Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2020

VA SIERRA PACIFIC NETWORK (VISN 21)
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

This past year was an unusual one for all of us. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 presented unique challenges and forced us all to adapt to ever-changing conditions.

I’m proud of the way our network collaborated to combat this pandemic. Several of our facilities were among the first in VA to admit and successfully treat patients with COVID-19.

Frontline staff worked tirelessly to ensure our facilities were safe for our Veterans and fellow staff. We utilized HRO principles and best practices to ensure we did everything in our power to maintain a safe, healthy work environment, and a place where our Veterans could receive the care they’ve earned through their service.

The successes we’ve achieved this year would not have been possible without the contributions from every member of our staff, including the many Veteran volunteers who have donated their time to ensure fellow Veterans are taken care of.

Once again, I’m privileged to work with all of you and honored by your commitment to service and to our Veterans.

Our entire staff should be commended for overcoming every obstacle that appeared in front of them and providing another year of incredible care. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished together this year, and I look forward to many more years of excellence here at VISN 21.

John A. Brandecker
Network Director
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The Veterans Affairs Central California Health Care System, based in Fresno, proudly serves veterans throughout Central California. The medical center is situated on 18.5 acres and was dedicated in March 1950. Located in the beautiful and agriculturally rich San Joaquin Valley, many of the center’s modern and attractive interiors complement the natural beauty of the area. The health care system is a 114 bed acute care, general medical and surgical center with state of the art primary, secondary and tertiary care in major diagnostic and treatment specializations and three CBOC's. Extensive outpatient services are provided in a managed care environment by 5 Primary Care Teams and numerous specialty care clinics, including women’s health. A 60-bed Community Living Center provides skilled nursing and rehabilitation care.

31,724
Unique Patients
Served in FY2020

2,219
Women Veterans Served

415,315
Total Outpatient Visits

1,755
Full-Time Employees

1,039%
Increase in VA Video Connect Usage
VA Northern California Health Care System serves more than 377,700 Veterans dispersed over a wide geographic area spanning approximately 40,000 square miles. The health system is comprised of a medical center in Sacramento; a rehabilitation and extended care facility in Martinez; 10 outpatient clinics, a Substance Abuse Treatment Center in Oakland; and dental clinics in Chico, Mare Island, McClellan, Sacramento and Redding.

The Sacramento VA Medical Center is a 76-bed, state-of-the-art, inpatient facility offering a full range of comprehensive health care services including medical, surgical, primary and mental health care. The medical center, which is comprised of 25 medical-surgical beds, 25 TCU beds, 10 ICU beds, and a four room operating suite, also houses a cardiac catheterization lab, a gastrointestinal & endoscopy suite, angiography capability and 16,000 square-feet of research laboratory.

The medical center offers a wide range of outpatient and diagnostic services, including mammography, MRI, CT, and PET scanning. VANCHCS has two divisions, each with an Associate Director. The Sacramento Valley Division is comprised of medical facilities in Sacramento (Mather and McClellan sites), Auburn, Chico, Redding, and Yuba City; and a contracted clinic in Yreka. The East Bay Division is comprised of medical facilities in Fairfield, Mare Island, Martinez and Oakland.

**Community Partners:**

- University of California, Davis
- Department of Defense, United States of America
- UCSF School of Nursing

**96,059**
Unique Patients Served in FY2020

**8,094**
Women Veterans Served

**1,195,686**
Total Outpatient Visits

**4,286**
Full-Time Employees

**44,000+**
VA Video Connect visits in FY2020

**TOP 10**
VA Northern California is among the top 10 health care systems in all of VA, in terms of total appointments provided.
The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) provides outpatient and inpatient medical services to Veterans residing in Southern Nevada with an official catchment area of Clark, Lincoln, and Nye Counties. VASNHS also draws Veterans from Arizona, Utah, and California. VASNHS is geographically dispersed throughout Southern Nevada with locations in Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Henderson, Pahrump, and Laughlin.

In the Las Vegas area, Primary and Diagnostic Care is disbursed between the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center and several clinical sites strategically located within each corner of the valley. Rural health care to Veterans residing in Nye County has been provided via Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Pahrump since 1999. A Rural Outreach Clinic opened in Laughlin in February 2015 to provide Primary Care services to rural Veterans in the Laughlin and Bullhead City, Arizona area.

In 2012, VASNHS opened the Department of Veterans Affairs’ first new comprehensive medical center in 19 years, providing specialty care, emergent care and inpatient services at one location. Inpatient services include 130 Medical, Surgical, Psychiatric, ICU, Step-Down, Rehabilitation & Domiciliary beds. An expanded Emergency Department opened in November 2015, and includes a fast-track area for patients with less severe medical needs.

VASNHS received Joint Commission accreditation for all services under Hospital, Behavioral Health, and Home Care programs via a tri-annual survey conducted in December 2019.

Between September 2017 and October 2020, VASNHS completed 558 outreach activities that were directed at suicide awareness and prevention.
VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) consists of three inpatient facilities located at Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Livermore, in addition to seven Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) and two residential homes for Veterans in the Compensated Work Therapy program. VAPAHCS operates over 800 beds, including three nursing homes and a 100-bed homeless domiciliary.

VAPAHCS is one of the largest integrated health care systems in VA in terms of specialized programs, research and graduate medical education; primarily affiliated with Stanford University School of Medicine. Comprehensive health care is provided through primary, tertiary and long-term care in areas of medicine, surgery, psychiatry, physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology, oncology, dentistry, geriatrics and extended care.

VAPAHCS is home to a variety of regional treatment centers, including Spinal Cord Injury, Polytrauma Rehabilitation, Blind Rehabilitation, Homeless Veterans Rehabilitation Program; and Men’s and Women’s Trauma Recovery Programs.

VAPAHCS’ Research Program is the second largest in VHA with an annual funding of approximately $58M. National VHA Research Centers at VAPAHCS include: Cooperative Studies Program; Health Services Research and Development; Center for Innovation to Implementation; Health Economics Resource Center; Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center; Mental Illness Research Education Clinical Center; National Center for PTSD; VHA Performance Evaluation Resource Center; VHA National Center for Collaborative Health Care Innovation; Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center; VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, War Related Illness and Injury Study Center; and Office of Public Health Surveillance and Research.

