CHOOSE US
CHOOSE MILWAUKEE VA
Thank you, once again, for picking up our annual report to see some of our highlights this last year at your Milwaukee VA! It seems like yesterday we were talking about our 150th anniversary, and now another year has passed.

There is so much good news to talk about. Did you know that in fiscal 2018, we had 857,415 hospital visits for outpatient, inpatient and the Emergency Department? We treated 420 Veterans in our world-class Spinal Cord Injury Center. And, we treated 719 Veterans in our Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program, where our Veterans most count on us for care for substance abuse, post-traumatic stress, homelessness and sexual trauma. To put those numbers in perspective, in this last year, our kitchen staff made and prepared about 606,846 meals for Veterans getting care here throughout the campus.

That’s just an amazing amount of work done by an amazing staff. We may not have room for every fact and figure, but you’ll see a sampling of that magnificent work in this report.

We’ve heard from folks in Green Bay, and purposely expanded on information available there, our largest clinic in Wisconsin.

You’ll also meet on these pages our Employee of the Year, who epitomizes the best of everybody. We were also fortunate that one of our top volunteers is really the top. He won VA’s Volunteer of the Year! Wow! We know we can’t do this job without the hundreds of volunteers who donated 81,283 hours to serving our Veterans.

SCI will always hold a special place in my heart for the groundbreaking work they do, especially with adaptive sports, which has given many Veterans a new lease on life. You’ll meet some of the Veterans in this report who also happen to be gold-medal winners at this year’s Paralympics.

You can learn more here about what we are doing to fight the opioid epidemic and reduce Veteran suicides. I’m so proud of the work we’ve done, but one death, one loss of life, is one too many. We can, and we will, do better. It is our sacred mission.

As always, thank you for trusting us with your care, and thank you for continuing with us on our journey!
Daniel S. Zomchek, Ph.D., FACHE
Medical Center Director/CEO

Dr. Daniel S. Zomchek was appointed director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center June 27, 2016. Prior to Milwaukee, he served as associate director of the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital since September 2012.

Dr. Zomchek’s previous VA experience includes the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois, including staff psychologist, assistant chief of Outpatient Mental Health and Systems Redesign coordinator for the facility. He served as acting hospital director at the Hines VA Hospital from November 2014 to February 2015, and again from June through October 2015.

He also served at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts, and the VA Healthcare System of Ohio.

James D. McLain, FACHE
Deputy Medical Center Director

James McLain is a retired Army lieutenant colonel, having deployed in 1990 for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and in 2003 for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

He received his master’s in health administration from Baylor University.

Christina Orr, DPT
Assistant Medical Center Director

Dr. Christina Orr is responsible for Medical Information Systems, Human Resources, Occupational Safety and Health, Veterans Transportation Services, Privacy, and the Community Engagement and Relations Division.

Michael D. Erdmann, MD, MS
Chief of Staff

Dr. Michael Erdmann has served as the Milwaukee VA chief of staff since 1997. He has served as a physician here for 32 years, and is the associate dean for VA Affairs and professor of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin. He received a master’s degree from the School of Public Health in Ann Arbor, Michigan, his medical degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and completed his residency in Internal Medicine here at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Annette Severson, EdD, RN
Associate Director for Patient Care Services and Nurse Executive

Dr. Annette Severson provides leadership to Sterile Processing, Nutrition and Food Service, nursing and ancillary disciplines across the medical center and community clinics.
Green Bay Milo C. Huempfner Health Care Center
2851 University Avenue

We opened the new Green Bay Health Care Center in August 2013, nearly tripling the number of enrolled Veterans in the area!

This state-of-the-art, 161,525-square-foot facility has 1,200 parking spaces and 300 staff. We care for nearly 18,000 Veterans including those who travel from Iron Mountain, Michigan, and the surrounding areas.

We are open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, call 920-431-2500.

