Dorn pays homage to fallen heroes of Warriors Walk
by Jennifer Scales
Dorn VAMC Public Affairs Office

From November 2015 through October 2016, another group of honored Veterans, who were once patients in the Warriors Walk Hospice Care unit of William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center, have completed their service in the military...and life.

Since 2009 Warriors Walk has held the Holiday Tree Gathering Ceremony, a service remembering those who have died on the unit.

This year’s esteemed observance honoring those who laid down their earthly mantle was Dec. 3, in the Building 5 Auditorium. Traditionally, this event is on the first Saturday every December.

Susan Zourzoukis, the social worker for Warriors Walk and organizer of every event since the beginning, said this is a symbol of closure for the family and remembrance of the Veteran.

Zourzoukis explained a bit of how the program process is initiated. “When a Veteran passes away on Warriors Walk, a tiny footprint replica is made in their honor, which bears their name and date of death. Before the family member leaves the unit, a ceremony of remembrance is held and the family places the footprint replica on a mural on our unit.”

The mural is a peaceful, beautiful painting which was made years ago by a Gold Star Mother who lost her son in Iraq.

Any family member or staff personnel who had contact with the Veteran, can reflect on memories during this initial remembrance of the Veteran as the footprints are placed on it. The mural is surrounded by the poem “Footprints”, along with an American flag and a photo of an eagle reposing in the background.

For the Holiday Tree Gathering ceremony, the footprints from the unit mural are the only decorations on the Christmas tree, topped with a red ribbon and several small American flags.

“Those family members who attend the annual ceremony are then presented with the footprints that were placed on the mural,” Zourzoukis said.

For many of those who attend, this will be the first major holiday without their loved one.

“We want to help them get through this time of year,” Zourzoukis said.

With plenty of Kleenex to go around, each person in attendance was appreciative of the recognition during the Holiday Tree Gathering event. The replica footprints were finally presented to those family members in attendance.

After recognizing the deceased Veterans, the mood was lightened with an interactive exercise that provided information to families about ways to handle holiday grief.

Zourzoukis is part of an extensive interdisciplinary team led by Nurse Manager, Diane Gatling and Nurse Practitioner Debra Layer.

Chaplains, recreational therapists, and volunteers are also key members of the team who provide support to care for these Veterans and their families.

The ceremony for 2017 is tentatively scheduled for December 2, 2017.

Find the PALMETTO POST on the Web at www.columbiasc.va.gov/Palmetto_Post/Palmetto_Post.asp
Crisis Line improves service with new call center in Atlanta

Courtesy of the VA’s Office of Public Affairs

In December, the Department of Veteran Affairs cut the ribbon for its new Veteran Crisis Line satellite office in Atlanta allowing the life-saving hotline to expand capacity by nearly 600 Veterans each day essentially doubling VA’s ability to help Veterans in need.

As a part of the MyVA initiative, the largest restructuring in the Department’s history, improvements of the VCL are a key priority, with the goal of providing 24/7, world-class suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to Veterans, service members and their family members across the globe.

“The addition of the second Veterans Crisis Line facility enhances VA’s ability to provide 24/7 suicide prevention and crisis intervention services by trained, dedicated VA employees to Veterans, Service members and their families,” said VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson who joined Veterans Crisis Line responders and partners in today’s ribbon cutting.

“The work at the Veterans Crisis Line is some of the most important work we do in VA,” Gibson added. “Today, we follow through on our commitment to give those who save lives every day at the Crisis Line the training, additional staff and modern call center technology they need to make the Veterans Crisis Line a Gold Standard operation. The Veterans of this nation, especially those in most need of our help, deserve no less.”

The VCL is critical to connecting Veterans with facility-based Suicide Prevention Coordinators. SPC teams within each Veterans Affairs Medical Center work to engage Veterans and communities to raise awareness about

Signed up for the MVP, yet?

The VA’s Million Veteran Program is looking for nearly a half million more Veterans to participate in the largest genomic database in the world.

This is a national research program with a goal of better understanding how genes affect health and illness.

If you are a Veteran who is registered within the VA medical system, please stop by the MVP office Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Bldg. 100, 3rd floor, RM 3A140.

It’s simple and only takes about 10 minutes to enroll. Help us move health care forward for yourself and future generations of Veterans.