**Key Partnerships:**

**Fisher House:**
- $1,211,400 savings in hotel expenses for families
- 719 families served
- 6,057 nights stayed

**The Defender's Lodge**
- $3,251,800 savings in hotel expenses
- 10,300 Veterans & caregivers served
- 16,259 nights stayed

The two Fisher Houses on the Palo Alto Division's campus provide free, high-quality, temporary lodging to families of Veterans and active-duty military personnel who are undergoing treatment. The Defender’s Lodge provides free temporary lodging for Veterans traveling long distances or undergoing extensive treatment or procedures, such as an organ transplant or chemotherapy.

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**VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

**63,425**
Unique Patients Served in FY2020

**4,546**
Women Veterans Served

**734,542**
Total Outpatient Visits

**4,034**
Full-Time Employees

**34,206**
FY2020 Clinical Video Telehealth Encounters
The San Francisco VA Health Care System is a comprehensive network that provides health services to Veterans through the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) and six community-based outpatient clinics in Santa Rosa, Eureka, Ukiah, Clearlake, San Bruno and downtown San Francisco. It has a long history of conducting cutting-edge research, establishing innovative medical programs, and providing compassionate care to Veterans.

SFVAMC has 112 operating beds and a 120-bed Community Living Center. There is a specialized homeless Veterans clinic in downtown San Francisco. SFVAMC has been affiliated with the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), School of Medicine for more than 50 years.

VA San Francisco has established a unique partnership with the Department of Defense (DoD) to study the basic neuroscience and neuroimaging of combat-related brain and spinal cord injuries, PTSD and other neurological combat-related injuries and predictors of injuries of war fighters. DoD considers this program a national resource.

Community Partnerships:

69,567
Unique Patients
Served in FY2020

3,744
Women Veterans
Served

643,541
Total Outpatient Visits

2,396
Full-Time Employees

3,000+
Veterans assisted by VA San Francisco Homeless Program in FY2020
VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) provides inpatient and outpatient care to a large geographical area that includes 20 counties in northern Nevada and northeastern California. The Reno campus is the site of the Ioannis A. Lougaris VA Medical Center, which operates 69 hospital beds and 60 Community Living Center (CLC) beds. VASNHCS also manages community based outpatient clinics in Susanville, CA, and Carson Valley, Lahontan Valley, Fallon and Winnemucca, NV.

VASNHCS provides a broad array of inpatient and outpatient services in specialty medicine, surgery, primary care, mental health, and geriatrics and extended care. The hospital offers a wide range of diagnostic services, to include MRI, CT, ultrasound, nuclear medicine, as well as interventional cardiac catheterization services.

VASNHCS maintains many academic affiliations including the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine, and East Bay Surgical Program at the University of California. Research continues to have a strong emphasis at the facility, with 36 active projects and an expanded collaboration with the University of Nevada.

Community Partnerships:
VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) Honolulu provides a broad range of medical care services, serving an estimated 31,000 Veterans throughout Hawaii and the Pacific Islands. VAPIHCS provides outpatient medical and mental health care through our main Ambulatory Care Clinic on Oahu (Honolulu) and through seven Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) including Hawaii (Hilo and Kona), Maui, Kauai, and Guam. Traveling clinicians also provide episodic care on Lanai and American Samoa. A fee basis Internist residing on Molokai provides medical care eight hours/week at the Molokai Rural Health Center. Mental health care is provided by traveling clinicians from the Maui CBOC.

Long-term and transitional rehabilitative care services are provided by the VA 60-bed Center for Aging, located on the Tripler Army Medical Center (TAMC) grounds. VA staffed inpatient psychiatric care and partial hospitalization care are also provided within a 20-bed VA operated ward in Tripler Army Medical Center. Additionally, there is a 16-bed VA Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Residential Rehabilitation Program at TAMC.

Medical inpatient care for Veterans is provided by VA hospitalists and Department of Defense physicians in TAMC through a VA/DoD sharing agreement, or through non-VA care providers in the community. Home Based Primary Care is provided on the islands of Oahu, Hawaii and Kauai.

Community Partnerships:
In June, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the appointment of Adam M. Robinson Jr., M.D., MBA, as the new director of the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System, headquartered in Honolulu. Robinson now oversees the delivery of health care to an estimated 129,000 Veterans, a $327.8 million annual operating budget and more than 1,400 employees.

“We are excited to bring Dr. Robinson on board as the new director of the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System,” said John Brandecker, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21 director. “His sound leadership qualities and proven experience will be valuable assets for the facility, the employees and volunteers, and most importantly, for the Veterans we are honored to serve.”

Robinson previously served as Medical Center Director at the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) in Baltimore, a position he held since 2015. Prior, he served as Chief of Staff at VAMHCS from 2014 to 2015.

Robinson also has more than 30 years of experience as a senior leader in the United States Military Healthcare System, culminating in his selection as the 36th Surgeon General of the United States Navy.

The Surgeon General is the chief executive officer for Navy and Marine Corps healthcare systems and serves as primary advisor on all health-related care issues and policies for the secretary of the Navy, the chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Robinson received his doctor of medicine from Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. He also has a master of business administration from the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. Robinson has received numerous military, civilian and academic awards and recognitions throughout his medical and Naval career.
Off-duty Las Vegas VA nurse saves lives at accident site

When faced with trauma in a hospital emergency department, nurses have myriad tools and resources available to tackle whatever challenges come their way. But when faced with a situation as the only lifesaver at the scene of a horrific accident in a remote location, dealing with 10 patients, lack of necessary equipment, a language barrier and sweltering heat, even the most experienced nurse can be challenged. That was the scenario a VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System nurse faced recently.

On the afternoon of June 20, an SUV traveling a lonely stretch of highway between Las Vegas and St. George, Utah, experienced a sudden tire blow-out, overturning and flipping off the road. The event threw several passengers from the vehicle and trapped others inside. Maria VanHart, a VASNHS emergency department nurse, was heading home to Utah after her shift at the North Las Vegas Medical Center. Nearly 30 minutes into her commute, she happened upon the single-vehicle accident. While a few onlookers had stopped to assist the victims, none of them were trained to manage the scene.

