

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Milwaukee VA Medical Center

CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI VA MEDICAL CENTER, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Director's Welcome



Another year has come to a close and we are faced with the same challenge of wanting to tell you about all the great accomplishments of your Milwaukee VA Medical Center and the people who made it happen, but only having so much space to tell that story.

I believe we've done a good job picking the best of the best for this year's annual report, including the history-making work that has begun on Old Main, the centerpiece of our beautiful campus. It is here where history was made more than 150 years ago when construction started on Old Main to take care of our Civil War Veterans — the first of three Soldiers Homes in the United States and the true birthplace of the modern-day Department of Veterans Affairs. Now history has come full circle, as The Alexander Company begins their project to turn Old Main into housing and services for homeless Veterans.

As VA continues its world-class care into the 21st century, you can learn about the innovative work we're doing for patients through our Whole Health initiative. In this fiscal year, we served 1,935 Veterans through an array of programs in this area, improving quality of life for all those we serve.

And speaking of innovation, check out what we've accomplished in the way of research and development, always staying on the cutting edge to offer our Veterans care they won't find anywhere else.

As always, we know it takes great people to make this happen, and our employee of the year has played an integral part in many of those technological issues. Most importantly, she epitomizes the caring attitude we have for all our Veterans.

Finally, thank you to this wonderful community, that has always stepped up to serve and care for our Veterans, yesterday and today. Nowhere was that more apparent than in Karate America's fundraiser that provided \$19,000 that went directly to our Veterans.

You'll find this and so much more in this year's Annual Report.

Thank you for trusting us with the health care of all those who borne the battle!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel S. Zomchek".

Daniel S. Zomchek, Ph.D., FACHE
Medical Center Director/CEO

Leadership



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 33 years. He is also the dean for VA 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 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.

Community Clinics

Green Bay Milo C. Huempfer Health Care Center

2851 University Avenue, Green Bay, Wisconsin

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
- Home-Based Primary Care
- 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.



Appleton John H. Bradley Clinic

10 Tri-Park Way, Appleton, Wisconsin

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
- Optometry
- Basic Radiology
- Laboratory
- HUD/VASH services
- Referrals to Specialty Care at the Green Bay HCC and Milwaukee VA Medical Center



Cleveland Clinic

1205 North Avenue, Cleveland, Wisconsin

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 with limited laboratory services
- Telehealth



- Referrals to Specialty Care at the Green Bay HCC and the Milwaukee VA Medical Center

Union Grove Clinic

Shemanske Hall, 21425 Spring Street, Union Grove, Wisconsin

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
- Phlebotomy with limited laboratory services



- Referrals to Specialty Care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center

Union Grove - Home-Based Primary Care



RN Farrah Mosley helps care for Marine Veteran Kenneth Schmitt during a home based primary care visit in Elkhorn, Wisconsin.

Even when he was still driving, it was difficult for Kenneth Schmitt to load his power wheelchair into his car and navigate the rural roads of southeastern Wisconsin to the nearest VA facility.

Schmitt, who moved with his family when he was 6 years old to a farm near Elkhorn where he still lives, no longer drives but still receives VA medical care through Home-Based Primary Care, an at-home primary care program for Veterans with complex medical, social and cognitive disorders for whom routine clinic-based care is not effective.

Schmitt receives his primary care at home through the Union Grove VA Clinic, which is about 40 miles south of Milwaukee. The Union Grove clinic, which opened in 1998 and moved to its current location in 2015, serves about 3,500 Veterans each year. The clinic offers primary care, mental health care, telehealth, phlebotomy with limited lab services and referrals to specialty care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, in addition to Home-Based Primary Care.

"We are a primary care clinic that goes out to the Veterans homes," said Angela Gard, assistant nurse manager of community based care at the Milwaukee VA. "We have staff that works out of the Union Grove clinic."

The multidisciplinary team consists of a primary care provider, medical director, pharmacist, RN case manager, social worker, registered dietitian, psychologist and an occupational therapist. HBPC provides cost-effective primary care services in the home for Veterans as they face the challenges of disability, aging and chronic disease.

"It works really well for Mr. Schmitt, who lives out in the country," said Farrah Mosley, a registered nurse who does Home-Based Primary Care from the Union Grove clinic.

"For example, Mr. Schmitt is a diabetic," Mosley said. "So, the dietitian comes in and completes a nutrition assessment and collaborates with the Veteran to develop a plan of care with goals and outcomes. He has done really well with it and he has really brought his numbers down."

Mosley said she visits Schmitt every four to five weeks, but the schedule varies to meet the needs of each patient.

Schmitt, who was an ejection seat technician in the Marines, said he appreciates both the care and the convenience offered by the program.

"I have been without a license for almost two years now," Schmitt said. "Before that I had a power wheelchair that I loaded in my car, but it was so stressful. Even if someone was trying to help, it would just wear me down. That helped a lot, but it was so hard. By the time I would get back home, I was done for. Takes away a lot of stress."

