

St. Cloud VA

# UPDATE

January 24, 2020



*A monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve them. 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](mailto:barry.venable@va.gov)*

---

## **My Life My Story debuts at the St. Cloud VA**

The My Life My Story program is intended to give your medical team the opportunity to get to know you better and learn about what's most important to you in your daily life. Each Veteran has a unique life story worth telling, and this program allows you tell your story, have it included as part of your medical record, and to make a written copy available to you to share with family members if desired. There is research suggesting that when doctors, nurses and other care providers know their patients well, they provide even better care.

### **How does the My Life My Story program work?**

We arrange an approximate hour-long interview in which we encourage you to share what you'd like to share; there's no pressure to discuss "off limits" topics. After an interview, we will compose a written version of your story and then allow you to make any changes that you'd like. When you're satisfied with your story, our team will add it to your patient medical record,

and we will also give you a copy of your story to keep for yourself or to share with others. If you want us to share it with others, we can do that too, just like our first participant, Gerald Plachecki, chose to do.



*Gerald Plachecki, a resident in the Community Living Center, was the first Veteran to participate in the program at the St. Cloud VA. Read Jerry's story on page 8.*

### **How you can participate:**

If you'd like to participate or receive more information, please call the Veteran and Community Service Department at 320-255-6353.

## **New Community Care Walk-In Hours of Operation**

The Community Care Office at the St. Cloud VA is standardizing the hours of operation at the walk-in office located in Bldg. 29, Room 20C.

The hours of operation for walk-in services are from 9 to 11 a.m., and 1 to 3 p.m. weekdays (except for federal holidays).

Veterans may continue to contact the Community Care Office via phone at 320-252-1670 Ext. 6401 (or press option 2, then press option 7), from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

## **Acting Associate Director for Patient Services/Nurse Executive**



Teresa Tungseth has been appointed as the Acting Associate Director for Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive, effective Dec. 29, 2019.

Ms. Tungseth has served Veterans at Minneapolis VA Health Care System since 1995, most recently as the Deputy Associate Director for Patient Care Services/Deputy Nurse Executive. During this time, Ms. Tungseth has also served in

Acting Nurse Executive positions at both the Minneapolis and Washington DC VA Medical Centers.

Prior to her roles in executive leadership, she served Veterans and staff as staff nurse, nurse educator, and nurse manager of the step-down unit.

Ms. Tungseth is a native of Minneapolis, Minnesota. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Nursing at the University of St. Catherine's in St. Paul, MN and her Master of Nursing in Nursing Leadership at Bethel University in St. Paul, MN. Ms. Tungseth has been an adjunct faculty member at St. Catherine's University. She is a member of the local chapter of American Organization of Nursing Leaders and a long-standing VISN 23 LEAD Mentor.

## **New Brainerd CBOC Clinic Coordinator**

Susan Woitalla, RN, BSN, PHN, has been named as the Clinic Coordinator at the Brainerd CBOC.



Susan has been a nurse for the past 27 years and most of that time was in clinical nursing. The last 12 years she was a Clinic Manager for a community owned non-profit health system in charge of overall operations for five clinic sites and 20 outreach and in-house specialty clinics. She was actively involved in behavioral health

community collaboration and several college advisory boards. Susan holds a Bachelor of Nursing from Excelsior College and is currently enrolled in a Master of Healthcare Administration program. She is a recent empty-nester of two grown daughters and her first grandchild is on the way! She loves fishing, gardening and bonfires.

## 2020 St. Cloud VA Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Fair

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System is seeking local Veteran entries for the 2020 National Veterans Creative Arts Competition, an annual competitive event that provides Veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities the opportunity to participate in creative self-expression in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music as part of their therapy, and to gain recognition for these artistic accomplishments.



**2020 National Veterans Creative Arts Competition**

The National Veterans Creative Arts Program goal is to promote self-expression through the arts as therapy. The Creative Arts Competition and Festival provides Veterans with an opportunity to gain recognition for their creative accomplishments.