VanHart assessed the situation and quickly acted. “I did what I was trained to do,” she said. “I didn’t panic. I just immediately did what needed to be done.”

One of VanHart’s first challenges was communicating with the victims. She learned the family had traveled to the United States from Syria for a wedding. Of the 10 passengers, only a 10-year-old boy was able to speak English. “He was walking around with some minor bumps and bruises, but overall looked OK,” said VanHart. He would serve as translator for all her patient care questions. “The first thing I told him was ‘I need you to show me everyone who was in the vehicle.’”

The driver of the vehicle was the father, who had suffered only minor bruises. An older teenage girl holding a baby was walking around the scene, both seemingly unscathed. VanHart’s immediate concern was for his brother, a 14-year-old who was trapped inside the overturned vehicle. “He was not breathing, and (based on his condition) I knew immediately that he was dead,” VanHart said.

Realizing there was nothing she could do for the deceased was difficult for VanHart. “This is the first time that I’ve ever been in a situation where I was the person who had to say ‘there’s...”

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husband became enraged. “I know that as a VanHart believed suffered internal injuries, her
removed the clothing from the woman who
was doing and there was no time to question
said. “You could tell that she knew what she
ambulances due to her triaging the scene,” he
ended up calling three helicopters and four
evacuation. “I trusted her expertise and
VanHart asked Cruz to request immediate
like an orchestra conductor.”
what to do while rendering aid herself. It was
scrubs, but then I noticed that there were no
paramedic because she was wearing
thought that she may have been a volunteer
Maria was running around and appeared to be
calm and know what she was doing. At first, I
realized what had happened. She had been on
the scene for two hours, in 105-degree heat,
and was exhausted. “When the adrenaline
goes away, there’s a crash. It’s an emotional
and physical crash. I was dehydrated and
physically shaky afterwards. I sat down,
drank some water and called my friends for
reassurance.”
After the helicopters were loaded with
patients and VanHart had briefed the receiving
medical teams at University Medical Center
in Las Vegas, she finally took a step back and
realized what had happened. She had been on
the scene for two hours, in 105-degree heat,
and was exhausted. “When the adrenaline
goes away, there’s a crash. It’s an emotional
and physical crash. I was dehydrated and
physically shaky afterwards. I sat down,
drank some water and called my friends for
reassurance.”
One of the first calls she made was to her
trauma training instructor, VASNHS Nurse
Practitioner Aileen Thompson. “She called me
and asked, ‘did I do the right things?’” recalled
Thompson. “I told her ‘yes, you did exactly the
right things. You maintained a chaotic scene,
kept people calm in a very tragic situation,
rapidly assessed and triaged, maintained
airways and vitals.’ That’s a huge responsibility
to take command of that scene and tell police
officers ‘I need two helicopters,’ but she made
the right decisions, and potentially saved two
lives.”
As VanHart’s instructor as well as her friend,
Thompson says VanHart is uniquely equipped
to handle situations just like the accident: “As
a nurse, she is intelligent and is a phenomenal
leader. I trust her without question. As a
person, she is so kind and caring. She loves
these people. She does the right thing, even
if it’s not popular. She is not afraid to ruffle
feathers to make sure that the patient gets
what they need. I can’t think of anyone more
qualified to take care of those people.”
For anyone who speaks with VanHart,
two personality traits become immediately
apparent: The first is her dedication to
serving and helping others; the second is
relentlessness in pursuit of the best method
to accomplish the first. “I get bored easily,” she
said. “I’m always trying to learn new skills.”
VanHart first became a firefighter and
advanced EMT while living in Indiana. Upon
moving to Las Vegas, she worked for the “flying
ICU,” then became a trauma-trained nurse and
emergency medical system registered nurse.
In addition to her job at the North Las Vegas
VA Medical Center, where she has worked for
over three years, she also works in a critical
access care hospital in Kane County, Utah.
“As a Marine Veteran myself, I am very glad
that she [VanHart] chose to work at the VA,”
said Cruz. “It was 105 degrees that day; we
were all running around, and she stayed
calm under pressure. When I saw her lanyard
from the VA Hospital, I felt relieved. I’m very
honored that we had the ability to work
together.”
VanHart is a breast cancer survivor, a woman
who lost most of her family to illness at a
young age, and is married to the former head
of UMC hospital’s trauma nursing department.
Healthcare has always played a big role in her
life. Because of these connections, VanHart
has a unique philosophy when it comes to
assessing her work.
“At the end of the day, there are two things
that let me know if I have done my job that
day. One is ‘what was my patient-to-hug
ratio?’ And the other one is ‘had my mother
been the last person I had cared for, would I
have done anything differently?’ Everyone out
there is someone’s parent or child, and they
all deserve to be cared for as if they were my
own.”
Bridging social distance through technology

During times of uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is natural to seek comfort from those we hold dear. Unfortunately for populations at higher risk for severe illness, including the ill and elderly Veterans living at the San Francisco VA Community Living Center (CLC), social distancing practices have made this practically impossible. However, thanks to the generosity of the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), the residents of the 120-bed care facility at the San Francisco VA Medical Center are now able to use modern technology to connect with family and friends – both near and far. UCSF Internal Medicine residents and medical students recently donated 16 tablet computers to the CLC for Veterans to use.

“Residents at facilities like this are especially susceptible to the spread of viruses, so extra care has been taken to ensure that CLC residents stay safe and healthy,” said Dr. Michi Yukawa, the CLC’s medical director. “CLC staff has been able to utilize video call technology on such tablets to connect residents to family, friends, and even other residents.”

For Troy Cooney, being able to see his Army Veteran father, Dan, through video calls removes a layer of worry. “Over the phone, he can say that he’s not sad,” said Troy, “but being able to see him [through video call] is as close to being there, and letting him know he is not alone.” Dan echoes the sentiment, saying that seeing his son “on the screen is better than not seeing him at all.”