Services include:
- Primary Care
- Mental Health
- Primary Care Mental Health Integration
- Laboratory
- Imaging, ultrasound and CT scans
- Podiatry
- Optometry
- Ophthalmology
- Cardiology
- Gynecology
- Urology
- Orthopedic
- Nephrology
- General surgery
- Pharmacy
- Audiology
- Pulmonary function testing
- Dental
- Hematology/Oncology
- GI Procedure
- Chemo infusion
- Dialysis
- Telehealth
- Mobile MRI
- Ambulatory surgery

The mobile MRI returned to the Green Bay Health Care Center and is available two days a week. This is a direct result from Veteran input at one of our Green Bay Town Hall meetings. VA saw a strong need to return the MRI after consultations with Veterans and other key stakeholders in the area.
Cleveland Clinic
1205 North Avenue
Our Cleveland Clinic opened in 1999, and we currently have 23 staff members. We serve more than 3,500 Veterans from Cleveland and the surrounding area.

Our clinic is open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, call 920-693-5600.

Services include:
- Primary Care
- Mental Health
- Phlebotomy
- Telehealth
- Optometry
- Basic Radiology
- Laboratory

Appleton John H. Bradley Clinic
10 Tri-Park Way
Our 152 staff members at the Appleton Clinic are proud to serve more than 11,000 Veterans in the Fox Valley area. The clinic opened in 1994. The original site at building 1 houses Primary Care as well as support and specialty services. We opened building 2 in 2008, where our Mental Health programs, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran case management services are located.

Our clinic is open 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Extended hours in Primary Care are available until 5:30 p.m. on Thursdays, and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. Earlier and later Mental Health appointments are available based on needs. For more information, call 920-831-0070.

Services include:
- Primary Care
- Mental Health
- Pharmacy
- Phlebotomy
- Telehealth
- HUD/VASH services
- Referrals to Specialty Care at the Green Bay HCC and Milwaukee VA Medical Center

Union Grove Clinic
Shemanske Hall, 21425 Spring Street
Our Union Grove Clinic is located on the same grounds as the Southern Wisconsin Center located near Union Grove, Wisconsin. We serve more than 3,500 Veterans in the Racine County area. Our original clinic opened in April 1998, and we moved in May 2015 to our current location.

Our clinic is open 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, call 262-878-7001.

Services include:
- Primary Care
- Mental Health Care
- Home-Based Primary Care
- Telehealth
- Referrals to Specialty Care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center
- Phlebotomy with limited laboratory services
When the new Green Bay Health Care Center opened in 2013, one of the tremendous advantages of the state-of-the-art facility was room for continued growth of patients.

“Before this building opened, there was another VA clinic in town, a small clinic,” said Dr. Shiloh Ramos, associate chief of staff in Green Bay. “It was about 7,500 square feet. This building is about 162,000 square feet. It’s over 20 times bigger.”

The spacious facility has 1,200 parking spaces and 300 staff. The previous Green Bay clinic had about 3,600 patients.

“I think this is the best thing that happened to Green Bay for the Vets, when they built that clinic,” said Adriann Aalders, who retired after 23 years in the Army, including a tour in Vietnam. “I’ve had five surgeries done right there in that clinic.

“When I walked in, oh my gosh, I thought I was the king of the place,” said Aalders, 70, who lives in Green Bay. “The courtesy, the professionalism — I’ll tell you what, if it was from one to five stars, I’d rate it five stars straight up.”

The Green Bay Health Care Center serves 18,000 Veterans, including 9,000 primary care patients. The remainder come for the specialized services, including dental, vision, pharmacy and mobile MRI.

“There’s the need for primary care, and we meet all the need,” Ramos said. “There’s no one waiting out there, waiting to come in here for primary care. We have capacity, obviously, for more.

“When we opened it up, the goal was to add specialty services,” Ramos said. “You always have a vision and a belief, but it’s pretty nice to see it actually happen.” And, he said, there is still room for more.

“You also have to be careful about growing too fast,” he said. “It’s like a business. If you start up a business, there are businesses that can grow too fast and they’re not ready for that growth. I think there is something to that with growing a clinic. You want to get those things right.”

“We’re still growing each month as word gets out and more Veterans come to us for care,” Ramos said. “We want to be their trusted place of choice.”
Moore is not alone in recognizing the multidisciplinary care at Green Bay’s Milo C. Huempfner Dental Clinic, which opened in August 2013.

“When we were built, in terms of dental, the long-term target number was about 1,800 patients. We exceeded that about year two and a half,” said Dr. Ankur Patel, lead dentist at the clinic. “Here we are in year five and we’re continuing to grow so much, that all these rooms are in high demand.

