

THE northern

The Official Voice of VA Northern California Health Care System

SUMMER/FALL 2015



Summer
of Service
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MOVE! PROGRAM
THE VA ENVIRONMENT

A Welcome Letter from the Director



Dear Veterans,

As many of you already know, this summer we have been focused on giving back and honoring our volunteers for all they do for us. Did you know our health care system has more than 1,200 regularly scheduled volunteers who donate their time, almost daily, giving back to our Veterans? They drive vans to pick up patients, give directions, make coffee, visit Veterans in inpatient areas, and escort patients around our campuses.

We are fortunate to have dedicated volunteers who are excited to talk about their interactions with our Veterans and eager to take part in our health care system and our mission to serve Veterans. They always give me a sense of pride and camaraderie, and that is something I am truly proud of.

Thank you for picking up this edition of *The Northern*. As you read the stories here, please take a few moments to think about how you might want to give back to your community—maybe by volunteering at the VA or by taking part in something else you are passionate about. Until our next edition, stay healthy and keep cool in the summer heat.

Sincerely,
David Stockwell
Director, VA Northern California Health Care System

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Upcoming Stand Down Schedule 2015

Stand Downs are one- to three-day events that provide supplies and services to homeless Veterans, such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, and Social Security benefits counseling. Veterans can also receive referrals to other assistance such as health care, housing solutions, employment, substance abuse treatment, and mental health counseling. The Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VA Medical Centers, other government agencies, and community-based homeless service providers.

Yuba Sutter Stand Down

Riverfront Park, Marysville
August 20–22

Stand Down on the Delta

Antioch Fairgrounds
September 11–13

Gold Country Stand Down

Roseville Fairgrounds
September 15–17

Sacramento Stand Down

Mather Field, Rancho Cordova
September 18–20

North Bay Stand Down

Dixon May Fairgrounds
October 13–15

North Valley Fairgrounds

Shasta County Fairgrounds, Anderson
October 29–31



Program

By Jeffrey Fortner

I told myself: 'I'm not going to hit 300 pounds,'" said Hank Sanders, an Army Veteran with 37 combined years of active duty and reserve service. "After I retired, there was no more weight control," he went on to explain.

"I could just watch TV and there wasn't going to be consequences." However, after a couple of years and a few visits to his doctor at the McClellan Outpatient Clinic, Hank discovered that there *had* been consequences. He was slowly gaining weight and developing symptoms such as high blood pressure and high blood sugar. He knew it was time for a change. In January 2014, following his doctor's advice, he started attending the MOVE! program. MOVE! is a national weight management program designed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion



and Disease Prevention (NCP), part of the Office of Patient Care Services, to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off, and improve their health. The MOVE! Program focuses on improving lifestyle choices one step at a time.

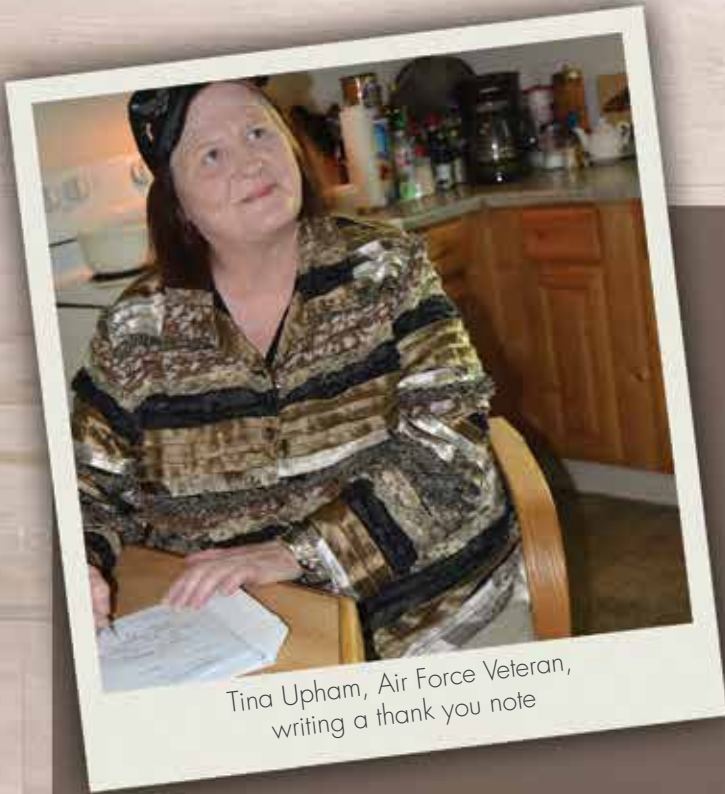
The program encourages monitoring daily activity with pedometers, recording food intake, and participating in community-organized events to assist with activity and camaraderie. Each Veteran has his or her own set of goals, such as measuring portions, completing food records, and/or meeting minimum activity goals of at least 150 minutes per week. MOVE! has had great success helping Veterans like Hank with their weight control, blood sugar, blood pressure, and lipid levels.