Fortunato “Jesse” Liberato is a Vietnam-era Navy Veteran who looks forward to every opportunity to video chat with his daughter and two grandchildren. While his daughter would ideally like to be with him in person, the video calls allow her and her children to experience Jesse’s bright smile and his “humorous” personality. When asked what he misses most about visits from family, Jesse adds that he misses when “they take me to the casino.”

Veteran Paul Meade says he misses his wife, Georgianne, because she “can always get me thinking about the good things.” Georgianne is grateful that the tablets allow her the opportunity to lift Paul’s spirits, sharing that his ability to see her and their beloved dog, Kent, through video call “gives Paul a sense of being connected.”

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Like Meade, Korean War-era Navy Veteran Ray Lindsey also misses interactions with furry friends. Prior to the shelter-in-place orders, Lindsey had frequent visits with dogs from the local chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). He uses the tablets to have video visits with SPCA dogs and is impressed with the technology. He shares, “I am amazed that technology has come so far, because I worked on the first large computers that cost millions of dollars and was not able to do what [the tablets] do.”

While the tablets have helped connect Veterans with family and furry friends across the country, they also help connect San Francisco VA Veterans with support systems that are closer to home. Army Veteran and CLC resident Earl Wells has been attending a Veteran support group at the VA since 2010. Since the shelter-in-place, he misses the friendship, support and camaraderie of meeting with the group in person. Staff at the CLC has worked closely with group co-facilitator Dr. Kristine Burkman to make it possible for Wells to connect with this group using the tablet video call technology. Asked if the video calls have made a difference, Earl shares, “Being in touch with them and seeing them is good — hearing their voice and seeing faces. I treasure going to this group.”
In February 2020, VA Palo Alto Health Care System became the first fully 5G-enabled hospital in the world, improving patient care and enhancing the Veteran experience at the facility.

February 12, 2020, the VA Palo Alto Health Care System became the world’s first fully 5G-enabled hospital.

Then-VA Secretary Robert Wilkie spoke at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. about the significance of this technological upgrade. “What 5G will deliver is richer, more detailed, three-dimensional images of the patient’s anatomy with resolution so clear and consistent that it will give us reliable use of important telesurgery services to Veterans across the nation,” Wilkie said. “That means reliable capacity to allow the VA’s best physicians to consult during surgery even when they are not in the same room or halfway across the country.”

VA partnered with Verizon, Medivis and Microsoft to deliver this state-of-the-art upgrade. The public-private partnership was led by VA’s National Center for Collaborative Health Care Innovation and worked to help identify potential clinical uses for technology that combine emerging health care innovations with 5G capabilities.

“Our hospital in Palo Alto is currently one of only a handful of 5G enabled health facilities in the world,” said Wilkie. “We’re excited to use this hands-on opportunity to work with our partners to develop foundational practices and deploy advanced medical solutions to serve our nation’s Veterans.”
Between January 1 and September 15, 2020, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) completed 47,438 video telehealth appointments with Veterans in their homes. This represents an increase in video telehealth appointments of more than 3500% over previous years.

Video telehealth allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet or mobile device with an internet or data service connection. As in-person interactions decreased in response to the coronavirus pandemic, video telehealth supported Veterans’ abilities to continue care and remain safe at home.

“When we contemplated using VA Video Connect in a more robust capacity, many of our staff members expressed concern that we could not offer all of the services that we offered via a face-to-face format,” said Timothy Jobin, associate chief of staff for Behavioral Health and VASNHS’ lead project officer for expanding telehealth access due to COVID-19. “What we discovered was that we were not only able to offer most of our services via video, but that it was also a more convenient modality of care for some patients. Additionally, by supplementing most traditional face-to-face mental health care with video appointments, we have essentially expanded access to care. Video mental health care will forever remain a very viable option for most forms of mental health care.”

All primary care and mental health professionals at VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System can provide video telehealth care to Veterans in their homes or other locations of their choice. In addition, almost 60% of all specialty professionals are currently capable of providing video telehealth visits with more staff being trained daily.

In 2020, more than 14,500 individual Veterans completed video telehealth visits through VASNHS. When necessary, VA staff provide equipment training and support to assist Veterans.
“I will not take my own life by my own hand, until I talk to my Battle Buddy first. My mission is to find a mission to help my Warfighter family.” That is the Spartan Pledge, created by Army Veteran and author Boone Cutler.

Depression, or what Boone commonly refers to as “Funky Funk,” is the leading cause of Veteran suicide, and lack of community only increases that feeling. That’s why Boone, rapper/entertainer Soldier Hard and many others established the “Warfighter Community,” a team of battle buddies that can always reach out to each other in times of need.

“When we first got back from the war, the VA wasn’t so on board with the way we were thinking,” said Boone. “We are here now because emerging leadership from within the Warfighter community is finally collaborating with VA leadership. That happens when good people like Director Lisa Howard with the Reno VA give us a chance because she recognizes that this works. At first, they had a big issue with that word ‘until’ within the Spartan Pledge, but realistically, when you are in the funky funk you can’t think about forever or anything other than this moment right now. So in that sense, the word until is actually a very important word to embrace.”

Howard, who is now the medical center director at VA Palo Alto, was attending a dinner in 2018 for Medal of Honor recipient Doc Ballard, when he led the entire room in the Spartan Pledge and introduced it as being authored by Cutler.

“I got chills,” she said. “I watched Veterans of all eras as they all stood and took the oath together, and I could see clearly that every one of them resonated with the pledge. So a week later, I called Boone to learn more. Our method of delivery and maybe who we reach was a little different, but our missions were the same and our hearts were in line. So I asked him right then and there if he would help me cosponsor an annual Pledge event.”

2020 was the third year that VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System has held a special event to take the oath together, but this year was very different. There were no bands or barbecue, no awards of recognition and no festivities.

Thanks to the pandemic, this year the event was held digitally for the first time with fewer than 20 people in a room, including Boone, Soldier Hard and Howard, located inside the hospital and broadcasted through the GallantFew’s annual VetXpo three-day stream.

