

**Nebraska Western-Iowa Health Care System
VAVS Committee Meeting
Wednesday, October 25, 2023; 1330 – 1500
In-Person Meeting**

Welcome: Jon Boothe – Acting Chief, Center for Development and Civic Engagement

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Discussion:

- **Executive Updates:**
- **From Jon:**
- **NEW LEADERSHIP HIRE ANNOUNCED:** The Nebraska-Western Iowa Veterans Administration Health System has hired a new Chief of the *Center for Development & Civic Engagement* (CDCE) department, which oversees the VA Volunteer Services, donations, and educational outreach programs for the Omaha, Grand Island, and Lincoln facilities. **Michael Ingram**, who is retiring from STRATCOM, will join the team in January 2024.

The CDCE objectives are to a) staff volunteers in meaningful roles and b) make volunteers and patients feel welcome. To aid in this work, a Volunteer Engagement Team (VET) has been established, and the CDCE “to-do-list” is growing. They would like to obtain patient testimonies of their care and share the story about the VA services; their primary focus is to “stay true to the mission.”

- **UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR:** Dr. Eileen Kingston announced the Omaha VA Medical Center was rated a highly coveted 5 Stars

(out of 5) by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Since attaining her position as Director, her team has focused on Public - Private Partnerships, such as the Ambulatory Care Center and a new Physical Therapy Center on campus. The new Sarpy County CBOC (to replace the Bellevue CBOC) is under construction on the southwest corner of 72nd and Giles.

Another expansion includes the Papillion Community Living Center (PCLC) at Midlands Hospital, which is a leased space. It is currently a short-term, skilled care rehab facility and projects up to 18-20 by the end of the year. They will have future memory-care beds, which is based on staffing availability. She is requesting a multi-million grant for a new "tower" for the main campus to add beds, and they are in the top 10 grant applicants.

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough visited the hospital and shared it is in the top 7th slot of VA hospitals. He is stressing VA careers, quality health care and VA benefits.

OVAMC EVENTS: Fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccines are now available at walk-in events in the Ambulatory Care Center (ACC), which are provided to Veterans only.

Saturday, November 4, 2023 - A Women's Memorial dedication will be held in the VA Healing Garden (bad weather in the ACC Hallway) for MSgt. Linda Turango-Griess, a Sutton, NE resident. She was in the Army National Guard and is the first female killed in action during the Iraq War (2004). A rose quartz boulder will have an inscribed plaque.

- **Patient/Veteran Testimony:** CDCE Specialist Cynthia Pommells became a sudden patient at the VA. While assisting a Veteran to an appointment. A medical staffer knew about an existing foot situation and insisted that Cynthia stay for an appointment. She immediately was admitted to the VA for 3 days, receiving antibiotics to fight a serious infection. She felt honored about the care received. Everyone she encountered during her stay treated her with the utmost respect.

- **VA Papillion Community Living Center (PCLC):** Cati Demasi introduced Kathy Junge. She is the program nurse manager and shared about recent events. Mrs. Nebraska, the daughter of a PCLC nurse, came to visit and handed out treats. The German American Society performed in the atrium with folk dances and shared root beer out of steins. A Nebraska military Organization, Hearts for Healing, volunteer comes to PCLC for art therapy sessions for dual diagnosis (physical and mental) veterans.

The length of a patient's stay at the PCLC varies due to their needs: rehabilitation, respite, and/or skilled nursing care; so, they may be there from a week up to one year. The goal is well-being improvement. A "Restorative Nurse" has been hired for the Long-Term Care inpatients' engagement. When they have enough staff, 18-20 patients could be there by the end of the year.

On Kathy's growing wish list is for volunteers to adopt a resident room: a) have a welcome bag / note for admitting veterans, b) many patients come unprepared from a physician appointment and need basic comfort supplies (clothing and hygiene); c) play games with the person, etc. They may start a "Mug Club" as simple things make them happy. They are already starting to have curated coffees and espresso as a treat; decorator napkins and unique mugs are welcome! CDCE is currently working with the PCLC staff to recruit and onboard volunteers for these positions.

With a focus on wellbeing, Kathy suggested volunteers could come for a half-hour activity just after meals, so that veterans engage with each other better. High school students are also welcome for evening or weekends to play cards, bingo, poker, watch Nascar, sing-a-longs or other musical performances. They especially need Dominos players.

○ **Old Business:**

- **2023 VA / ALA Veterans Art Competition Celebration.**
ALA – IA Rep Ann Crawford and ALA – NE Rep Paula Pillen assisted Cati Demasi and CDCE on September 19, 2023, to display and award the competition entries. One of the OVAMC winning artists has volunteered to be an art instructor for PCLC patients. ALA - IA Representative Ann Crawford went to the National Veterans Creative Arts event. February 2024 is when information will be out for next year's competition. Additionally, the mental health floor Recreation Therapist will become involved, but no volunteers can be on the floor.
- **Women's Veteran Baby Shower:** The Women's Health Clinic and CDCE hosted the Fall Baby Shower on October 21. 15 families were in attendance! Thank you for all your support with this event!