“We’re really fortunate that we’re in a pretty unique area between all these other VA dental clinics,” Patel said. “We actually get quite a few referrals from Tomah, Madison, Milwaukee and Iron Mountain.”

In addition to comprehensive general dentistry services, the Green Bay clinic also offers periodontics, prosthodontics and oral surgery. It’s one of the few places where the care runs from general dentistry such as cleaning, all the way to dental surgery, if necessary, so Veterans don’t have to be referred elsewhere.

Patel also focuses on the community partnership and helping others. At any one time, two dental residents train at the clinic. Green Bay also has affiliations with the local technical colleges for dental hygiene and assisting.
Mariabel Loo considers her tireless efforts on behalf of homeless Veterans as more than just doing her job. It’s her passion.

That belief and commitment to her mission has earned the respect of coworkers and the Veterans she assists. It also led to Loo’s selection as the Milwaukee VA Medical Center’s Employee of the Year.

Loo has been employed here for 27 years, including the last eight as a HUD/VASH coordinator in Homeless Programs in the Mental Health division, providing outreach to Veterans, community agencies and others in a vulnerable population.

“I think most of our team members approach it as more than a job because it’s not the easiest population to work with, so your heart has to be in it,” said Loo.

Among the many outreach and volunteer programs with which she has worked, Loo has volunteered since 2014 with Mr. Bob’s Under the Bridge Ministry, an outreach serving the homeless community in Milwaukee and surrounding area.

Loo also collaborated with Milwaukee Vets for Peace and participates in a weekly breakfast outreach for at-risk Veterans.

She has participated in numerous late-night ride-alongs with area police departments to connect homeless Veterans with VA.

During a 10-year period, Loo provided drug and alcohol treatment at different shelters around Milwaukee.

“My belief is that housing is a basic need. That is a stepping stone to getting a job,” Loo said. “It’s really hard to get a job if you sleep outside, you can’t shower and you have no clean clothes. For some people, with housing you can take care of yourself medically much better. Your medication won’t be all over the place. Even in a shelter, people lose their medication.

“Each one of our employees have not just one story, but numerous stories, about ways they have affected people’s lives, and real genuinely,” said Dr. Dan Zomchek, Milwaukee VA Medical Center director, at the Employee of the Year banquet, which included all the Employee of the Month winners. “I really believe we have the best mission in the world and it’s because of the heart in the room that we get to do what we do.”

Loo said she was surprised to receive the Employee of the Year award and does not take it for granted.

“I am honored to be recognized with the other Employees of the Month and I am really humbled that I got picked,” she said. “Everyone has made great contributions to the VA mission.”
Roland Ransom doesn’t do it for the awards. But his commitment to helping those who served is readily acknowledged by others.

Ransom, a volunteer at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, as well as numerous other community projects for Veterans, was one of two in the nation named the national 2017 Volunteer of the Year for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“I don’t do it for the awards or the honors or anything,” Ransom said. “One, I love to do it, and second, I get my family involved with it. And third, it always feels rewarding to be able to help somebody — in a personal way, not rewarded with a medal or trophy.”

The 71-year-old Vietnam Veteran, who joined the Marine Corps right out of high school, has volunteered for more than six years at the Milwaukee VA. He has logged more than 500 hours of service.

“This award could not have gone to a more deserving or dedicated volunteer,” said Carrie Lodi, Community Engagement manager. “His willingness to use and share his gifts and abilities has strengthened our mission and the care to our Veterans.”

He was presented the award by Jim McLain, deputy medical center director, at the local Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon in May.

In addition to VA, Ransom also has been involved with the Honor Flight since its inception, including fundraising, and arranging for a Knights of Columbus Honor Guard as each group returns to the Milwaukee airport.

“We started with eight guys and I have an email list of over 70 people now,” Ransom said of the Honor Flights. “We’ve been averaging somewhere around 30 Honor Guard members, every Honor Flight, for the past three years.”

On Memorial Day and Fourth of July, Ransom, his granddaughter, and other volunteers place flags on Veteran graves at the Union Grove Cemetery.

He advocates for the Fisher House at public and Knights of Columbus events, helps with USO fundraising events, and works with getting patients and others to events at the American Legion post in Mukwonago.

His efforts on behalf of Veterans and related causes is just the latest in a lifetime of volunteering for Ransom, who retired from Rexnord in Milwaukee after almost 40 years.