Gard said Home-Based Primary Care also allows Veterans to remain in familiar and comfortable surroundings to maximize their function, minimize institutionalization, and maintain quality of life.

"We try to keep people in their houses longer instead of going to a nursing home. They've lived there forever. It's not very often that they want to move."



Robert Wilkie, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs (center); Victoria Brahm, acting VISN 12 director (left); and Dan Zomchek, director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

Secretary Robert Wilkie visits Milwaukee

Five employees of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center system each received one of the biggest surprises of their respective careers courtesy of Robert Wilkie, the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Wilkie paid a brief visit to the Milwaukee VA to discuss national Veterans Affairs initiatives with medical center leadership, conduct one-on-one interviews with local media, and tour the National Soldiers Home Historic District on the campus.

Wilkie recognized the five employees for their contributions, presenting them with a challenge coin at a ceremony in the Matousek Auditorium. None of the recipients knew in advance of the recognition.

"To me, the most exciting part of his visit was when he presented the coins to our staff," said Dan Zomchek, director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. "Because, our staff really is what sets us apart from other health care systems, and what just makes Zablocki such a great place to be for our patients."

Receiving the challenge coins were Luke Yanny, graphic designer in medical media; Patty Davis, DAV transportation coordinator; Laurie Vail, MISSION Act champion and MIS division manager; Gregg Gwidt, surgical care program manager at the Green Bay VA Health Care Center; and Val Adricula, environmental management services.

"I am very pleased, but pleased is probably the wrong word. I'm very honored," Davis said. "It's nice that I was recognized, but I don't do it for the recognition. You do it because it's what needs to be done. Everyone makes this happen in here, not just me."

Davis' level of appreciation of the challenge coin might only be appreciated by someone from Wisconsin.

"It's on my shelf of honor, between my family pictures and my Packers football," she said.

Vail knew ahead of time about the coin ceremony, but in a completely different context.

"I was told I was going because Luke Yanny was getting an award and his supervisor was out of the office," Vail said. "I'm the division manager for that area, so I was going to be with him. I didn't know until I got to the Matousek that I was also getting an award. That was the first I knew and I was shocked."

The trip was Wilkie's first to Milwaukee as the VA Secretary. Afterward, he visited the Milwaukee Regional Office of the Veterans Benefits Administration, and then the Tomah VA Medical Center.



Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie thanks Milwaukee VA employee and Veteran Luke Yanny. On top of his stellar graphic design expertise, Yanny submitted an award-winning piece of art depicting the horrors of war to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.



Employee of the Year – Katie Schultz

As the assistive technology program director, Katie Schultz often is at the forefront of innovation that benefits Veterans receiving care at the Milwaukee VA.

Yet, Schultz believes the appropriate use of technology to best meet a Veteran's needs is more important than the technology itself. That approach, along with her dedication and unwavering enthusiasm, led to Schultz's selection as the Milwaukee VA Medical Center's Employee of the Year.

"Our Assistive Technology Program has just skyrocketed under her," said Dr. Kenneth Lee, Spinal Cord Injury Center division chief at the Milwaukee VA. "Patients that would have become dependent on others have become independent in many areas.



This spoon was adapted for use by a patient with limited function of their hands or arms through the Milwaukee VA's assistive technology program.

"Technology has always had limitations, but then the creativity takes over and that's what Katie has," Lee said. "Katie has this creativity in her mind where she can visualize the technology and make it work for our patients."

As part of her duties, she has spearheaded the nationally recognized 3D Design and Printing at the Spinal Cord Injury Center, the only 3D printing program within the VA system operated by therapists.

The Employee of the Year is selected from those who are chosen as the medical center's Employee of the Month. Even that was a surprise, she said.

"I did not know that I was nominated," Schultz said. "I got an email while I was off-station at a conference that I had received Employee of the Month. It was unexpected."

Schultz is extremely appreciative of the recognition, but is quick to credit others. She also hopes it directs focus toward the program.

"I work with an amazing team," she said. "But, yes, people see it as a positive thing for both therapy and spinal cord."

Schultz enjoys the challenge of using or adapting technology to fit the needs of a specific patient.

"Our guidelines talk about, what's the high-tech option, what's the low-tech option, what's the no-tech option," she said. "Out of those three, what's my best option? The high-tech solution is not the answer for everyone."

The bottom line is that Schultz is a difference maker, Lee said.

"When you get spinal cord injury patients, especially those who are quadriplegic who have limited functions, and someone like Katie comes along and can make a difference between becoming dependent on a person to becoming independent because of her skills, that concept probably is unimaginable to them.

"When we're at the end of our rope, she has that technology background to turn it into one step beyond the limit that we as a provider have. That makes a world of difference for everybody."

Community Volunteers – Karate America

The board-breaking folks at Karate America used their hearts as well as their hands to make a difference for thousands of Milwaukee-area Veterans.

Instructors, staff and students from three area Karate America studios, along with employees from the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, went on a \$19,000 shopping spree at the Target store in West Allis to purchase needed items for Veterans.