**ART ENTRIES DUE FEBRUARY 21**

- \*50 categories, including fine art, applied art, and craft kits
- \*All artwork must have been created since April 1, 2019
- \*Call for drop off dates, times, and location
- \*Entries must adhere to size limits, art fair details
- \*Entries must be framed and ready to hang, please no glass

**MUSIC ENTRIES DUE MARCH 6**

- \*All entries must be video recorded
- \*Call to set up a recording appointment
- \*Solo and Group categories, vocal and instrumental categories

**DANCE ENTRIES DUE MARCH 6**

- \*All entries must be video recorded
- \*Call to set up a recording appointment
- \*Solo and Group categories

**DRAMA ENTRIES DUE MARCH 6**

- \*All entries must be video recorded
- \*Call to set up a recording appointment
- \*Solo and Group categories

**CREATIVE WRITING ENTRIES DUE MARCH 6**

- \*All entries must be typed
- \*All entries must adhere to word limits

Open to all Veterans enrolled for care at the St. Cloud VA

First place local entries will be forwarded for national judging

One entry per category per Veteran in each division. Veterans may enter in multiple divisions

Art show will be held in Building 8, Auditorium, on Wednesday, February 26th, 12:30-6:30 Thursday, February 27th, 9:00-3:00

All possible care will be taken in handling art entries and in the process of video recording. However, the VA Medical Center cannot be responsible for any loss or damage

All participants are required to give written consent allowing the release of photo and voice for competition and publicity purposes

Guns, knives, or other weapons will not be accepted due to VA regulations

The judges and St. Cloud VA staff reserve the right to change an entry's category or to withhold entries from public viewing

**CONTACT:**  
Madge Scherer, MT-BC  
4801 Veterans Drive  
St. Cloud, MN 56303  
320-252-1670 ext. 7336  
madge.scherer@va.gov

Art division entries will be accepted through Friday, Feb. 21, 2020. Entries in all other divisions will be accepted through Friday

Mar. 6, 2020. For information on categories and rules or to learn how to enter the competition, visit the St. Cloud VA homepage at: <https://www.stcloud.va.gov/> or contact Madge Scherer at (320) 252-1670 ext. 7336.

Submissions in the visual arts division will be judged and displayed at the Veterans Art Show on Wednesday, February 26, from 12:30 to 6:30 p.m., and Thursday, February 27, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the Auditorium (Building 8) on the St. Cloud VA Medical Center campus. The show is open to the public.

## St. Cloud VA Goes Red for Women

Every February during American Heart Month, the Women Veterans Program at the St. Cloud VA joins the American Heart Association's efforts to raise awareness and provide education about heart disease and stroke among women Veterans.



**Go Red for Women's Heart Health**

Learn more about heart disease in women. Make a heart health themed towel to take home with you.

February 19, 2020  
5:30 to 8 p.m.

St. Cloud VA Auditorium  
Building 8  
4801 Veterans Dr.,  
St. Cloud, MN 56303

Please R.S.V.P. by February 17th to Amber Willert, Women Veterans Program Manager (320)654-7656 or through: <https://www.eventrite.com/e/women-veterans-go-red-for-heart-health-tickets-90810780489>

VA  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
St. Cloud VA Health Care System

Women Veterans are invited to join the effort by learning more about heart disease while creating a heart health themed towel to take home on Wednesday, February 19, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. in the St. Cloud VA Auditorium (Bldg. 8), located at 4801 Veterans Dr., St. Cloud.

### Heart Disease in Women

One in three women die from cardiovascular diseases and stroke each year, killing about one woman every 80 seconds. An estimated 44 million women in the U.S. are affected by cardiovascular diseases.

The [symptoms](#) of heart attack can be different in women versus men, and are often misunderstood—even by some physicians. Fewer women than men survive their first heart attack. Women also have a higher lifetime risk of stroke than men.

Ninety percent of women have one or more risk factors for heart disease or stroke. However, 80 percent of heart disease and stroke events may be prevented by lifestyle changes and education, and it all starts with knowing your numbers.