Shane Whitecloud, a Veteran and public affairs officer at VA Sierra Nevada, saw firsthand the effect the pledge had on not only himself, but the Veterans he was speaking to.

Most notably, they had just finished doing a Spartan Pledge event at a local college campus. After the event was over, that evening he received a message through Facebook from a young lady who had skipped class to attend the event.

“I will never forget her words,” Whitecloud said.

“I know you might not always know the impact you have, so I just wanted to let you know that I called the VA and made a same-day appointment,” she told him in the message. “I disposed of drugs by myself I had planned to use [to die by suicide]. This quiet victory made me feel like a survivor more than anything before. So thank you.”

“I am forever grateful for the Spartan Pledge and the people that I’ve met and my Battle Buddies, as well as the VA Sierra Nevada HCS for giving this pledge a chance to save more lives,” said Whitecloud.
Veteran: Why I choose the San Francisco VA Medical Center

“Here in the Bay Area, a Veteran can’t beat the service and care you receive at the San Francisco VA Medical Center,” said Tom Johnson, U.S. Army Veteran.

When he needed to undergo a major operation recently, Johnson was worried about having to wait months. His friends who received their medical care at private hospitals had been waiting for a year or longer for surgical procedures.

That wasn’t the case for Johnson, who has been receiving his care at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) since 1974.

“I got my operation within three months,” the San Francisco native said.

“I choose the SFVAMC because of the quality of service. I always get an appointment. The appointment is always on time, and I always have excellent doctors.”

Parade of families

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the VA Center for Rehabilitation and Extended Care (CREC) in Martinez, California, has been forced to close its door to visitors, including families of Veterans who are receiving care. In response, VA Northern California Health Care System’s Recreation Therapy Service organized a “Parade of Families” for the CREC residents in celebration of Independence Day.

Starting the morning of July 3, families slowly drove their vehicles in front of the facility as Veterans receiving care at CREC stood by as spectators of the parade, many of whom shed tears throughout the event. Joining CREC family members as parade participants were VA NorCal employees from Nursing, Social Work, Engineering, Environmental Management, Police, and Chaplain Services.

The parade proved to be one of the CREC’s most successful events since the pandemic began. Extreme measures were taken in social distancing, masking and hand sanitizing to ensure safety in a fun atmosphere.
Local Veterans donate hand sanitizer to VA Palo Alto

VA Palo Alto Health Care System received a special donation on Friday, April 17, 2020 – the first of three 250-gallon tubs of hand sanitizer for staff and Veterans!

Members of the Bay Area’s Wine Country Marines rolled onto the medical center’s campus that afternoon with the large tub on the back of their truck.

VAPAHCS leaders and other staff welcomed the donation with much appreciation. Also in tote for our Veterans were shaving kits, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and brand new sweatsuits and blankets.

It doesn’t stop there! Just last week the non-profit organization donated 50 sleeping bags and additional new sweatsuits for our Veterans.

Wine Country Marines is a patriotic organization of Marines and friends of the Corps dedicated to supporting Veterans through charity, education and community-based activities.

Former Director and U.S. Army Veteran Thomas Fitzgerald III thanks James Brown of Wine Country Marines for donations to Veterans.
In April 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic making it difficult to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE), a necessity for healthcare workers, local community partners stepped up to help out VA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS).

Commander James Bennett, American Legion Post 23, Sanger, had the idea to partner with a local high school, after seeing a story in the news about Career Technical Education Charter (CTEC) School donating masks to a hospital in the area.

“CTEC Director John Delano is a friend, so I reached out, appealing on behalf of the VA hospital,” said Bennett. “All I had to say was ‘Veterans,’ and John was all in!”

With Delano on board, it was simply a matter of bringing all the pieces together. Bennett sought the aid of VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program Manager Mary Golden to see how best to support the hospital.

Golden knew any materials used in the hospital, especially near Veterans, had to meet strict safety and sanitation guidelines. She contacted Chief Safety Officer David Smith.

“We need PPE to keep the staff and the Veterans safe,” said Smith. “So, when our VAVS Program Manager said a local high school was willing to 3D-print PPE for us, we had to make sure they had the correct, approved template that would be usable in a hospital setting.”

Gina Raines, from the Office of Innovation, provided the proper template, approved for 3D printing by the Veterans Health Administration.

“The hospital actually considered purchasing 3D printers,” Smith said. “But even if we could get them, there is the problem of finding and acquiring the right media suitable for hospital use.”

With the help of the Safety department, VAVS, The American Legion and CTEC Charter School, all of the pieces had been gathered, and all that was left to do was put together the proverbial puzzle.

“When JD (Bennett) came to me with the idea, I was all for it,” said Delano. “American Legion Post 23 assisted with the funding for the materials, and our supplier was able to deliver. And the staff were all for it! It was a perfect match and a great way for our new high school to support our community.”

It took less than a week for 500 approved masks with face shields to be 3D printed and delivered to the VA hospital in Fresno, California. The masks came in several vibrant colors: red, blue, black, yellow and white. The masks were made from polylactic acid, or PLA. It is the raw primary natural material used in 3D printing which is a form of polyester.

Medical Center Director Charles Benninger received the masks and face shields, along with VAVS Program Manager Mary Golden. Bennett personally made the delivery on Wednesday, April 15.

“I can’t say enough about this community. Their love and appreciation for Veterans can really be seen everywhere you look,” said Benninger. “We’re grateful for all of our community partners. They see a need. They fill it. It’s that simple. But this, this is really exceptional, especially at a time when there are extreme shortages across the nation.”
VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Sacramento District, hosted a ground breaking ceremony on Friday, November 8, 2020 for the new VA outpatient clinic in Stockton, California.

This state-of-the-art facility will feature the new VA’s Patient Aligned Care Team design, offering adaptable exam rooms that can also accommodate telehealth, mental health and other specialty services aimed to improve the Veteran experience.

“This is a new method, a new way of providing healthcare. Our mental health care will be embedded in the same clinic, so mental health and primary care all come to the Veteran in one room,” said then-VAPAHCS Director and U.S. Army Veteran Thomas J. Fitzgerald III.