Filling cart after cart with underwear, socks, sweat pants, shoes, laundry detergent, personal care products, bedding and therapy supplies, the group took care of the Milwaukee VA's entire Wish List in one carefully coordinated excursion.

Many of the items were earmarked for Veterans in the HUD-VASH program, which helps homeless Veterans and their families find and sustain permanent housing. Others were destined for Veterans at area VA clinics.



Karate America started a wave of goodwill they hope spreads throughout the country, after raising \$19,000 in a board-breaking event, and using every penny to buy items for our Milwaukee VA Veterans.

Money for the shopping spree was raised earlier in the year at "Knock Out the Wish List" board-breaking marathons in the nearby communities of Brookfield, Pewaukee and Menomonee Falls. Participants could break a board for a \$10 donation, with all money going to the Milwaukee VA. The event surpassed its original goal of \$15,000. "I knew our fundraiser was going to bring in a lot more, especially for Veterans, than just socks," said Kyle Mealy, a chief instructor at the Brookfield school. "So, what can we do? And then we realized that financially we could probably do the whole thing, so that's what we did."

The dominoes of success continued to fall into place when Mealy reached out to Antonija Nekich, an executive team leader in Human Resources at Target.

"My husband's grandfather actually passed away at VA the weekend before I got the call from them," Nekich said. "What a great way to honor him and the Veterans in our country. It is a great day. How can you not smile on a day like today?"

Among those helping the shoppers navigate the aisles was Clifford Wallenfang, an 83-year-old Air Force Veteran who works at Target and gets care at the Milwaukee VA.

"This was good, this was exciting. I'm pleased with what they did for the Veterans," said Wallenfang. "I was in the hospital here for 13 weeks a year and a half ago. I use them for everything I need."

The shopping spree also held special meaning for Jeff Quirk, owner of Karate America in Brookfield and Pewaukee.

"We've done fundraisers, but never anything to this level," Quirk said. "From my own personal story, my dad counts on the VA. He was in Vietnam, First Battalion, Third Marines. He is dependent on the VA and you guys take such good care of him. When I heard that these guys set it up with the VA, it floored me."





Veteran Spotlight – Arthur Montgomery

For Arthur Montgomery, swapping Milwaukee’s urban sprawl for the rural farmlands of northern Illinois, was the perfect place to find peace — especially atop a horse.

Montgomery participates in equine therapy at BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding and Educational Center in Harvard, Illinois, as part of a bimonthly program aimed at enhancing day-to-day personal skills, ranging from open communication to self-esteem.

“It has helped in a relaxing way — especially in getting away from the city environment,” said Montgomery. “You just put all your worries away. Your mind is not on the normal life things.”

Montgomery, an Army Veteran, was deployed to both Afghanistan and Iraq as a part of a tank squadron. After completing his Army service, Montgomery’s return to civilian life left him unmotivated, lost and, ultimately, homeless.

“I have no idea why that happened,” said Montgomery. “I went from having everything laid out for me, to having no reason to do anything. It could have been the war, I am really unsure.”

The equine therapy was part of the Milwaukee VA’s Housing & Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing — or HUD-VASH — for Veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

“I have never ridden before in my life and after my first time doing it, I loved it,” said Montgomery. “The horses are real mellow and relaxed and some really smart animals.”

Courtney Zeller, a recreation therapist at the Milwaukee VA, said Montgomery has grown a lot on many levels since he first started equine therapy. He has obtained housing and helps elderly with projects such as yard work and snow removal.

“When I first met him, he was really quiet and would kind of just be in the background,” Zeller said. “And now he is one of the more talkative, and one of the Veterans to encourage other Veterans to try new things.”

Amber Eck, Veteran services director at BraveHearts, said the goal is to help Veterans beyond the riding arena.

“Our goal is to get them as independent as possible,” Eck said. “Whether they are riding or volunteering — we make sure we give them the tools they need.”

Maintaining day-to-day peace is what Montgomery strives for — taking a couple of hours of serenity and integrating that into his life so those peaceful hours become days and years.

“I am just concentrating on being here,” he said. “I realize what I need to do, keeping my back straight or adjusting the stirrups. But then again, know how to apply that when I return to the city life.”

Veteran Spotlight – Halli Lannan



As a 41-year-old Army Veteran and VA health care patient with stage four breast cancer, and a lesbian who is a staunch advocate for the LGBTQ community, Halli Lannan admits she doesn't fit the stereotypical image of a trend-setting fashion model.

But that's why Lannan was willing to walk the runway during New York Fashion Week to raise awareness for metastatic breast cancer research.

Metastatic breast cancer, or MBC, is cancer that has metastasized, or traveled to other parts of the body.

Lannan said that by walking in the fashion show, she wanted to "bring light" to MBC research. "We need more attention and more funds toward research," she said.