AHA [recommends](#) that women are aware of five key numbers: Total Cholesterol, HDL (good) Cholesterol, Blood Pressure, Blood Sugar and Body Mass Index (BMI). These numbers are important because they help providers determine your risk for developing cardiovascular diseases.

### Join the Conversation

[Learn more](#) about women Veterans and heart health, and help VA spread awareness

about heart disease and stroke in women. Women Veterans are invited to learn more about heart disease while creating a heart health themed towel to take home on Wednesday, February 19, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. in the St. Cloud VA Auditorium (Bldg. 8), located at 4801 Veterans Dr., St. Cloud. To RSVP visit


<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/women-veterans-go-red-for-heart-health-tickets-90810780489> or for more information, contact Amber Willert, Women Veterans Program Manager at [amber.willert@va.gov](mailto:amber.willert@va.gov), or call (320) 252-1670 Ext. 6655.

### Coffee Talk and Whole Health at the Max J. Beilke VA Clinic

Alexandria area Veterans are invited to attend Coffee Talk at the Max J. Beilke VA clinic on Feb. 22, from 9 to 11 a.m., to learn "how to use" the VA effectively, obtain a services overview, and engage in Q & A. Coffee Talks now also include Intro to Whole Health, all in one convenient session.

## Coffee Talk


*Saturday morning coffee & conversation with Veterans*




- All area Veterans and their family members invited. Includes VA health care orientation —learn how to use your benefits.
- Tips to take charge of your health and *Live Fully* through self empowerment, self - healing & self care.
- Not enrolled? Bring your DD214 and we'll let you know how you may be eligible.

**Saturday, Feb. 22, 9 to 11 a.m.**  
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, 515 22nd Ave. E.  
Alexandria, MN

*Can't attend but want to enroll for VA health care? Call us at 320-255-6340.*

VA  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
St. Cloud VA Health Care System



# TAKE CHARGE.

EMPOWERING VETERANS TO LIVE FULLY. [VA.GOV/WholeHealth](http://VA.GOV/WholeHealth)

## **Have you heard? You can now quickly chat with VA.**

VA has launched the VA Health Chat app at the St. Cloud VA. The response from your fellow Veterans has been great! Use VA Health Chat to chat with a VA Health Care Team member, and quickly receive medical advice, schedule appointments, refill prescriptions, and more.

Already using VA Health Chat? Please be sure to complete the survey at the end of your chat encounters. Your feedback will help us determine if VA Health Chat availability should be expanded. VA Health Chat is available on the VA App Store, through the VA Launchpad app, and available for download from the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store.

To use VA Health Chat, you'll need either a My HealtheVet premium account User ID and password, DS Logon, or ID.me. For more information on creating VA credentials, click [here](#), or visit the Health Hub in Bldg. 29, Room 20.

Chat hours are Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Free Drop-In Legal Clinic for Veterans**

Tuesday, January 28 9 a.m. -3 p.m.  
Free legal consultation for Veterans for housing, employment, benefits, debt collection, expungement, family law including child support. For more information please call 651-200-4750.

### **Veterans Affairs Radio Show**

Monday, February 3 8:10 -8:30 a.m.  
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

### **Intro to Whole Health**

Wednesday, February 5 9 -11 a.m.  
St. Cloud VA, 4801 Veterans Drive, Bldg. 29  
Room 20E

This two-hour, peer-led session explains the Whole Health approach to healthcare. Discover what matters to you and how you can be at the center of your own care. No reservation required.

### **Intro to Whole Health CBOC Locations**

Wednesday February 5 2-3:30 p.m.  
Alexandria, Montevideo and Brainerd  
CBOC's

This two-hour, peer-led session explains the Whole Health approach to healthcare. Discover what matters to you and how you can be at the center of your own care. Veterans attending at a CBOC location should contact their clinic to reserve their spot: Alexandria 320-759-2640; Montevideo 320-269-2222; Brainerd 218-855-1115.