Hank is now 63 pounds lighter and uses his pedometer to track his daily activity (10,000 steps a day, or 5–6 miles). He also weighs his food, tracks his sodium intake, and uses telehealth to monitor his blood pressure and blood sugar. MOVE! introduces new goals into his program every so often—things like trying new types of produce, making low-sodium spaghetti sauce, or trying to beat the number of steps he took yesterday. Hank says "It's a lifestyle change, not a diet."

Way to go Hank!

For more information about the MOVE! program, ask your primary care doctor or go to www.move.va.gov.

VASH



Tina Upham, Air Force Veteran,
writing a thank you note

Meanwhile, a van pulls up outside to deliver the new box spring, mattress, bed frame, and all the accessories—items that were donated to Voluntary Services for use by local Veterans. Tina says that she has become an advocate for her fellow Vets. "I'm like an unpaid social worker. I talk to all the struggling Veterans I know about how they can find the resources they need. You have to work for it a little bit, but the VA comes through."

One year ago, Tina Upham had little more than her suitcase and a voucher for housing from the HUD-VASH program at VA. Today she sits at her kitchen table and writes a thank you note to VA Voluntary Services for the new mattress that is on its way to her. "I always make it a point to say thanks for what I receive," she says with a smile.

She first heard about housing vouchers for Veterans from a shuttle bus driver, and she was determined to get one for herself. "It took a little bit of work and time, but I am persistent. Now I have a home, a little patio garden, a new bed, and I am overjoyed!"



Ms. Upham received two new beds thanks to
donations from VA Volunteer Services



Hans Holtz volunteers to deliver new beds
to previously homeless Veterans

Hans Holtz—one of the volunteers in the Sacramento area—has been delivering new beds and other home goods to area Veterans for just over a year. He helps Tina and her neighbor move the new bed into place, makes sure she has the pillows and sheet set, and then gives her a hug and thanks her for her service.

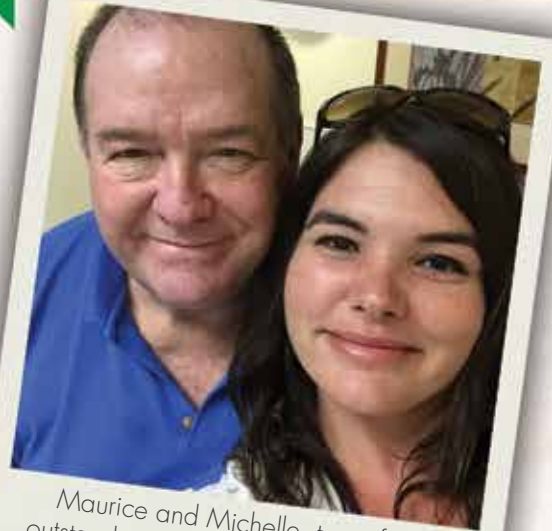
"Volunteering is fun! It feels good to help other people, and it's nice to show up and give a Veteran a free bed."—Hans Holtz

SUMMER *of* SERVICE

*“Whatever needs to be done, I do—
and I love it!”—Maurice*

For the last five years, Maurice has been putting together hygiene kits, documenting donations, helping with preparation for Christmas programs, and writing awards for other volunteers. On top of that, he helped coordinate the meditation garden and is working on a project that will allow Veterans coming to the VA today the ability to convey to future generations their reasons for serving. Thanks, Maurice!