Keynote speaker U.S. Representative Jerry McNerney (CA-09) joined VAPAHCS and USACE leadership to kick-start the construction project. Veterans, their families and the public attended the event.

Construction is expected to be completed in two years. A new 80-bed Veterans Community Living Center housing complex will be built nearby as well.

VA Palo Alto opens new fitness and wellness center

In February 2020, the new 26,700 square-foot, three-story Fitness and Wellness Center, adjacent to the existing Aquatic Center at VA Palo Alto, was opened. The facility includes a gymnasium of 8,600 square feet built for various sports such as basketball, volleyball and rugby, a 3,376 square-foot Gait Track overlooking the gymnasium, offices and work supporting Recreation Therapy staff, and two state-of-the-art exercise rooms.
Construction and Additions

Residential Recovery and Renewal Center opens at Las Vegas VA

November 1, 2019, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System opened the Las Vegas VA Residential Recovery and Renewal Center (LVR3). LVR3 is a 30-45 day, 20-bed substance use and gambling residential treatment program, with five dedicated rooms for female Veterans. The facility will provide research-based, high quality interventions to assist our residents with addiction.

“This is VA’s first residential program in southern Nevada. It is also the second residential gambling addiction recovery center in the nation. “There is definitely a great need for this here in Las Vegas,” said LVR3 Program Manager Roxanne Untal. “Gambling and substance abuse already exist here, so it’s important that we are responsive to that when problems arise for our Veterans. The biggest goal is to provide residential care for Veterans when more intensive care is needed than what they would receive in outpatient treatment.”

New Sim Lab opens at Palo Alto VA

Leadership and Simulation Center staff at VA Palo Alto Health Care System cut the ribbon November 22, 2019, to its State-of-the-Art Simulation Center at its main division in Palo Alto.

The medical center’s Simulation Program has pioneered the use of mannequin-based, fully interactive simulators in anesthesiology, intensive care, emergency medicine, and other clinical settings since the 1980s. Additionally, Veterans participate as actors to portray patients and/or family members during training sessions dealing with verbal communication.

The new Simulation Center continues to grow through the years. This new facility is its 4th location in history on the VAPAHCS campus since 1995. The center is one of the largest in the entire network of VA medical centers.

VA Hilo Outpatient Clinic move is complete

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPICHS) announced on December 16, 2019, that the Hilo Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) has completely relocated to a larger, newly-refurbished facility. On that day, Veterans began receiving care at the new clinic.

“Opening this CBOC is part of the continuing effort to provide world-class health care closer to where more Veterans live,” said Jennifer Gutowski, then-director of VAPICHS. “Community-based clinics are key to providing Veterans better access to high-quality care closer to home; by reducing the distance Veterans have to travel, we hope more Veterans will benefit from the health care services they have earned through their service to our nation.”
Dr. Rachel L. Murkofsky, director of the Rehabilitation & Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders at VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), was selected for the fifth consecutive year as one of Castle Connolly’s Top Doctors and selected as one of Honolulu Magazine’s Top Doctors in Hawaii.

Murkofsky came to VAPIHCS in 2010 as the medical director of the newly formed Spinal Cord Injury & Disorders (SCI&D) Program. The SCI&D team cares for Veterans with spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and other spinal cord disorders. Along with her SCI&D team, Murkofsky has spent the past 10 years building the SCI&D Program from the ground up into a full-time program that serves the needs of SCI&D Veterans across the Pacific Islands. The SCI&D team consists of a physician, two nurse practitioners, nurse, social worker, physical therapist, program analyst, pharmacist and medical support assistant.

Team members provide specialized interdisciplinary care across the Hawaiian Islands (Oahu, the Big Island, Maui, Lanai, Kauai), Guam, Saipan, Rota and American Samoa that is comprehensive, integrated, and lifelong.

Murkofsky spent much of the last two years serving as associate chief of staff of geriatrics, rehabilitation, & extended Care, but never left her SCI&D program behind. She has recently returned to spend much more time with her SCI&D Veterans as director of rehabilitation and SCI&D. She is constantly looking for ways to expand local services to improve the care of Veterans with SCI&D. The team works closely with the SCI Hub at the Palo Alto VA as part of the VHA Hub and Spokes system of care for SCI&D.

“I would like to send a shoutout to my SCI&D Veterans who make every day rewarding for me, my SCI&D team without whom I could not do everything that I do, my VA colleagues who are always encouraging, and most of all my family who love and support me and allow me to do the best job I can for our Veterans,” said Murkofsky.
Las Vegas, Palo Alto VA facilities receive environmental awards

VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) and VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) were both named among Practice Greenhealth’s top hospitals in the nation for environmental excellence. VA Southern Nevada has now been recognized for environmental excellence for five consecutive years, and multiple VA Palo Alto locations earned awards.

This year, VASNHS was selected as a Partner for Change Award recipient and recognized for leading the health care industry with innovation in sustainability, maintaining superior environmental programs, and illustrating how green initiatives are entrenched in the facility’s culture.

“This was truly a team effort,” said William Scott, VASNHS GEMS (Green Environmental Management Systems) Manager. “Many services came together to make this happen, from housekeeping to engineering, from pharmacy to food service. We all worked hard to earn this achievement.”

One major project for Energy and Sustainability is the Las Vegas VAMC Energy Savings Performance Contract (ESPC), which was awarded April 8, 2020, and is projected to save approximately $755,000 per year in energy, water and sewer costs.

Practice Greenhealth is a non-profit membership organization founded on the principles of positive environmental stewardship and best practices by organizations in the health care community. It strives for sustainable health care that’s good for the environment, good for patients and staff, and good for the bottom line. Practice Greenhealth presents these awards annually, and VASNHS has been recognized every year since 2016. Nominees must submit a 195-page application to be considered for the award. “It’s an honor that we share with all the staff at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center,” said Scott. “We will continue to make improvements and strive to earn the honor again next year.”

VAPAHCS received the “Emerald Award” and “Greening the OR” award at the Palo Alto Division, and the “Partner for Change” award at the Livermore and Menlo Park Divisions from Practice Greenhealth, the nation’s leading organization dedicated to environmental sustainability in health care.