“Before this, I had more than 20 years as a volunteer CPR instructor,” he said. “I taught adult, infant and child CPR, and community first aid. A lot of it was at schools and work places.”

The Milwaukee VA thanks Roland, and all our volunteers who work tirelessly to serve and honor our Veterans!
The bullet is still in Mike Thomas’ back and the wheelchair is a constant reminder of something he’ll never forget.

“It’s lodged right in the spine, but doctors can’t remove it, or it will cause more damage,” he said. “It happened in Detroit. Just living in Detroit, big city life.”

Thomas, who gets his care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, was in the wrong place and time when a random, stray bullet left him paralyzed from the waist down almost 20 years ago.

“I spent 34 days in rehab in Detroit,” said the Army Veteran who served in Germany from 1975 to 1977. “The therapist there was good at his job. I don’t think I was an easy guy to get along with before. Set in my ways. And when he brought that chair to me, I wanted to kill the world. He put up with me.

“That rec therapist before I left Detroit, he got under my skin. He dared me to go to the Winter Sports Clinic, and I did. Was hooked ever since then.”

That’s where he learned about some of the other adaptive programs available to Veterans.

He moved to Wisconsin when he found out the spinal cord-injury care was one of the tops in the nation, and he met Dr. Ken Lee, who is now the Milwaukee VA Spinal Cord Injury Center director.

Thomas has expanded beyond VA’s adaptive sports and is part of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association where he plays on a Division II team.

He’s also been on the board of the Wisconsin Paralyzed Veterans of America and does what he can to help other, newly injured Veterans.

“You can have a pity party for 30 days,” he said. “Then you gotta try. If you want to try, I’ll go all the way with you. I see some of these guys here (at the Wheelchair Games). I remember when they were the new guys, and now they love this. They’re my crew. I broke them in. You see them later, and they’re doing good, they’re taking it good.

“I love this. I love doing this stuff,” he said. “If you aren’t living, you’re dying.”
After several years of a steady downward spiral fueled by addiction and mental illness, Xander Renish may have found the turnaround at the tip of his drawing pencil.

Following several unsuccessful attempts at sobriety, the struggling 26-year-old Navy Veteran found himself in the Mental Health Residential Treatment Program at the Milwaukee VA.

“Prior to actually getting in here, I spent a lot of time by myself with an active addiction,” said Renish, who has been academically and professionally successful, despite his self-acknowledged demons. “I didn’t talk a lot about my emotions, I didn’t share that with other people. I wasn’t in counseling, I wasn’t in therapy. I was on a dark path ultimately leading toward death.”

A class called PhotoVoice within his treatment program has allowed his artistic skills to blossom. It has enabled him to illustrate his thoughts, and provide him with a glimpse of the future he finally envisions as possible.

PhotoVoice is one of three classes in the program, along with work skills and codependency, which lasts six weeks. Participants usually find a photo online or take a photo and then write down what that image means to them, but Renish was allowed to draw his own images.

Despite his artistic success, Renish said he has a long way to go to reach his goals, but believes he has found a path — or at least the beginning of one.

“Who I am in here is who I want to be out there,” he said. “Being in here is just reinforcing that. I’m excited to meet myself in six months. I’m really optimistic for the first time in my life. I’ve found a certain level of peace. I’m sleeping soundly at night. This is all new to me.”
A good measuring stick for any first-time festival is when the next one is being planned before the initial event is over.

The inaugural VA Beats & Eats, which featured a 5K Run-Walk-Roll, live bands, car show, food trucks, Veteran art show, historical tours, and info booths on VA health care, drew about 750 people to the Milwaukee VA Medical Center grounds on a pleasant summer Saturday.

“Today turned out to be a successful event,” said Dr. Christina Orr, assistant medical center director.

About 50 classic cars were on hand, drawing a steady stream of automotive enthusiasts and envious wishful-thinkers to the parking lot of the Spinal Cord Injury Center. The Jeff Clair Project provided the music at the car show. The remainder of the festivities centered around Lake Wheeler, just down the hill.

The Run-Walk-Roll jumpstarted the event with a 5K course through the campus. 13-year-old Mackenzie Frazier of Wauwatosa, ran with her father, Dan, a Navy Veteran. “This was fun,” she said. “I’m doing it next year, too.”