Lannan also broached the subject of visibility. "I don't usually see people that look like me in much of anything, especially not breast cancer campaigns," said Lannan, who has a wife and a college-age son. "The majority of women that I saw in breast cancer campaigns were young, long hair and feminine, and running on the beach with their husband and their dog, and have breasts."

Breast cancer may be Lannan's toughest challenges faced, but it's by no means the first.

An assistant director of curriculum and instruction for the Racine, Wisconsin, Unified School District, Lannan has completed two master's degrees since leaving the military. Completion of her dissertation for a doctorate as a Tillman Scholar has been slowed by the effects of chemotherapy, but she is determined to finish her degree.

A medic during her five years in the Army, Lannan experienced military sexual trauma. She has also confronted discrimination both personally and professionally because she is a lesbian.

After being diagnosed with stage two breast cancer in 2016, Lannan went through what she called "a rough six months of some pretty harsh chemo" and had a mastectomy.

Lannan was declared cancer free, but a year later it was found in her lung and she underwent surgery. In February, a new spot was found in her lung, and she will again continue chemotherapy.

Lannan has refused to let challenging circumstances define her life.

That's why Lannan agreed to take part in Cancerland's 3rd Annual New York Fashion Week Show. The show benefited METAvivor, a non-profit organization founded in 2009 by MBC patients that focuses on stage four cancer research. Each of the runway models in the fashion show are living with MBC. Most wore clothing from AnaOno, which designs intimate apparel and loungewear for those affected by breast cancer.

Instead of wearing lingerie, Lannan made her statement by wearing body paint, which took three hours to apply.

"It was very much a moment of, I completely have control of my body right now, I'm choosing to do this, I'm sending a message of strength and empowerment, and I hope that other people out there that have dealt with the same thing see that."



Whole Health

As a former primary care nurse with a background in recreation and fitness, Stacy Olson has a unique perspective on the benefits of Whole Health.

"Providers were trained — find it, fix it," said Olson, the Whole Health program manager at the Milwaukee VA. "So now we're changing it to be what matters to the patient, instead of what's the matter with them."

"Looking at their values, their mission, their life — what's really important to them, and using that as motivators to drive their health care," she said.

Whole Health programming at the Milwaukee VA has expanded significantly in the last year to offer more options to Veterans, Olson said.

Yoga often comes to mind when Whole Health is mentioned, but the program encompasses much more than that with meditation, tai chi, acupuncture, chiropractic care, and occupational therapy with biofeedback programs.

"We have a functional restoration group which focuses on pain and non-pharmaceutical pain management," Olson said. "We have open gym, open swim. We have what's called Zentangle, which is more like meditation through drawing."

The change to a Whole Health philosophy by Veterans Affairs has gained national recognition.

It's also a personal topic for VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, whose father was a combat soldier in Vietnam. In a radio interview after a visit to the Dayton VA Medical Center in Ohio, Wilkie talked about the change to a Whole Health approach.

"My father — terribly wounded in the invasion of Cambodia, 30 years of jumping out of airplanes, left service needing two new knees, two new hips, had a bad back and had lead in his body that they couldn't take out — a lifetime ahead of pain," Wilkie told the radio station. "If I had told him we're going to treat that with acupuncture or yoga he would have probably flattened my nose against my face, but we are changing the culture and the approach."

The Milwaukee VA is making a concerted effort toward Whole Health and the benefits it provides for Veterans, Olson said.

"Whole Health is actually a transformation of care," she said. "We're going from patient-centered to a patient-driven concept. We're trying to engage patients into being partners with their provider and making decisions on their plan of care, as well as giving them more tools to self-manage their own health."

**Whole
Health**
for **Life** 



Veteran Matthew Turenen leaps for a catch surrounded by Veterans Dimitrius McDowell, Amy Fiene (peer support specialist), Cory Lynn and Westin Peters. This group and dozens of others played football and adaptive football during an afternoon with the group Play For Your Freedom at the Milwaukee VA. Former Green Bay Packer Gary Brown was on hand for the event.



Sam Park performs a dry needling for Veteran Steven Weber.



Doris Wihowski, a 13-year Army Veteran, trims an eggplant in the garden she and a handful of Veterans tend on the Milwaukee VA campus. The gardening program is part of Milwaukee's Whole Health program.



Stacy Olson from the Milwaukee VA's Whole Health program practices yoga during Warrior Stance Yoga & Relaxation at the Milwaukee County War Memorial.



Jerry Roberts takes part in his cardiovascular appointment via teleconference more than 300 miles from Dr. Nicole Lohr.

Telecardiology

Jerry Roberts is quick to admit an appreciation for his cardiac care is based solely on convenience.

From his home in Mercer, a small town of about 1,700 roughly 60 miles northeast of Rhinelander, Wisconsin, the 79-year-old Navy Veteran would face a one-way drive of about 300 miles to the Milwaukee VA Medical Center for a cardiology appointment.

Instead, Roberts travels about 30 miles to a VA clinic in Ironwood, Michigan, where his examination is conducted by a doctor in Milwaukee via the VA's telecardiology program.