### **Coffee Talk**

Friday, February 14 2-4 p.m.  
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 29, Room 20E

Veterans are invited to attend Coffee Talk to learn "How to use" the VA effectively, services overview, Q & A and a tour. Participants can also attend via a telehealth session at a CBOC location. Coffee Talks now also include Intro to Whole Health, all in one convenient session. To attend at a CBOC please call the Health Hub at 320-252-1670, Ext. 7271 to reserve a spot.

**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday**

Monday, February 17

Outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including VA Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed. Urgent Care at the St. Cloud VA will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**Voices for Veterans Radio Show**

Wednesday, February 19 8:10-830 a.m.  
WJON AM 1240

**Go Red for Women's Heart Health**

Wednesday, February 19 5:30-8 p.m.  
St. Cloud VA Auditorium (Bldg. 8)

Women Veterans are invited to learn more about heart disease while creating a heart health themed towel to take home.

To RSVP visit

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/women-veterans-go-red-for-heart-health-tickets-90810780489> or for more information, contact Amber Willert, Women Veterans Program Manager at [amber.willert@va.gov](mailto:amber.willert@va.gov), or call (320) 252-1670 Ext. 6655.

**Coffee Talk**

Saturday, February 22 9-11 a.m.

Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria

Veterans are invited to attend Coffee Talk to learn "How to use" the VA effectively, services overview, and Q & A. Coffee Talks now also include Intro to Whole Health, all in one convenient session.

*For a complete Calendar of Events, go to <https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp>*

# Quick Reference Phone List

<b>Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number</b>	<b>320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739</b>
TDD User	320-255-6450
<b>Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria</b>	320-759-2640
<b>Brainerd VA Clinic</b>	218-855-1115
<b>Montevideo VA Clinic</b>	320-269-2222
<b>Veterans Crisis Line</b>	<b>800-273-8255 Press 1</b>
<b>Homeless Veteran Hotline</b>	877- 424-3838

## Billing:

- VA Care 866-347-2352
- Care in the Community (non-VA care) 877-881-7618

Chaplain Service	Ext. 6386
Community Care Referrals	Ext. 6401
Discrimination Complaints	Ext. 6304
Eligibility	Ext. 6340
Nutrition Clinic	Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program	Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate	Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line	855-560-1724
Privacy Officer	Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office	Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records)	Ext. 6336
Transportation	Ext. 7622
TRICARE	844-866-9378
Voluntary Service	Ext. 6365
VA Police	Ext. 6355

## Stay in Touch

Visit our Website: [www.stcloud.va.gov](http://www.stcloud.va.gov)

Like us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS](https://www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS)

Sign up for our automated email service. Visit the St. Cloud VA Website at: <http://www.stcloud.va.gov> and on the right-hand side of the page is a request to sign up for email updates. Enter your email address and you are automatically signed up to receive email updates from our web page. There are also options presented to sign up for updates from other government sites.

## **My Life My Story with Gerald Plachecki**

I thought I'd start out telling you about my Grandfathers. They both came from Poland. On my father's side, he wouldn't allow Polish to be spoken in his presence. My Grandfather on my mother's side preferred Polish to be spoken around him. My parents married on June 23rd, 1927 and that was the day they moved into their brand-new house. I was born five years later June 25th, 1932. I never heard or saw them fight. We always had a maid. It was, ya know, a good upbringing.

I was, I guess, an only child. My sister wasn't born until five years later and that's quite a difference. We didn't have the same friends, or the same things that we wanted to do. Being the only child at that time, I had a lot of things the other kids didn't have. When we got two of us in the family, I still didn't have to hand anything down.

I went to St. Johns Cantius, a private, Polish school, until 8th grade. I was, I guess, a person that was inquisitive. One day, I noticed the ink in my ink well on my desk was disappearing, so I put sweeping compound in it. Well, it turns out one of the nun's was taking it to fill her pen, which was her prized possession. That sweeping compound didn't do her ink pen any good. She whipped me in the boiler room with horse leather for that. After that happened, I switched to the public school called Central junior high, which is where city hall is now. I had to walk over a mile each way to get there, but it was a better school. Here again, I am all alone. Most of my life, I guess I have been kind of by myself.