Having served in the military, Dan Frazier said participating in events such as Beats & Eats is a way to give back.

“I’m a Vet, my older brother’s a Vet, my dad’s a Vet, both grandfathers were Vets,” he said. “Anything I can do to support Veteran’s causes.”

The Veteran art show included a wide range of creativity, including drawings, photography, multimedia and ceramics.

The Lake Wheeler pavilion hosted more live music, which was provided by the Sonic Boomers, and their mix of classic rock and blues, and Cold Sweat and the Brew City Horns, with a blend of funk and R&B. DJ Wigglez capped off the afternoon.

“It was a great event,” said Delon Powell, co-chair of the event. “I really feel this is the first step in a great direction. I was especially pleased, again, for the participating groups and all the volunteers; everyone in the audience we spoke to had positive things to say.

“I’m looking forward to what we can do next year,” he said. “Overall, I give it a very solid grade.”

[VA BEATS & EATS] Festival
The U.S. scored the tying goal with 37 seconds left in regulation, and then went on to win 2-1.

Three Veterans on the team get their care at the Milwaukee VA’s Spinal Cord Injury Center — Josh Misiewicz, Travis Dodson and Ralph DeQuebec.

“[What was so unique about this year was the team came together in northern Illinois and then the Veterans on the team that needed care, were able to come up to the Milwaukee VA for our adaptive sports clinic],” said Uihlein, who splits his time at VA between the Emergency Department and the adaptive sports clinic. “It was great, because it allowed continuity for me as the team doc.

“No sled hockey team has ever won three consecutive gold medals,” said Uihlein. “This has been one of the most amazing and humbling experiences of my life, being part of the staff for this team. There are no finer athletes and no finer individuals than you’d find on this team.”

Many of the top sled hockey teams in the country are sponsored by National Hockey League teams. Playing for the Chicago team allows Misiewicz and Dodson to receive care in Milwaukee.

Misiewicz, 29, a native of La Grange, Illinois, stepped on a roadside bomb while deployed in Afghanistan in 2011, ultimately losing both legs above the knee.

Dodson, 33, who was a high school golfer in Deming, New Mexico, competed in the biathlon at the 2014 Paralympics in Sochi, Russia, before switching to sled hockey. He is a double amputee after being struck by a grenade while serving with the Marines in Iraq in 2007.

His lifelong sport was one of the first things Misiewicz thought of when he was injured.

“I grew up playing hockey, played high school, played college. When I got injured, one of my first thoughts was, ‘I’ll never play hockey again,’” he said. “When you first get injured, you don’t know what to expect. You don’t know anything, if you’ll ever have a girlfriend again, if you’ll ever do anything. You have no idea.

“Then through all the care and stuff, you start seeing that you can be normal and do stuff again.”

The Veterans said they want to participate in the 2020 Paralympics in Tokyo, Japan.

“If they’ll have me,” Uihlein said. “This team does way more for me, than I do for it on any given day. This team is amazing. The staff is amazing. I’m honored to be part of this team.”
There is a deadly opioid crisis in America with 42,249 dying from overdoses each year — including at least 330 from Milwaukee County.

For some, an addiction starts as normal pain treatment. Then patients move to illegal prescriptions or even heroin. Some use it to numb the pain of war, sexual trauma or other issues.

The Milwaukee VA has been at the forefront of treatment and reducing opioid use for more than five years.

The percentage of patients prescribed opioids has dropped from 14 percent in 2013 to 9.1 percent today. That is 2,364 less patients on opioids out of the 48,245 patients who receive prescriptions each year.

VA studies and other medical research show opioids are no better than Tylenol at treating back and knee pain. Researchers looked at all opioid use for chronic pain and found only minimal benefits in terms of pain severity.

“These medicines are still useful for specific diagnoses,” said Dr. Jeff Jackson, chief of General Internal Medicine. “We use opioids for managing cancer pain, post-operative pain and fractures. But doctors across VA are finding better ways to help our Veterans. The Milwaukee VA has led that charge for many years.”

Milwaukee VA care providers follow a strict opioid regimen. All prescriptions are logged in a statewide database since 2014. This dramatically cuts the possibility of a patient going from doctor to doctor and abusing medications with multiple prescriptions. VA also requires at least one urinalysis per year for patients on chronic opioids.