"I think it's great that they came up with that," Roberts said. "Otherwise, it's a long, long ways away. I'd recommend it to anybody."

The video-teleconferencing system connects a Veteran and nurse at a remote location with a doctor at the other end.

"Basically, I get an email from the nurse at whatever site, and I open up the software," said Nicole Lohr, a cardiologist at the Milwaukee VA. "I put these headphones on and the nurse on the other end has a stethoscope that's hooked up to the computer, that then transmits breath sounds, heart sounds. You can do a fairly decent physical exam."

The Milwaukee VA, which already had a strong telecardiology program with its clinics in Green Bay, Appleton, Cleveland and Union Grove, as well as several other VA facilities, recently was awarded expansion funds from the Office of Rural Health to serve as the Telecardiology Hub for VISN 12, which includes VA facilities in Wisconsin, northern Michigan and northern Illinois.

Lohr said the expansion funds will allow for additional employees to be allocated to the telecardiology program, as well as expand its reach.

"For some people who have made a decision to live in very remote areas, they're still allowed an opportunity that their choice of location isn't going to hurt them physically, that they will get a good doctor, and they will have access to health care," Lohr said.

Veterans who take advantage of the telecardiology option enjoy the experience, Lohr said.

"I crack the same jokes whether I'm in the office or not," she said. "So, detachment through technology is not really a barrier.

"In the age of Apple Watches and all this other stuff, now we're basically saying that where the doctor came to your house in the past, it's now cool to go back to that kind of thinking," she said. "It's personal, but in a different way. It's using technology to get back to keeping everything local and I just find that appealing."

Research – 3D Printing



The standard joystick options on power wheelchairs did not meet the needs of Jim Borelli.

Borelli, who became a quadriplegic in 2018 after falling down a flight of stairs, was unable to maintain contact with the round surface of the joystick to control his power wheelchair.

Thanks to a combination of creativity and logical analysis, and the use of a 3D printer, physical and occupational therapists at the Milwaukee VA created a specially designed rectangular joystick that works for Borelli.

"I would drive the chair maybe five or ten feet before slipping off the (joystick)," he said. "It was very frustrating and made life more difficult than it already was."

Borelli's physical and occupational therapists tried a variety of solutions without success.

"They were banging their head against the wall, trying various methods — six different joysticks — without any real headway," said Katie Schultz, a physical therapist and assistive technology professional with the Spinal Cord Injury Center.

After watching Borelli's arm and shoulder movements, Schultz realized the issue was the shape of the joystick. With a computer-assisted design program, she created the rectangular joystick on the 3D printer — at a cost of roughly \$3.

"It was the first time since he was injured that he was able to drive his power wheelchair," Schultz said. "That opens up a world. The fact that you can leave your hospital room and actually go out and talk to people in the hallway. That's huge."



Katie Powell is one of three people who helped make life easier for Veterans with the Milwaukee VA's 3D printing.

The Milwaukee VA was able to purchase the 3D printer through the VA Innovation Grant Program. Schultz and her colleagues, Katie Powell and Jaclyn Raab, wrote the grant, completed a training course, and worked with a mentor in Rehab Engineering from the Richmond VA.

"What makes us different, what makes us a complete standout, is that we are the only 3D printing program that is run by therapists," said Katie Powell, one of three who works on the program. "Every other 3D printing program in the country has a rehab engineer as a part of their team."

"For me, the clincher is time," she said. "We've gone from six to eight weeks, down to three or four days. Not only are you saving time, now the Veteran has that in their possession much sooner. That is the part that continues to amaze me, day in and day out."

Research – Independence Drive

When Garrett and Jennifer Smith got news of his Lou Gehrig's Disease, they got angry. Then he went fishing and lived life.

Two years later, confined to a wheelchair and almost totally paralyzed from the neck down, Garrett is still living on his terms. The Navy Veteran is the first person in Wisconsin to receive the Independence Drive that allows him to steer and move his power wheelchair with a gaze of his eye.

The Independence Drive, created by Evergreen Circuits, is basically a green box that attaches to the back of a wheelchair and connects to a Surface Pro computer. Although Smith is quickly losing use of hand muscles, he can also use this to surf the internet and talk with friends and family through Skype, Facebook and other social media platforms.

"There was anger. There was a lot of anger when we found out (about the disease)," Jennifer said. "But that's not right to stay angry. It was a time to love and be with family for all the time we had left. He went fishing and played cards. He played with the kids."

By October 2018, he was in the chair full time.

The Milwaukee VA got him the Independence Drive as soon as it was cleared by the Food and Drug Administration.

The equipment costs \$12,000 and VA will soon be able to get them for other eligible Veterans.

So what all can Garrett do with it?

"Oh man, what can I not do?" he says.

He controls turns and movements of the chair by fixing his gaze for a half second on the computer screen's arrows.