○ **Updates:**

- **Wednesday, November 8, 2023** - Mrs. America Jane Rozier will be part of a special Veterans and staff event, which will be held in the ACC hallway at Noon. This former VA employee will be handing out treats.
- **Saturday, November 11, 2023** – A very generous donation will be presented to the Fisher House from "Operation Hat Trick," (OIT) a nonprofit who obtains funding for the recovery of America's wounded service members and veterans. A University of Nebraska group won the \$30,000 award by participating in social media events. (OIT) is donating the award on behalf of the UNL to the Fisher House.
- **Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2023** - The Soldiers Angels Organization is hosting it's annual "**Home of the Brave**" campaign at the Omaha VA from 11am -1 pm. Members from Bristol Myers Squibb and the CDCE Staff will be handing out goodies to all Veterans in the Omaha VA during this time.

- **STAND DOWN AND DONATIONS:** Cynthia shared that enough volunteers have signed up for the Friday, Nov. 17 event, which is in the UNO Milo Bail Student Center, 10-2pm. This high volunteer engagement is primarily due to NFM and Mutual of Omaha volunteers; they will help 100-150 homeless Veterans. Thanks to the generous monetary and in-kind donations by so many of your Organizations, we are able to provide heavy winter coats, bags, boots, clothing, hygiene kits, etc. The ALA Reps of Nebraska and Iowa will have donation tables at Stand Down to provide hand or toe warmers food, scarves, gloves, reading glasses, snow scrapers, throws, plastic mats, etc. We are still in need of men's sweatpants (L—2xl); largest sized men's gloves; men's scarves; cold-weather sleeping bags; and small tents.
- **GIVING TREE:** Social workers will identify non-hospitalized veterans who have chronic conditions and are truly in need of support. CDCE staff is setting up a "Giving Tree" near Thanksgiving; people can select a tag from the tree and purchase the Veteran's needed gift(s). Last year, primarily staff and fellow Veterans gave ~\$5,000 in presents. The tree is to be located near the pharmacy; purchased items should be delivered to CDCE department staff unwrapped (4101 Woolworth Ave. B803, Omaha, NE). They will ask for volunteers to wrap the gifts, and VA social workers will distribute the gifts. Please contact CDCE at 402-995-3283 or Cynthia.Pommells2@va.gov to share your intended gift delivery day/time, which is before December 15.
- **VOLUNTEERING:** Heather is the Onboarding Specialist and volunteer program manager. She mentioned the volunteer orientation process now involves 2 trips; one to get a photo badge and then another visit to activate the name tag and have finger printing recorded. They attained 70 new volunteers at OVAMC last FY year. There are three volunteer desks set up, with two people at each desk; one at

the main entrance, another in the Ambulatory Care Center (ACC) and a third at pharmacy (this has no wheelchairs).

- **PROGRAMS:** Call the CDCE office to set up a special program or activity. Recent volunteer activities include:
 - Veteran Cookie Program: every Wednesday, features Lynn Corbeil as the baker, distributor, and outstanding conversationalist with Veterans. Additionally, cookies are handed out by other volunteers two more times per week.
 - Information Desk Volunteer Gloria Sauck staffs it on Fridays; however, she is soon going overseas for a mission trip.
 - Organizations help with outpatient rides, handing out items to veterans.
 - Volunteers are needed to help with an Activity Cart for inpatients twice a week.
 - There will be an ALA Christmas Gift Shop on Dec. 4-7.
 - 14 Senior NCOs came to the VA in uniform and had lunch in the cafeteria. They want to do various once-per-month volunteer opportunities such as campus beautification, popcorn days, greeting, activity cart, inpatient/outpatient visits.
- **PROJECT COMPETITION:** Employees are going to be encouraged to participate in a special "Shark Tank" competition for improving veteran care/service. Suggestions are to be submitted in writing for possible adoption. Up to \$25,000 will be awarded to one or several people who suggest the top service project for veteran care improvements. Leadership will review and select the overall winner(s). Feel free to contact Jennifer if you have any questions.
- **Special Events Coordinator:** Cynthia is our special events coordinator. She will be heavily involved in all the events going on with CDCE. Cynthia and Tracy also began a monthly CDCE newsletter for volunteers.
- Volunteer meal vouchers have been increased to \$9.50 for a 4-hour volunteer shift

- Outreach: Jennifer is our Outreach Specialist. She would be happy to attend any Organization meeting or gathering to speak about what is going on in CDCE and the VA. Just contact the office at (402)995-3283 if interested.
- **DONATIONS:** ALL donations need to come to our office directly. Fisher House/CRRRC/CLC have gotten donations lately that did not come to our office. This is not allowed as it is against VHA policy. We are the only office/staff in VA allowed to accept donations. If CDCE does not know about the donation, your Organization is not getting credit for it. Please email Jennifer at Jennifer.Servant@va.gov if you plan on dropping off a donation to a facility other than CDCE so we can account for it correctly. Thank you!
- **Service Organizations that are wanting to plan events for the upcoming holidays:** please coordinate with our CDCE Staff. Last year items consisted of stockings, gift cards, chap stick, socks, shorts, t-shirts, etc. This year we will allow 2-4 people to deliver the items to the inpatient rooms. If you prefer, our staff does not mind playing Santa's elves for you!