“The risk of opioid complications begins at about 50 milligrams, so whenever possible, our providers try to keep to less than that a day,” Jackson said. “If people want to reduce their opioid use, our goal is 10 percent reduction a month. Some ways we do that are with physical therapy, chiropractor work, acupuncture, and even yoga and tai chi. We also use art therapy, music therapy and equestrian therapy as part of an overall, holistic program.”

Other Whole Health programs include reiki healing touch, sleep classes and even aromatherapy. Our treatment options will increase with the new VA Whole Health Initiative.

For those dealing with substance abuse issues, our Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program provides care for our most vulnerable Veterans. It provides intensive, evidence-based care, lasting 45 days to seven months or more.

“Our goal is to help Veterans help themselves and see they can have a productive life — clean, sober and without illicit drugs,” said Dr. Martha Carlson, who oversees the program. “Similar care in the community could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

“Doctors across VA are finding better ways to help our Veterans,” said Dr. Jeff Jackson.
"I would not be here today if it was not for the staff and programs this VA offered me. I was depressed and homeless and had nowhere to go. A few days ago, I just finished my first year in college. I can never say enough good things about the staff and what this VA means to me. Thank you!"

That short note is one of many the Milwaukee VA Medical Center received over the last year from those grateful for our life-changing and life-saving work.

But for all those happy with their care, we know too many aren’t getting the VA health care they’ve earned and deserve. Of the 20 Veterans a day who commit suicide, 14 aren’t enrolled in VA.

We know our programs work. We know we can help you or a loved one.

“I’m starting to tear up a little as we talk about it, but this is sacred work,” said Cathy Coppolillo, one of our psychologists who treats our Veterans.

Her father served in the South Pacific with the U.S. Navy during World War II and went on to become a psychiatrist.

“I hope I’m honoring his legacy as a Veteran, and honoring his work in mental health.

“I feel so honored when someone takes a risk to come in with these scary thoughts of ending their life and allows me to sit with them in their darkest moment. And then, to help them through, to help them find new meaning, a new mission and a sense of purpose — there is no more important work.”

When calls come in to the Veterans Crisis Line, the professionals on the other end of the phone provide immediate counseling and emergency services, if necessary. That information is also sent to our Milwaukee VA where specialists reach out to set up an action plan.

Veterans Crisis Line referral calls have steadily increased over the years, from 388 in 2013 to 782 in 2018.

“That tells me it is working and we are doing a better job getting this information out to the Veterans. It also tells me our Veterans realize it takes incredible courage to ask for help,” said Karen Gage, our local suicide prevention coordinator.

Our VA offers an array of evidence-based treatment including inpatient care, outpatient therapy, support groups and holistic health care. In addition to traditional therapy, events such as adaptive sports and the National Wheelchair Games, the local and national creative arts festival and events like the “Feast of Crispian,” which helps Veterans connect with their feelings through Shakespeare, offer additional types of care.

“When I see a Veteran come through this and they are better off, it is so humbling, because I know the hard work it took to get there,” Coppolillo said. “But there is help. Good things absolutely happen.
An innovative partnership between the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and several neighboring areas could result in life-saving changes on 911 calls made by Veterans.

The project initially allowed Veterans who are West Allis residents and who receive care here, to be pre-identified by voluntarily providing their name, address and status as a Veteran to show up in the 911 system.

It has now expanded to Greenfield, St. Francis and those covered by the North Shore Fire Department in Bayside, Brown Deer, Glendale, Fox Point, River Hills, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay. This helps determine the most appropriate destination for care.

“What we have identified over the last few years is some of our sickest Veterans are not calling 911 to come to the hospital,” said Ben Thelen, Emergency Department nurse manager at the Milwaukee VA. “They’ll either drive themselves, or take a bus, or have a family member bring them. We’ve had them in the passenger seat in the car and pull into the ambulance bay and we have to do CPR out there.”

The project was funded by a Spark Innovation Investment grant from VA. The program is believed to be the first of its kind, Thelen said. The program will help change VA misconceptions.

“Veterans would say I have to go to VA, that’s where I get my care, that’s where I want to go, I like it there, they give good care — and the financial element,” Thelen said. “So, they have gotten in the habit of just driving here, which is kind of scary when you’re really sick and you’re behind the wheel, or someone is driving here.