In health care, sustainability means looking at how operations affect the health and safety of the environment, as well as the health of patients, staff, visitors and the local community. Strategies to address sustainability in VA include: minimizing and recycling waste, addressing chemicals of concern, lowering energy and water consumption, sourcing food and products sustainably, and establishing environmentally preferable purchasing criteria. At VA, we know sustainability is essential to best care for patients, communities and our planet.
VA staff honors three centenarian Veterans

Several celebrations were held at VA facilities within VA Sierra Pacific Network to honor Veterans who had reached their 100th birthdays. WWII Veteran and VA Palo Alto volunteer William Difu was celebrated on November 19, 2019. Difu had already been a volunteer for two years. “My primary doctor said I had too much time on my hands and the VA is a good place to get a job,” he said, when asked how he started volunteering to give out coffee and snacks to Veterans waiting for their appointments.

He celebrated his 100th birthday with friends and family at the campus’ Fisher House II. Executive leadership for VAPAHCS joined a special lunch held in honor of Difu, offering a few words of gratitude for his continued service to our Veterans.

When Milton Chatelain arrived for a check-up at the Northeast Las Vegas VA Clinic July 13, he was greeted with balloons and streamers, celebratory banners, and dozens of VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System staff members welcoming him with a song. Of course, this was no ordinary day for the World War II U.S. Navy Veteran — it was his 100th birthday.

The newly-minted centenarian was grateful for the warm welcome and excited to show off some dance moves for family and friends. While everyone in attendance adhered to physical distancing and universal masking requirements, the celebration included cupcakes, a card signed by VASNHS staff, and presentation of a challenge coin from VASNHS Executive Director William J. Caron.

In August, VA Palo Alto celebrated another Veteran’s 100th birthday. This time, it was Albert Bertoli, who had been a resident at the Menlo Park Community Living Center for three years.

With his favorite raviolis on hand, a cake with large candles in the shape of “100,” and his 88-year old girlfriend, Bertoli was able to enjoy his milestone birthday despite the ongoing pandemic.
WWII Veterans awarded French Legion of Honor medals

World War II Veterans William “Dean” Whitaker and William Grant received the French Legion d’Honneur award in a ceremony in Las Vegas on October 5th, 2019. The Legion d’Honneur is France’s highest award, conferred upon men and women for outstanding achievements in military or civilian life.

The two Veterans, both 94 years old, celebrated with friends, family, and distinguished guests including Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak at the National Atomic Testing Museum. Grant and Whitaker were also honored with certificates from Sisolak, the Nevada Department of Veteran Services and Nevada’s Congressional delegation.

The award was presented by Sebastien Thevenin, the French Honorary Consul for Southern Nevada. “These two men are examples of the Greatest Generation,” Thevenin said. “They are an unbreakable link in the long chain of friendship between our two countries that will remain forever in our hearts.”

Both Veterans, who receive care from VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, spoke about remembering those who lost their lives in World War II and the importance of educating younger generations about the impact of the conflict.

Second Lieutenant William “Dean” Whitaker, born in Los Angeles, enlisted as a bombardier in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1943. He flew 20 missions over Europe in a B-17 Flying Fortress.

He earned a Purple Heart for injuries sustained on his first mission, and his 20th and final mission ended when his plane was shot down over Merseburg, Germany.

Whitaker was taken prisoner and survived seven months in a P.O.W. camp before liberation by Gen. Patton’s forces in 1945. Following the war, he returned to California where he worked as a school teacher, a firefighter and an architect, building homes throughout Laguna Beach. He moved to Las Vegas soon after retirement, where he now resides.

Private First Class William Grant joined the Army as an infantryman from his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in September 1943. He landed on Normandy on July 13, 1944 and participated in the liberation of France, seeing action in the Battle of Falaise Gap and Monschau. He was wounded by an artillery barrage at the Battle of Hurtgen Forest, for which he would receive the Purple Heart.

Grant would go on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge and finished his tour of duty with a European Campaign Medal with Five Bronze Service Stars. After the war, he worked for the Social Security Administration for 35 years, after which he retired and moved to Las Vegas.
On Thursday, June 18, 2020, VA Central California Healthcare System (VACCHCS) staff and volunteers wished a fond farewell to an 81-year-old Veteran coronavirus survivor.

After 63 days in the hospital, Air Force Veteran Leroy Brown was discharged from the main hospital. Brown was admitted to the emergency department on April 15 after testing positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus).

Once discharged, Brown was reunited with his daughter Lynette and his sister Juanita, who had been unable to see him for two months. “Here I am, live and in living color,” said Brown. “I thank the Lord.” Brown was the healthcare system’s first COVID-19-positive inpatient. The executive leadership team thought it only natural to commemorate his recovery, as a Veteran who fought coronavirus and won.

Medical Center Director Charles O. Benninger was eager to celebrate a fellow Veteran. “It’s just so great to see one of our Veterans survive this terrible virus,” said Benninger. “This is truly a cause for celebration!” His family was grateful for the care their loved one had received from VA.

“We appreciate everything you guys have done,” said his daughter, Lynette. “Everything. All the prayers, the hands-on, the communication. We love you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.” VA Voluntary Service presented Brown with a balloon bouquet. Observing social distancing rules and protocols, staff and volunteers lined the walls of the main corridor to wish Brown farewell.

Brown continued his recovery with the aid of skilled nursing care in the hospital’s Community Living Center before returning home. Elated with the turnaround, Brown exclaimed, “I just want to live! I was so happy; I cried a whole bucket full of tears!”

Air Force Veteran Leroy Brown was the first COVID-19-positive inpatient at VA Central California Health Care System. He recovered after a 65-day hospitalization.
Unsung heroes prevent COVID-19 contamination

Kolan Glass is not a doctor or a nurse, yet he is one of the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System’s most-critical employees in the battle against COVID-19. As the primary housekeeper in North Las Vegas VA Medical Center Emergency Department, it’s up to him to make sure that after a Veteran has been released, the room is completely sanitized and prepared for the next patient. Hard work, attention to detail and careful adherence to strict cleaning protocols by Environmental Management Safety (EMS) staff is the only way to ensure that there is no cross-contamination between patients or staff.