- **Future Meetings**

- 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, January 24, 2024 – VAVS
Committee Members
- 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 24, 2024 – VAVS
Committee Members
- 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, July 24, 2024 – VAVS
Committee Members
- 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 23, 2024 – VAVS
Committee Members



JENNY ROSENBALM, MOL, BS, RHIA

Associate Director



JON BOOTHE,

Acting Chief, CDCE

Attachment Roster

**Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, Omaha, NE 68105
 VAVS Committee Meeting, Cumulative Attendance Record - FY 2024**

JENNY ROSENBALM, MOL, BS, RHIA
 Associate Director

JON BOOTHE
 Acting Chief, CDCE

	AJR Month	Certification Expires						
					Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul
Air Force Association								
David Skilton	N/A	Unk	Rep	E				
American Legion								
Fred Tisdale (Nebraska)	APR	(Pending)	Rep	P				
American Legion Auxiliary								
Jean Brown (Iowa)	NOV	Ind	Rep	P				
Ann Crawford (Iowa)		Ind	Rep	P				
Paula Pillen (Nebraska)		Ind	Rep	P				
Trish Schnack (Honorary)		N/A	H	P				
American Red Cross								
Louis Wagner	APR	Ind	Rep	P				
Kevin Zuroski		Ind	Dep	E				
AMVETS Auxiliary								
Vacant (Nebraska) *	SEP							
Janice Holtz (Iowa)		Unk	Rep	E				
Combat Vet Motorcycle Ass'c								
Kurt Busch	N/A	N/A	H	P				
Daughters of Union Vets Civil War								
Mary Hunt (Nebraska)	JAN	Ind	Rep	E				
Sue Mize (Iowa)		Ind	Rep	P				
Disabled American Veterans								
Kari Bealer (Nebraska)	APR	Ind	Rep	P				
Vacant (Nebraska)		Ind	Dep	X	X	X	X	
Vacant (Iowa) *				X	X	X	X	

Elks	AJR Due	Certification Expires			Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul
Richard Klinger	APR	Ind	Rep	P				
Mia Newell		Ind	Dep	P				

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.

Martha Didamo	APR	Ind	Rep	P				
Rita Gardner *		PENDING	Rep	P				

Military Order of the Cootie

Gary Steckelberg	FEB	Ind	Dep	P				
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Military Order of the Cootie Aux

Marcia Jones	SEP	Ind	Rep	P				
Dorothy Steckelberg		Ind	Dep	P				
Janice Davis		Ind	Dep	P				

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Jerry Eledge		Unk	Dep	E				
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Military Order of the Purple Heart Aux

Barbara Counihan	OCT	Unk	Rep	P				
Linda Eledge		PENDING	Hon	E				

Nat'l Masonic Services Assc

Anthony Johnson	JAN	Ind	Rep	A				
Jess H. Winn II		Ind	Rep	P				

Nat'l Soc Daughters of American Rev

Ann Cox	OCT	Unk	Rep	P				
Marta Dempsey		Unk	Dep	E				
Karen Fitzgibbons		Unk	Dep	P				
Glenda Irish		Unk	Dep	P				

Nat'l Soc Col Dames of XVII Century

Vacant	N/A	Ind	Rep					
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AJR Month	Certification Expires	Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul
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Nat'l Soc U.S. Daughters of 1812

Sandra Spicer	JAN	Unk	Rep	A			
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Sons of American Legion

Doug Washburn	JAN	Ind	Rep	P			
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The Salvation Army

Stephanie Sawka	MAR	Ind	Rep	E			
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Veterans of Foreign Wars

Richard "Dick" Ryba (Iowa)	APR	Ind	Rep	E			
Francis Durham		Ind	Rep	P			

Veterans of Foreign Wars Aux

Paulette Marquez (Nebraska)	NOV	Ind	Rep	P			
(Vacant) (Nebraska) *				X	X	X	X
Nora Clark (Iowa)		Ind	Dep	P			
Marilyn Robinson (Iowa)		Ind	Dep	E			

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc

Thomas Brown	MAY	Ind	Rep	P			
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P	PRESENT
A	ABSENT
*	NO CERTIFICATION
E	EXCUSED
Ind	INDEFINITELY
////	REP REPLACED
N/A	No meeting COVID-19 Pandemic

R	Representative
D	Deputy Representative
AR	Associate Representative
DA	Deputy Associate Representative
H	Honorary Representative
Unk	UNKNOWN

3 consecutive unexcused absences will result in termination of Rep/Dep status

*** Need formal appointment in writing**