“But, it happens every single day,” he said. “Our sickest patients still are not coming by ambulance, they’re coming through other means, so we really want to try to change that paradigm.”

The concept for the 911 program was the result of discussions between the Milwaukee VA and West Allis Fire Department, stemming from the department’s Mobile Integrated Health Initiative.

“We wanted to find out why were Veterans so afraid of calling 911? There’s a lot of different reasons,” said Lt. Jason Schaak of the WAFD, who is a Navy Veteran. “We wanted to quickly put in place a couple of ways we could transport more Veterans to the Emergency Department of their choosing, while we’re out in the field providing care.”

“What’s appropriate for a Veteran, and what I’d call a standard citizen, they vary a little bit. The VA is almost a specialty hospital for dealing with Veterans.

“They have special needs, they’re special people. They’ve had unique experiences in life and because of that, they require the resources of a Veterans hospital. If their medical condition allows, we may even drive a little further in terms of distance to get them to the most appropriate place, which would be the Veterans hospital.”
It was another busy year on our Milwaukee VA campus. We built or refurbished $22 million in projects. Some aren’t easily seen but still have a direct effect on the quality of care we deliver each day — whether it’s new steam line piping to our Mental Health Residential Treatment program in building 123, which provides heat and hot water more efficiently, or a new air handling unit for Adult Day Health Care so our older Veterans have a cool place to stay and relax. Other projects are much easier to see as the Milwaukee VA continues providing the best care for all our Veterans.

Residential homes

The Milwaukee VA opened two residential community homes on the east side of the campus. This $9.1 million project was completed Oct. 12 and are the final two of three community homes. These aren’t your typical nursing homes. Instead, the community homes provide high-level, round-the-clock, medical care in a home-like environment where nurses and specialized health technicians — called universal workers — build trusting bonds with those they serve. Each home has 10 private rooms and medical equipment is tucked out of the way. The rooms surround a community kitchen and a large table for family-style dining. There is also a fireplace, large living room and outdoor patios. Care is provided 24 hours a day.

“I paint with them, plant flowers, we make meals together,” said Mattie Murry, one of the universal workers. “It’s definitely relationship building. They get one-on-one care they won’t get anywhere else. They get to know us, we get to know them and we grow together as a family. We really are a family here.”

Parking Garage 7

Veterans and employees circling the campus for a parking space is a thing of the past, thanks to our second of two parking structures to open. Our newest, $9.6 million parking structure — this one for employees — was completed Oct. 23, 2017. The first structure for Veterans opened in 2016. All told, the parking structures created 435 additional spaces — 245 for Veterans and another 190 for employees.

Dental Clinic expansion

A trip to the dentist can raise anyone’s anxiety. But Dr. David Armin, acting dental service chief, wants Veterans to know they are in good hands at the Milwaukee VA Dental Clinic, where staff performed 64,187 procedures in fiscal 2018.

VA provides dental care to those with service-connected dental disabilities, those at 100 percent disability, prisoners of war, homeless Veterans, and those enrolled in Chapter 31 vocational rehabilitation. A recent $1.9 million expansion, completed in December 2017, is helping the dental staff keep up with the growing need to provide more care and increasingly complex dental services. The expansion added four dental treatment rooms and increased the size of the in-house dental lab where technicians make dentures, partials, crowns, bridgework, and implant restorations using state-of-the-art, computer technology.

The expansion also included a multimedia conference room and administrative work areas to improve efficiency. The increased size is now able to handle a staff which has almost doubled in size in the last decade. The most recent addition to the clinical staff includes three prosthodontics residents to treat complex dental cases and one periodontal resident to treat gum disease.
**Environmental Excellence**

The Milwaukee Veterans Affairs Medical Center received the Top 25 Environmental Excellence Award from Practice Greenhealth, the nation’s leading organization dedicated to environmental sustainability in health care.

Some of the areas the Milwaukee VA was honored for include:

- Creating a controlled substance segregation process to reduce pharmaceuticals in waterways. These pharmaceuticals are kept aside and incinerated instead of flushed into the water system.

- Using loaves of bread for food trays instead of individually wrapped slices. This saved 7,042 plastic wrappers — 56 pounds — from going into a landfill and saved $12,432.

