for you. What worked for me may not work for you but I can tell you I found the steps that led to my recovery: going to VA, asking about their options, talking to somebody about my MST and PTSD, going to their classes, attending their groups.”

When: August 3, 2015, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. It is important that you are able to attend the entire day.

How do I sign up? Discuss with your mental health provider, or contact Joy Finkelson, VA Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator, at (320) 252-1670 extension 6398 if not currently in treatment.

Where: Location details provided upon registration.

FACTS—Medical Cannabis

The new Minnesota medical cannabis law goes into effect on July 1. It is important that Veterans understand how current VHA policy and the State law relate, and to have a working understanding of the State program. Additional questions may be directed to your primary care provider..



VHA Policy

VHA policy prohibits providers from completing forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a Veteran's participation in a State marijuana program.

-This is because VA providers must comply with all Federal laws, including the Controlled Substances Act. Marijuana is classified as a Schedule I (no currently accepted medical use) drug under the Controlled Substances Act.

-State laws authorizing the use of Schedule I drugs, such as marijuana, even when characterized as medicine, are contrary to Federal law.

-VHA policy does not administratively prohibit Veterans who participate in State marijuana programs from also participating in VHA substance abuse programs, pain control programs, and other clinical programs where the use of marijuana may be considered inconsistent with treatment goals. While patients participating in State marijuana programs must not be denied VHA services, the decision to modify treatment plans in those situations needs to be made by individual providers in partnership with their patients.

-VHA endorses a step-care model for the treatment of patients with chronic pain; any prescription for chronic pain needs to be managed under the auspices of such programs described in VHA policy for pain management.

VA does not provide marijuana nor will it pay for it to be provided by a non-VA entity.

Possession of marijuana, even for authorized medical reasons, by Veterans or staff while on VA property is a violation of 38 CFR 1.218 (Security and law enforcement at VA facilities) and places them at risk for prosecution under the Controlled Substances Act.

Overview of Medical Cannabis in Minnesota

Only patients who are legal Minnesota residents and have been diagnosed with one of the qualifying conditions are eligible for registration in the medical marijuana program.

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Minnesota's list of qualifying conditions has been set by law and includes cancer that causes pain or nausea, glaucoma, Tourette syndrome, Lou Gehrig's Disease, AIDS, HIV, epilepsy, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis or any painful condition expected to kill the patient within a year.

To become a registered patient in the medical marijuana program, individuals must be certified by a health care practitioner who has responsibility for care connected to a qualifying condition.

In Minnesota, registered patients do not smoke marijuana. Only pills are allowed, as well as oils and some vaporized inhalants.

Smoking marijuana remains illegal.

Hospitals and pharmacies do not dispense or distribute medical marijuana. In fact, the law sets forth manufacturers and distributors/dispensaries, and they are not hospitals or clinics or pharmacies.

Two Minnesota companies are the only authorized distributors in the state. Each will sell marijuana products from eight dispensaries located around the state. Dispensaries will open Wednesday in Eagan and Minneapolis. Others are tentatively scheduled to open later this summer in St. Paul, Maple Grove, St. Cloud, Moorhead, Hibbing and Rochester.

A typical patient will pay \$200 annually to register with the state and then pay \$300 to \$500 for a month's supply.

Medical marijuana is not covered by insurance. However, patients on Social Security Disability, Medical Assistance or Medicaid are eligible for a reduced fee of \$50.

More information about the Minnesota medical marijuana program is available from the Minnesota Department of Health website at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/topics/cannabis/>.



New Health Hub

Primary Specialty Medicine is excited to announce the opening of the Health Hub!

The Health Hub serves as the St. Cloud VA one-stop shop for Veterans to learn about virtual health modalities. These modalities include My HealtheVet, Secure Messaging, Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER), Healthy Living Assessment, and Telehealth. As the Connected Health program grows, the Health Hub will also offer support of mobile apps, text messaging and Direct technologies.

The Health Hub is located in Building 29, Room 105. The Health Hub offers multiple kiosks as well as the convenience of Veterans being able to register for multiple virtual resources in one place!



The Health Hub will be available for Veteran use from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The Building 1 (Main Entrance) MHV kiosk will remain available for assistance with My HealtheVet, Secure Messaging and VLER.

We encourage Veterans to stop by our new location and learn about all the great virtual resources available to them.

Construction Update



Rehabilitation Center

Work on the new Rehabilitation Center continues to progress. This view shows the main (south) entrance. The connecting corridor to Bldg. 51 is visible on the left. Photo taken on 6-23-15.



View of the inside of the Rehabilitation Center showing the main exercise area. The large windows allow plenty of light into the building. Photo taken on 6-23-15.

Food Service Building



View from the south showing the concrete footings being poured. A portion of the original connecting corridor and the laundry building are visible in the back of the photo. Photo taken 6-23-15.



View from the east showing the concrete work being done. Building 8 steps and a portion of the original connecting corridor are shown on the right side of the photo. Photo taken 6-23-15.

A Recipe for Health

Rainbow Fruit Salad

Ingredients

Dressing:

½ cup honey

2 T. lemon juice

¼ tsp. nutmeg

½ c. orange juice

¼ tsp. ginger

Fruit:

2 sliced bananas

2 c. strawberries

5 c. cantaloupe

1 c. fresh blueberries

2 nectarines, sliced

2 c. grapes, cut in half

Directions

Mix dressing and pour over fruit. Serving size: 1 cup.

Nutritional Information

124 calories, 0.6g fat, 8.3mg sodium, 1.6g protein, 33.7g carbohydrates



Take care of your buddy!

Help a fellow Veteran enroll
for VA healthcare.
Contact your County Veteran
Service Officer, call the St.
Cloud VA at 320-255-6340,
or apply online at
www.1010ez.med.va.gov

www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS



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