Nutrition & Food Services

Healthy Recipe: Black Bean Turkey Chili

(Yield: 6 servings)

Ingredients:
- 1 lb Ground turkey
- 3 Garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 cup Chopped green pepper
- 1/2 cup Chopped onion
- 1 can (14.5 oz) Diced low sodium tomatoes
- 1 can (15 oz) Black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 11-oz bag Frozen whole kernel corn
- 1 can (8 oz) Tomato sauce
- 1 can (6 oz) Tomato paste
- 1 Tbsp Chili powder
- 1 tsp Dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp Dried basil
- 1/4 tsp Black pepper

Preparation:
1. In a 3-quart saucepan over medium heat, cook turkey until it is no longer pink. Drain off the fat. Add garlic, bell pepper and onion.
2. Sautee until tender.
3. Add 1/2 cup water, beans, tomatoes, corn, tomato sauce, tomato paste and all of the spices. Bring to a boil then reduce the heat and simmer covered for 30 minutes.

Nutrition information (per serving):
Calories: 325 kcals
Total fat: 10.5g
Protein: 27g
Sodium: 706mg
Carbohydrate: 35g
Fiber: 9g
Army Vet overcomes past, find focus in life, spreads cheer through inspirational songs

Story and photos by
Jennifer Scales
Dorn VAMC Public Affairs

Many have ‘heard’ him, before they saw him.

Paul Whitaker, a William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center mail clerk delivers, picks up, sorts and does other mail room and publications duties with whatever religious song is laid on his heart. And these songs can be like healing medicine for many of the Veterans and staff within the space of Dorn VAMC.

“A lot of times, the patients need to hear the song that he sings,” Bobbie Knowles, a scheduler in the Radiology Department said. “They [patients] may be upset over the long wait times, and Paul comes along with a song that will not only lift them up, but me also. God sends him in right on time with the song that needed to be sung for them and me.”

Whitaker says that you never know what a person might be going through. For some of his 60 years, Whitaker acknowledges trying times that he has experienced.

He begins by relating that being a South Carolina native, he is one of five children of the late Rev. and Mrs. J. R. Whitaker. His parents instilled in all of them to acknowledge their respective talents. In addition to singing, Whitaker had a keen sense of solving mathematical equations, poetry and drawing.

As a first Tenor, he has been a part of the South Carolina All-State music championships.

After graduation from C.A. Johnson High School, he then went on to receive a Bachelor of Science in Business Law and Mathematical Statistics from the University of South Carolina from 1975-1979. While at USC, he was one of the star athletes in football, basketball and track.

He put his degree to use as the night school coordinator at Eau Claire High School, but then decided to join the U. S. Army. Military assigned him to such positions as finance specialist and air assault instructor at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind.; Fort Richardson, Alaska; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Knox, K.Y.; Fort Meade, Md.; Fort Jackson, S.C.; and Korea.

“While serving in the military, I continued to use my gifts and perfect my talents,” Whitaker said.

But Whitaker admits to taking a downward spiral while hanging out with the wrong type of people during his time in the military. Though he did get out in time with an honorable discharge, he came out a changed man.

“I had spent more than $18,000 in less than six months in a substance that was totally abusive to my mind, body, and spirit,” Whitaker admits. “I had lost so much weight that I had become unrecognizable.

During his addiction, Whitaker isolated his family which included his children (Paul Jr. and Candice), his brothers, sisters, wife, in-laws, friends and others. Nothing mattered but the drug. “I became an expert manipulator…but during my addiction I prayed for deliverance. I had treatment in the VA, Charter Rivers, Morris Village and even to Virginia, where I was hospitalized for a year,” Whitaker said.

His turning point? His son, Paul Jr.

The thought of what could possibly happen to Paul Jr. made Whitaker do an...
Spreading holiday cheer
More than 4,200 motorcyclist, families converge at Dorn VA bringing presents, praise, and patriotism for Veterans

Thousands were in attendance for this year’s Vet’s Christmas Charity Ride in which more than 4,200 motorcycles were driven from Carolina Honda off I-20 through Columbia to Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center. This is the 16th year the community has participated in this event to bring gifts for the Veteran/patients at Dorn VAMC.
VCL from Page 2

VA’s suicide prevention and behavioral health resources.

The VCL interfaces with various stakeholders, including the Veterans Health Administration Suicide Prevention Program Office and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to provide critical services that ultimately provide a safe haven for Veterans and service members.

Since VCL was launched in 2007, the crisis line counselors have:
- Answered nearly 2.6 million calls
- Dispatched emergency services to callers in imminent crisis more than 67,000 times
- Engaged nearly 314,000 Veterans or concerned family members through the chat option
- Responded to nearly 62,000 text requests since the launch
- Forwarded more than 416,000 referrals to local VA suicide prevention coordinators on behalf of Veterans to ensure continuity of care

The VCL staff has grown over the years. Initially housed at Canandaigua VAMC in New York, it began with 14 responders and two health care technicians answering four phone lines.