- Continuing the electronics recycling event, which collected 117,600 pounds of electronics, an increase of more than 12,000 pounds from the year before.

- Replacing steam lines allowing us to reuse steam in another part of the campus.

The Milwaukee VA also received The Circle of Excellence Award in Water and Making Medicine Mercury Free Award.

There can be up to 10 designees selected for the Circle of Excellence category from more than 700 applicants. The award recognizes hospitals with exemplary programs in water conservation and efficiency.

**Research & Quality Improvement Award**

Dr. Peter Pahapill and medical resident Dr. Elsa Arocho-Quinones received the Medical College of Wisconsin Affiliated Hospitals Award for their work in greatly reducing post-neurosurgical infections.

The two created a rigorous checklist of infection prevention protocols for Veterans and medical staff to follow throughout the surgical recovery time. Their work involves putting implants in the spinal cord and brain.

The protocol checklist cut post-surgical infections from 3 percent to less than .5 percent.

**Early health care executive**

Omar Knighton was named an Early Career Health Care Executive by the American College of Health Care Executives.

The administrative officer for the Office of Quality Management and Safety manages the patient advocates and administrative staff who provide support to Infection Control, Risk Management, Patient Safety, and Performance Improvement programs.

He has previously worked as a program analyst for Spinal Cord Injury; business and procurement manager for Logistics; and payroll technician for Finance.

Knighton has been an ACHE member since 2014 and was part of the leadership development program between 2017 and 2018.

**Fellow of Radiology**

Dr. A.G. Bharatkumar, division manager of Medical Imaging and also an associate professor with the Medical College of Wisconsin, was named a Fellow of the American College of Radiology.

This award is one of the highest honors the ACR bestows only upon 10 percent of its members who demonstrate a history of service to the College, organized radiology and research.

Bharatkumar was lauded for establishing the Milwaukee VA as a training site for radiology residents.
### Demographics
- 16 counties served
- 7,500 square miles

### Facilities
- Milwaukee, Green Bay HCC, Appleton, Cleveland and Union Grove Clinics

### Workforce
- **Physician Assistant**: 14
- **Optometrist**: 12
- **Speech Pathology & Audiology**: 15
- **Dental Officers**: 32
- **Pharmacists**: 93
- **Social Workers**: 157
- **Nurses**: 925
- **Nurse Practitioners**: 69
- **Medical Officers**: 385

### Stats
- **Veterans Served**: 64,350
  - Male **60,039**, Female **4,311**
- **Bed Totals**: 468
  - Hospital **196**
  - Community Living Center **113**
  - Domiciliary **150**
  - Transition **9**
- **Total Bed Days of Care**: 119,930
- **Hospital Visits**: 857,415
  - Outpatient **824,165**
  - ED Visits **24,192**
  - Inpatient Admissions **9,058**
- **Surgical Procedures**: 4,144
- **Clinical Laboratory Tests**: 2,800,000
- **Prescriptions Filled**: 1,371,756
- **Prosthetic Services Rcvd**: 33,017
- **FY18 Expenditures**: $701,146,290
- **Construction**: $30,700,000
- **Volunteer Hours**: 81,706
- **Donations**: $2,263,786
  - Monetary **$291,403**
  - Volunteer Value **$1,972,383**
- **Pathology Test Volumes**: 2,801,000
  - Clinical **2,761,000**
  - Anatomic **40,000**

### Facilities
- **Green Bay**: Door, Sheboygan, Calumet
- **Milwaukee**: Milwaukee, Green Bay HCC, Appleton, Cleveland and Union Grove Clinics
- **Waukesha**: Racine, Door, Sheboygan
- **Racine**: Racine
- **Cleveland**: Cleveland
- **Appleton**: Appleton
- **Ozaukee**: Ozaukee
- **Waupaca**: Waupaca
- **Shawano**: Shawano
- **Winnebago**: Winnebago
- **Fox**: Kewaunee, Oconto, Calumet
- **Manitowoc**: Manitowoc
- **Brown**: Brown
- **Shawano**: Shawano
- **Door**: Door
- **Kewaunee**: Kewaunee
- **Outagamie**: Outagamie
- **Washington**: Washington
- **Marinette**: Marinette
- **Waukesha**: Waukesha
- **Ozaukee**: Ozaukee

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