One day, our homecoming queen asked me to give her the answer to the math problem on the board. I whispered to her that I didn't have any idea, but I gave her an answer, and it was wrong. She went and sharpened her pencil and then stuck me in the arm! That lead was in my arm for years and years. After I graduated from Tech High School, I went to a trade school in Minneapolis. I was going to be a telegrapher for the railroad. I was all by myself, living in a rooming house. I skipped school and rode the street car, explored a lot.

The Korean War started on June 25th, 1950. I was in trade school, but not doing well because I didn't show up. I kind of talked to the guys, my six friends, about joining the Army. On Sunday, we agreed to join, but the next morning only three of us showed up. David and I passed the physical, and the Recruiting Sergeant said we would stay together. When it came time to get on the train, he was sent one way and I was sent the other. Here now, I'm all by myself, I didn't know a soul. It was Valentine's Day and I ended up in Fort Riley, Kansas. I did my basic training there and went on to Judge Advocate school in Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis where I was trained to take shorthand. It was a high-level school. On Sundays, I'd put on my uniform and stand outside a church, didn't matter which one, just a church. Someone would always kind of adopt me, feed me supper, take me out to eat.



I decided I didn't like shorthand very much. I wanted to get into the fight, before the war was over, so I went into the office one day. The Sergeant was there, and I said I wanted to apply for overseas. Five days later, I was on a train towards Japan. I was all by myself again.

We stopped in Fort Lewis, Washington and got on a ship. Everybody had to do something, you couldn't just lay around. When I got on, I saw one of those "SP" (shore police) bands laying there, so I picked it up and put it in my pocket. Every time they would come and want me to do hard duty or something, I would take out my band and tell them, "I just got off." I roamed around on that ship for 14 days and didn't do a thing!

We traveled to Japan. I wanted to be in the first Calvary-they had that big patch (points to left arm). On the fifth day, I finally got called for duty. I was told to get my uniform on and that I would be picked up for a meeting. I walked into the room and my God, there was an officer from each of the different branches plus a civilian. They started asking me questions, about my parents' loyalty and about my cousin's Australian wife. They asked if I wanted to go to Korea. Later that day, we got on the plane, no one was saying where we were going, I'm all by myself. I was kind of scared, wondering what I got myself into. I was escorted everywhere which was good, because I had no idea where I was. I found out later, we were in Seoul. After about a week, people had a different relationship with me. They would sit by me when we would eat. It turned out I had got my security clearance. I was in the JACK unit (Joint Advisory Commission Korea). My commander was a paratrooper that jumped on D-Day. John Wayne played him in the movie, The Longest Day. Anyway, here I was in this CIA unit as an Intelligence Analyst. I was given a pseudonym to use. I heard they pulled it out of a phone book in London. It was a stupid name.

We trained Korean agents to do interrogations behind the lines. We had to supply those agents. We flew a C-46 in low, around 300 feet or so. It was so cold with the plane door open, dropping those bundles. I could see the lights of Russia in the distance. They gave us a little pill to keep in our pockets, we would have to bite into it if we crashed. At that time, I had eyes only clearance which is above top secret.

After that, I gave up my state side rights and went to Europe. The Army had to wear wool shirts year-round, but I was given civilian identification, so I didn't have to. I was given a clothing allowance and a car that I used to drive people around in. It was a 1951 Chevy four door sedan. My enlistment ended on Feb. 14, 1953. After that, I went to school at St. Cloud State and got a business administration degree. In my senior year I married a nurse from this VA. Doris worked here her whole life. I went to work for Zapp National Bank and retired in 1999 after 42 years. I was the #2 person and could do whatever I wanted. I had a lot of authority and could make a loan up to 1 million dollars without permission from anyone. My Dad used to say, "When you can go to work, that should be your happiest day."

What I am most proud of it that I volunteered for those events. People thought I was dumb and foolish, but what an experience! I am grateful for it and would do it all again. That's my story and why I am who I am.