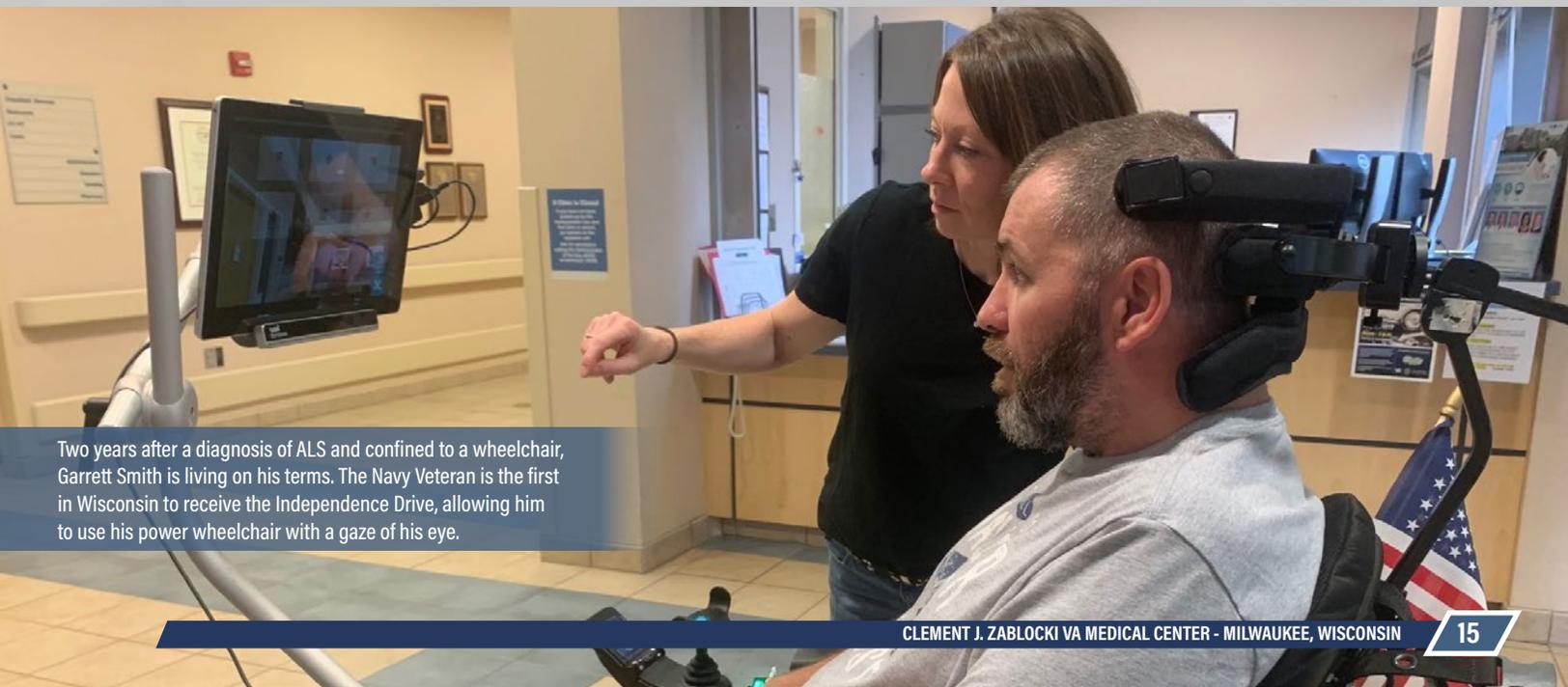
"He almost ran me over yesterday!" his son, Caleb, 6, giggled as Garrett took his chair for a spin around the Spinal Cord Injury Center.

When he isn't using it to steer and drive his chair, he uses the same technology to shop on Amazon. He can adjust the thermostat and lights in his house from another screen. He only has to gaze at letters of the alphabet to type on the screen and can even use that to talk out loud.

He stares for a moment at the screen, his eyes rapidly moving from one letter to the next. Then a robotic voice says: "Hello. Nice to meet you."

Like other ALS families, Garrett and Jennifer don't know how much longer they have but are determined to continue living — and enjoying — the life they have.

"I'm still here," he says. "You never give up."



Two years after a diagnosis of ALS and confined to a wheelchair, Garrett Smith is living on his terms. The Navy Veteran is the first in Wisconsin to receive the Independence Drive, allowing him to use his power wheelchair with a gaze of his eye.

The Soldiers Home Project

The iconic building known as Old Main on the historic Milwaukee VA campus moved a step closer toward once again fulfilling its original mission of caring for Veterans.

Old Main and five other historic buildings on the grounds will be converted to housing for homeless or at-risk Veterans and their families, as part of an Enhanced Use Lease agreement with VA, The Alexander Company and the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee.

A ceremony marking the major, \$44 million remodeling project took place Sept. 20, with Old Main as the picturesque backdrop.

The project is expected to be completed by late fall 2020 and will provide 101 housing units.