“I clean every room as I would want it if I was the next patient to be staying in it,” said Glass. “I sanitize each room with my full attention.” While housekeeping has always been an important job in any hospital, COVID-19 has put it in the spotlight, and the dedication and effort of Glass and his peers is needed now more than ever.

His insistence on following protocol and good safety measures “borders on OCD,” he says, but he believes that’s what is best for his own safety as well as the Veterans. “I’m always going to have on my proper PPE,” he said. “I don’t want to take nothing home besides a paycheck.”

Glass experienced firsthand how a viral outbreak can test the Emergency Department. On March 2, 2020, a Veteran checked in with shortness of breath. There had not been a single case of a COVID-19 patient in Nevada at that time, and when Glass came into contact with this patient, he never suspected that he might be the first. After influenza and pneumonia were ruled out, a COVID-19 test showed the Veteran was a presumptive positive. As a precaution, Glass, along with the other VA employees who came into contact with that Veteran were placed on a 14-day quarantine. “I didn’t get nervous,” said Glass. “I understood it was a precautionary measure, but I was ready to get back to work.”

His supervisor recognized Glass’ leadership and work ethic. “Even after that period of time where he had to self-isolate from his family, and the stress of waiting for testing results, he came back to work and immediately picked up right where he left off,” said Jesse Diaz, VASNHS’ EMS chief. “He has even been very vocal in educating the staff in his area, and his housekeeping peers, to develop a partnership with the clinical staff and EMS to help reduce the chances of others being infected or impacted by COVID-19.”

Teamwork, communication and attention to detail have been critical to the success of EMS in preventing the spread of COVID-19. According to Glass, who served more than seven years in the Army as a mechanic, working at the VA has also given him a continued sense of service. “I’m a Vet. Now that I’m out of the military, this is my way of giving back to my fellow Veterans and still have a connection to the military community.”

The entire VASNHS EMS staff are just as dedicated as Glass in their service to Veterans. “It is our responsibility to maintain a clean and safe environment of care at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System,” Diaz said. “The knowledge of our housekeeping staff in the use of available resources such as newly introduced chemicals and equipment to fight COVID-19, ensures the prevention of infections between patients, visitors and employees as COVID-19 can easily spread through the cross contamination of high-touch surfaces.”

One of those new tools that EMS has been using in fighting infection in the emergency department is the Surfacide Helios UV-C disinfection system. This device uses two to three remotely-controlled towers that emit powerful UV light to purify equipment, room surfaces and objects. While the system has been used throughout inpatient rooms for nearly two years, it has proven to be an effective tool for emergency department housekeepers. “When I come in, I’m in my full suit, and I bring everything I need in here with me,” Glass said. “The entire process takes about two hours, but it’s the best way to ensure the room is as clean as possible for the next Veteran.”

Whether through hard work, dedicated service, or cutting-edge technology, housekeepers like Glass are making sure that Veterans who come to the VASNHS medical center are welcomed with a clean and sanitary room. “Probably about 90% of us [housekeepers] are Vets,” he said. “That means we talk, and we don’t panic. Sure, we are dealing with a pandemic, but we still got to get the job done and keep everybody safe at the same time.”
Nevada’s ‘Patient Zero’ celebrates after beating COVID-19

Ronald Pipkins, Nevada’s first patient to test positive for COVID-19, left the North Las Vegas VA medical center to the cheers of VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) staff on Monday, April 20. Nearly two months after testing positive with the virus, and three weeks since awakening from a coma, Pipkins is transferring to a local medical rehabilitation facility.

“It feels fantastic,” Pipkins said. “I hate to leave, I made a lot of friends, but I’ve got to go and see my family.”

Pipkins has inspired staff and Veterans alike with his strength and perseverance, even receiving recognition over a phone call from Nev. Gov. Steve Sisolak. “I never thought I’d be famous just for being alive,” Pipkins said. “But I hope that I can make people realize how serious this virus is. I wish no one would get this disease. This is a terrible virus because once it gets ahold of you, it really tries to take you out.”

The 55-year-old Marine Corps Veteran was admitted to the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center March 2 for pneumonia. After developing a fever, he was tested for COVID-19, and within 24 hours, his results came back as a presumptive positive. He spent much of the last month on a ventilator in a medically induced coma while battling the illness.

Since regaining consciousness and two consecutive negative COVID tests in early April, Pipkins has undergone intense rehabilitation with VASNHS physical and occupational therapists. “My recovery has been really strong,” Pipkins said. “It’s all coming together and once I get to rehab, I know that I’ll pick up the pace.”

While Pipkins is excited to continue on his road to recovery, he appreciates the life-saving care he’s received at the North Las Vegas VA medical center. “I’m grateful I’m at the VA because the people here have waited on me hand and foot,” Pipkin said. “The staff here are very professional and I’m really proud of the service I’ve received here.”

Pipkins urged Americans to not take COVID-19 lightly. “Listen to the health professionals. A lot of people think it won’t get them, but if it gets you, you will feel some very painful things happening to your body. So I tell you, ‘put on the mask. Going to work is not as important as living. It’s better to be broke and alive than to have money and be dying’.”
I understand there’s a hesitancy for people to take the COVID-19 vaccine. However, the COVID-19 vaccine is a key step in winning the war against this insidious virus. By doing our part and volunteering, we can save lives and prevent unnecessary illness and deaths. As leaders, we need to show our faith in the vaccine and publicly demonstrate our courage by rolling up our sleeves and getting vaccinated. I’m proud to stand with our country’s leaders and do my part to help end this pandemic. I urge each of you to get the vaccine for the people you love, our wonderful country, and a better tomorrow.

-John A. Bradecker

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VISN 21 Annual Report FY 2020
This report was assembled by the VISN 21 Public Affairs Office, with assistance from VISN staff and the Public Affairs Office from each facility.

For questions or comments regarding this report, please email patrick.gordon@va.gov.