Today, the combined facilities employ more than 500 professionals, and VA is hiring more to handle the growing volume of calls.

Atlanta offers 200 call responders and 25 social service assistants and support staff, while Canandaigua houses 310 and 43, respectively.

Callers dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number (800) 273-TALK (8255) and Veterans choose option 1 to reach a VHA VCL Responder. The text number is 838255 or Veterans may chat with our trained professionals online at Vets.gov.

Calls, texts, and chats are immediately directed to a VA professional who is specially trained to handle emotional and mental health crises for Veterans and service members.

VA is also streamlining and standardizing how crisis calls from other locations, including full implementation of the automatic transfer function that directly connects Veterans who call their local VAMC to the VCL by pressing a single digit during the initial automated phone greeting.

Whitaker from Page 3

about-face on his own life and take the steps necessary to get his act together to save his son from imminent danger. He also credits his loving 8-year-old granddaughter, Comaria Leah, with bringing the family back together for the sake of love.

“When I sing, it’s never about me,” Whitaker said. “When I put God first, he will give me what I need. Even when I take a bathroom break, I get on my knees to Him and do an assessment of my life. God gave me five senses…I try to use at least one all the time.”

Whitaker finds himself singing at weddings, funerals, stand downs, homeless shelters and other functions. And he is mainly recruited from just being himself, singing in the halls. Complete strangers will approach him and ask him about singing at their special event.

As he continues to deliver down the hallways of Dorn with his melodious a capella songs, other staff members respond to the sounds of his musical voice. “He brightens up our mornings,” said Cantania Mattison and Bonnie Grissom, Registered Nurses for Primary Care. “If he’s not singing, we know something is wrong.”

Whitaker became employed at Dorn through the Vets4Success program at the Veterans Administration Regional Office in Columbia. He credits Jeff Soots, who was Dorn VAMC chief of logistics during that time frame, for giving him an opportunity to work in the program. “Mr. Soots told me to give the Engineering School at Midlands Technical a try, and I did. Imagine me, at the age of 57, going back to school. I did it, and got a certificate from the school and training.”

On sleepless nights, Whitaker just gets up and comes on in to work. He recalls being in the mail room at 2 a.m. on some mornings and just singing as loud as he can. “People call me all times of night for inspiration. Why? I guess because they see how far God has brought me,” Whitaker said.

Whitaker these days takes blessings in the fact that he has a key to put in a door that he can call home, as it was not always like that.

“Carrying the message through song is the easiest job you could have as a mailman,” Whitaker said.

And one day he hopes to fulfill his dream of giving back even more through singing. “I want to have a group of reformed Veterans come and sing with me. We will go far beyond William Jennings Bryan Dorn to Walter Reed to Texas to California, singing and telling our life and helping other Veterans like us,” Whitaker said. He encourages anyone interested, to get in contact with him.
Talk with your doctor – be involved in your health care

Health care appointments are usually shorter than we might like, but there are ways to make the most of every visit. You, your health care providers (the doctors, nurses, therapists, clinicians) and other members of the health care team can come away from each visit feeling more satisfied by following some simple steps.

There are two basic ways to make the most of your visit. First, come prepared. My HealtheVet makes this easier. Before your visit, check your prescription records online. Let your health care team know if there are changes to your medications or in the way that you have been taking them. You can also review notes from previous visits with your health care team and recent lab test results. These are easily found in your VA Blue Button report.

Second, at your visit, speak up and actually talk with your health care team as your partners. They are here to help you with your health and care. This means that you need to be involved in your health care and can do things to make your visits more productive.

For example, much of the information needed to make a diagnosis is based on your description of symptoms, recent changes, and your health history. Be sure to share this information with your health care team during your visit.

Download and print out your VA Blue Button report from My HealtheVet and take it with you to your appointment. You can use it as a reference. Make sure your information is up-to-date.

Here are some suggestions that can help:

Be sure to bring all the medications you are taking in their original labeled containers, including any over-the-counter medicines or herbal products.

Be prepared to describe exactly when, how, and how often you take each of these, and any side effects you have noticed.

Bring a written list of changes in your health. Include symptoms, any medical history or other information you think might be helpful for your health care provider to know.

Bring a written list of your questions. Common questions include:

- What is wrong with me?
- What is the cause, or why is this happening to me?
- What treatments will help me?
- What will the treatments be like?
- What can I expect to happen to me?
- What do you recommend I do?
- Where can I get help if I need it?

Bring pen and paper so you can write down the answers to your questions.

You may want to bring a friend or family member with you to help you remember the answers to your questions or other details of the visit.

Talking with Your Provider

Speak up! Do not be afraid to ask questions of your provider or others on your health care team; they are there to help you and they appreciate you being involved in your care.