Over the past year, Michelle has been working at the information and voluntary service offices, helping patients find their appointments and coordinating volunteer activities. She is also a notary public and makes her services available free of charge to all Veteran patients. Thank you for your service, Michelle!



Maurice and Michelle, two of the outstanding volunteers ready to help at Sacramento VA Medical Center

Volunteers cook out for VA's Summer of Service event



VANCHCS's Voluntary Services is participating in the VA Summer of Service initiative, which is designed to increase the number of individuals and organizations serving Veterans in their communities. Throughout the summer, we are working closely with Veterans Service Organizations and many local community organizations, as well as private sector and non-profit organizations, to identify new and innovative ways to support our Veterans.

Summer of Service also gives those looking to begin their career at VA the chance to meet and interact with current VA employees. In addition, volunteer service can help your resume stand out from the crowd.

If you would like to volunteer, or if you have ideas or questions, please contact Maria Almes, Chief of Voluntary Services at (916) 366-5372 or email maria.almes@va.gov



The VA Environment



Water Usage

Since 2010, we've saved over 13 million gallons. That's 24%—three times the 8% goal. How did we do this? We installed moisture sensors, so only the minimum amount of water is used for landscaping.



We have worked hard to make our health care system energy efficient—learn how.

Recycling

In 2010, the Federal government set a recycling goal rate of 50% by fiscal year 2015. We are at or above that goal at the largest sites and expect to exceed it everywhere by the end of the year.



Hazardous Waste Disposal

Since 2010, we have reduced hazardous waste disposal by 29%. Mather Laboratory Service, for example, uses an innovative system that cleans spent solvents for reuse. In 2014, this reduced spent-solvent disposal by over 5,000 lbs.

Energy Use

We've had an 18% energy reduction since 2010—more than double the goal of 8%. How? We have solar panels at Mather, Martinez, McClellan, and Mare Island that provide 12–15% of needed electricity.



LEED-Certified Building and Sustainability

We have nine LEED-certifying buildings. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification requires the use of high-efficiency lighting and HVAC systems, sustainable building materials, high-efficiency water fixtures and meeting indoor air quality standards.

Our Martinez campus received the 2015 Energy Star Certification, for using 35% less energy and generating 35% lower greenhouse gas emissions than similar buildings across the nation.

Questions or Comments?

Please contact:

Gus Ballis, GEMS Program Manager,
gus.ballis@va.gov

Hadi Janbakhshzadeh, Energy Manager,
hadi.janbakhshzadeh@va.gov

Solar Panels

Solar panels installed at our major facilities have generated about 4.5 million kWh of renewable electricity. This accounts for about 15% of all electricity used by the health care system and results in a savings of 2.3 million kg of carbon dioxide.





I am the sole caregiver for my father, who is a WWII Veteran. He has a lot of needs that I am not capable of meeting by myself. What kinds of benefits are available for him?

In the VA Northern California Health Care System we have a wonderful program called Caregiver Support, which offers a variety of services for caregivers of eligible Veterans of all eras. This program provides caregivers with training and resources intended to enhance their quality of life and improve their resiliency. Caregiver Support facilitates referrals, promotes peer support groups, and advises caregivers on the process of initiating services from a variety of sources. Caregiver Support coordinators help locate services for eligible Veterans, including skilled nursing, home health aides, home-based primary care, peer support, telehealth, medical equipment, home or vehicle modifications, Aid & Attendance, respite care, and caregiver education.

Additionally, coordinators assist caregivers in applying for the Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program. This program provides a stipend to qualifying caregivers of Veterans who were seriously injured while on active duty any time after September 11, 2001. Veterans and caregivers must meet specific criteria to qualify for the program. **For more information, visit www.caregiver.va.gov**

Also be sure to check with your local Social Security Office and ask for information about In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS). IHSS is a program that provides financial assistance to hire someone to help with housecleaning, meal preparation, chores, travel to medical appointments, and more. Anyone who is over 65 years old, disabled, or blind is eligible. **Visit www.cdss.ca.gov/agedblinddisabled/pg1296.htm for more information.**

If you need help with these programs, please speak to a primary care social worker at your local VA Clinic.