Speakers at the event included Dan Zomchek, director of Milwaukee VA Medical Center; Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers; Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett; Sen. Tammy Baldwin; Army Veteran Gary Wetzel, recipient of the Medal of Honor; and Joe Alexander, president of The Alexander Company.

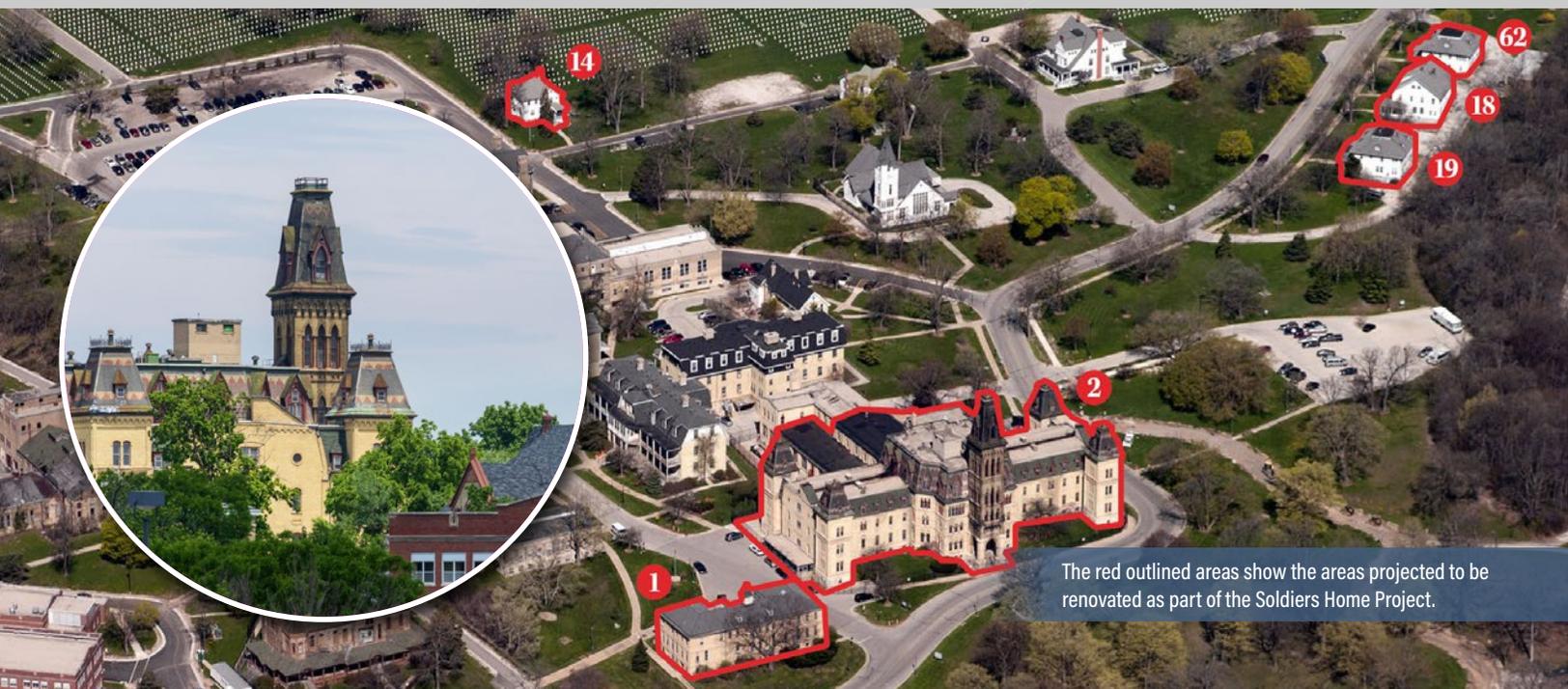
In addition to preserving the historic buildings, the project will allow Veterans easy access to the complete spectrum of health care offered at the Milwaukee VA.

"The ability for us to have such close proximity for these at-risk, vulnerable Veterans, to not only have housing, but access to the plethora of services that we have, from mental health and primary care, and surgery, is really unparalleled," Zomchek said. "This is really going to make a meaningful difference in scores and scores of our Veterans."

Barrett praised the multilevel cooperation and years of effort to make the project a reality.

"Everybody came together because this is the right thing to do for our Veterans, and it is the right thing to do for this hallowed ground," Barrett said. "This is what this is all about. It's all about this peaceful place, to pay tribute to the men and women who put their lives on the line for our freedoms."

Medal of Honor recipient Gary G. Wetzel speaks at the groundbreaking of the Soldiers Home renovation in September. Also pictured (from left to right) Dr. Dan Zomchek, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, and HUD Administrator Joseph Galvan.



The red outlined areas show the areas projected to be renovated as part of the Soldiers Home Project.

Construction - Kitchen, Clinics, Emergency Department

Three major projects, including kitchen expansion, significantly increasing the size of the Emergency Department, and a renovation to facilitate a move of outpatient clinics accounted for almost 70 percent of more than \$29 million in completed construction projects at the Milwaukee VA campus in the past year.