Tell your health care provider right up front what you want to get done at this visit.

Bring a written list.

Early in your visit, describe any pain, symptoms, or side-effects you have been having.

Talk about your concerns and worries you have about your health. Don’t wait until the end of the visit to mention important concerns or symptoms.

Tell the truth, even if it is embarrassing. Your health care team needs to know the full picture. Tell your provider even about any personal concerns like sexual problems or trouble controlling your bladder or bowels. Your health care team understands those things and is there to help.

Be clear and to the point; avoid extra chatter about things not related to your health and care that can use up the valuable time.

Be sure to ask questions. If you have trouble understanding what members of your health care team says, ask for a simpler explanation, to speak more slowly, speak louder or softer, draw a picture, or whatever else would help you understand.

Ask about your treatment or care plan so you understand it, know what to expect, and what the next steps are.

Ask for written instructions and/or information if it is available.

Remember: about five days after your visit, you can logon to My HealtheVet and read your provider’s visit notes using VA Blue Button. If you have any questions or concerns, you can easily send a Secure Message to your health care team.

Being actively involved in your health care in all these ways helps you and your health care provider and team act as partners.

They are all working together to improve your health and keep you healthy. Your health may be your most valuable asset, so be sure to protect it. You are worth it!
Frequently Called Numbers

Admissions ..................................................(803) 776-4000 x4983/7190
Appointment Line ...........................................(803) 647-5829
..................................................(800) 293-8262

Billing and Insurance
Collections – pay a bill ..................................(888) 827-4817
General questions ........................................(866) 258-2772
Medical claims ............................................(803) 776-4000 x6763

Chaplain Services
8 a.m. to 4 p.m. .........................................(803) 776-4000 x6332
After hours ................................................(803) 776-4000

Compensation and Pension ............................(803) 776-4000 x6183
Enrollment Eligibility ....................................(803) 776-4000 x7010
Information Desk (Dorn VAMC) ......................(803) 776-4000 x4179/8055
Medical Records ........................................(803) 776-4000 x6283
Mental Health .............................................(803) 776-4000 x6290
MyHealthVet ..............................................(803) 776-4000 x7998/6937
Patient Advocate .........................................(803) 776-4000 x6323
Prosthetics ..................................................(803) 776-4000 x6780
Release of Information ................................(803) 776-4000 x6870
Shuttle Service ............................................(803) 776-4000 x6398

Travel Office ..............................................(803) 776-4000 x4483/4525/4484
Veteran’s Transportation Service ...............(803) 776-4000 6398

Veteran Service Organizations
American Legion ........................................(803) 776-4000 x7539
AmVets .................................................(803) 776-4000 x2421
Disabled American Veterans ......................(803) 776-4000 x2422
Military Order of the Purple Heart ..............(803) 776-4000 x2430
Paralyzed Veterans Association ...................(803) 776-4000 x2432
Veteran’s of Foreign Wars .........................(803) 776-4000 x2443

Voluntary Services .................................(803) 776-4000 x6780/7081

Community-Base Outpatient Clinics

Anderson CBOC
3030 N. Hwy 81
Anderson, SC 29621
Tele (864) 224-5450

Greenville OPC
41 Park Creek Drive
Greenville, SC 29605
Tele (864) 299-1600

Spartanburg CBOC
279 North Grove Medical Plaza
Spartanburg, SC 29303
Tele (864) 582-7025

Florence CBOC
1822 Sally Hill Farms Blvd
Florence, SC 29501
Tele (843) 292-8383

Sumter CBOC
407 N. Salem Ave
Sumter, SC 29150
Tele (803) 938-9901

Orangeburg CBOC
1767 Village Park Drive
Orangeburg, SC 29118
(803) 533-1335

Rock Hill CBOC
2670 Mills Park Drive
Rock Hill, SC 29732
Tele (803) 366-4848

Stay connected to with Dorn VAMC

Dorn VAMC official Web site: www.columbiasc.va.gov/
Dorn Facebook page: www.facebook.com/ VA Columbia SC
Dorn Twitter handle: @VAMCColumbiaSC
Dorn Flickr account: www.flickr.com/photos/dornvamc

Comments / Suggestions for the Palmetto Post

The Palmetto Post is designed to help keep South Carolina’s Veterans informed about the health care and services provided by the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center and its seven community-based outpatient clinics.

This is your newsletter. So suggestions on the information you’d like to see in this newsletter are most welcome. Keep in mind, space is limited as this is only a monthly newsletter, so not all suggestions will be granted.

Submit your comments or suggestions to vhacmsdornpa@va.gov.