How can I change my primary care doctor?

To change your primary care physician, you will need to get a Primary Care M.D. Change Request form, either from the front desk staff at your primary care clinic or from a patient advocate. It is important to remember that if you are changing your doctor because you did not have a positive experience, sharing that information with your patient advocate can be useful to improve experiences for other Veterans.

As a single mom, I always seem to be rushing at work, at home, and even on weekends. What can I do to calm my life down?

Being a parent is hard enough—but being a single parent is the hardest job in the world! Of course, it doesn't help that we live in a culture where being busy is a badge of honor and a lifestyle that is encouraged both at work and at home.

Give yourself permission to set boundaries. Sometimes you will have to say NO to the variety of requests put on you. You can start by making a few small changes in your life.

- Turn off your cell phone during meals, family time, and a few hours before you go to bed. Unplugging helps you stay focused and present in the moment.
- Schedule free time on your calendar. Sometimes this means forcing yourself to go on a walk or waking up early to exercise. This may be hard, but worth it.
- Allow yourself to say NO to at least one task a week. This is a tough one, but your sanity and energy levels will thank you.
- Try to get everything ready at night, like lunches, backpacks, and even the socks and shoes for the kids! This will help eliminate some of the morning stressors—which will start your day off better.

These little changes will make all the difference. Now, go grab a cup of coffee and a book—you've earned it!

Do you have a question for Art? Please email publicaffairs21@va.gov

Artur Akkerman has been working for the VA Northern California Health Care System for the last five years. He is a licensed clinical social worker who received his B.A. in psychology from the University of California Santa Cruz and his master's degree in social work from New York University. He lives in Oakland with his husband of 13 years and their two fabulous dogs.

Healthy Recipes!

Stuffed Bell Pepper

Yield: 8 servings; Serving size: 2 stuffed pepper halves

Ingredients

- 8 red, yellow or orange bell peppers
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- 2 Tbsp canola or olive oil, divided
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 1 Tbsp ground cumin
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 6 oz lean ground turkey
- 2 cups fresh baby spinach, rinsed and chopped, or 1 10-oz pkg chopped frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed to remove moisture
- 1 16-oz jar chunky salsa (mild or hot)
- 1 cup cooked quinoa or brown rice

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375. Cut the peppers in half lengthwise, slicing from the stem to the bottoms, leaving the stems intact. Remove the white pith ribs and seeds and discard.
2. Place the peppers in an 8 x 10 inch (or larger if fits in the microwave) shallow microwave-safe baking dish. Drizzle the peppers with 1 tablespoon of the oil.
3. Microwave for 3-4 minutes to soften. (May need to do two batches depending on size of pan used.)



4. Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic, black pepper (to taste), chili powder and cumin. Cook until the onions are softened, about 3 minutes.
5. Add the ground turkey to the skillet. Cook, breaking up with a spoon, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes.
6. Add the salsa and spinach and cook, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes.
7. Remove skillet from the heat and stir in the cooked brown rice or quinoa.
8. Carefully fill the pepper halves with the turkey mixture. Cover dish with foil and bake until the filling is hot and peppers are tender, about 20 minutes.

Courtesy of the VA Yummy Benefits Cookbook



To register, please call Kristi Scott, MyhealthVet Coordinator, at 916-843-7108 or email her at Kristi.Scott@va.gov

My Health, My Care: 24/7 ^{Online} Access to VA

Connect with VA Northern California Health Care System

Valley Division—Sacramento VA Medical Center
 10535 Hospital Way
 Mather, CA 95655
 916-843-7000 | 800-382-8387

East Bay Division—Martinez Outpatient Clinic
 150 Muir Road
 Martinez, CA 94553
 925-372-2000 | 800-382-8387

Call Center

800-382-8387 Mon–Fri 7 a.m.–6 p.m.

Prescription Refills

Automated Telephone Refill System: 1-866-600-VARX (1-866-600-8279) Toll-Free

Available 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.