"These are things people see," said Linda Sue Schwarz, chief engineer and division manager of Facility Management at the Milwaukee VA. "The kitchen, room service — big improvement for our Nutrition and Food Services. The big projects, everybody sees them, but we do a lot of other little stuff along the way.

"It's an evolving process, it's always something," Schwarz said. "Building 6 was built in 1879. The CLCs (community living centers), in 2017. That's 138 years in age difference in the buildings that we have people in."

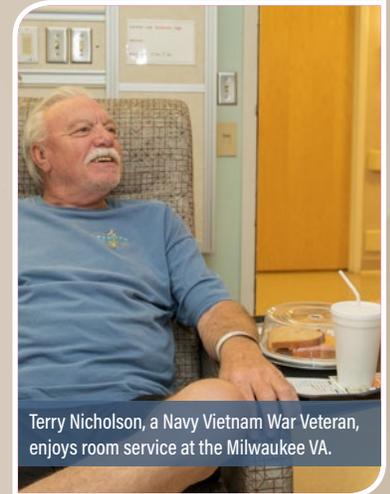
The \$8.46 million project included construction of a 7,500-square-foot addition to the west side of the main hospital for a new kitchen. The project included new equipment to provide room service food preparation and delivery for inpatients.

"We got all new walk-in coolers, all new kitchen equipment from a flat-top grill, to stove, refrigerators, a new tray line, new dish machine, new dish room," said Amanda Henderson, Nutrition and Food Services division manager. "The end result is definitely nice. The space is built for the kind of service that we're providing to this hospital today. The previous old kitchen was built for our hospital 50-plus years ago."

The new kitchen, which opened in mid-December 2018, also made it possible to greatly expand the room service dining option for inpatients, who can "order what they want, when they want, between the hours of 6:45 a.m. and 6:45 p.m."

"We did it (room service) in the old kitchen, we just had to do it with a very small menu," Henderson said. "We were able to expand our menu when we moved to the new kitchen once we had the right equipment."

The room service dining option has been well-received by patients, Henderson said.



Terry Nicholson, a Navy Vietnam War Veteran, enjoys room service at the Milwaukee VA.

Renovation of half the eighth floor to relocate numerous clinics is expected to improve the overall Veteran experience through redesign and more efficient work space.

As part of the \$6.74 million project, 24,000 square feet was renovated to relocate most services and clinics from 7A to 8A.

Among the departments that moved were: Vascular Surgery, General Surgery, CT Surgery, Plastic Surgery, Wound Clinic, Vascular Lab, Orthopedic Surgery, Neurosurgery, and Urology.

"It's really very pretty and expansive, we doubled the number of exam rooms," said Kris Stephens, program manager of Surgical Care. "It's wonderful because patients won't have to wait as long."

The project took about three years from planning to completion, with the actual construction taking more than a year. Once the new space was ready, Stephens said the clinics which were moved were only shut down two days.

Stephens said the addition to more efficient use of space and upgrades goes beyond hammers, saws and drywall dust.

"The goal is to improve service to our Veterans."



The \$6.74 million dollar project on 8A was done to improve the overall Veteran experience

The 5,995-square-foot-addition almost doubled the emergency care capabilities at the Milwaukee VA.

The \$5.36 million project expanded the Emergency Department from 11 beds to 20, including two rooms specially designed for mental health patients. The expansion was designed to optimize care and greatly reduce waiting times for Veterans.

The expansion was designed and built to match the latest thinking on fast tracking people through an Emergency Department, with specific rooms and patient flow based on treatment needs.

"It's really allowed us to implement more efficient staffing and flow processes to help see Veterans much quicker than we used to be able to do," said Ben Thelen, Emergency Department program manager at the Milwaukee VA.



Ben Thelen, Emergency Department program manager, shows some of the work being done, mid-construction.

Awards



Clinician Excellence for Therapists

Joyce Casey, a recreation therapist at the Spinal Cord Injury Center, received the 2019 Clinician Excellence Award for Therapists from the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

The award recognizes clinicians who have demonstrated exceptional professional achievement and expertise in the clinical care of individuals diagnosed with spinal cord injury/disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or multiple sclerosis.

ALS Certified Treatment Center of Excellence

The Milwaukee VA ALS Clinic achieved certification as a Certified Treatment Center of Excellence through The ALS Association.

The Milwaukee VA is one of two facilities in Wisconsin and one of five in the VA system to receive the Certified Treatment Center of Excellence certification.

The ALS Association Certified Treatment Center of Excellence Program designs, implements and monitors a national standard of best-practice care in the management of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

To become certified as a center of excellence, each clinic must: Meet The ALS Association's clinical care and treatment standards, based on AAN Practice Parameters; participate in ALS-related research; and successfully complete a comprehensive site review.



Wolcott Award

Dr. Michael Erdmann, Milwaukee VA chief of staff, received the 2018 Mark Wolcott Award for Excellence in Clinical Care Leadership by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

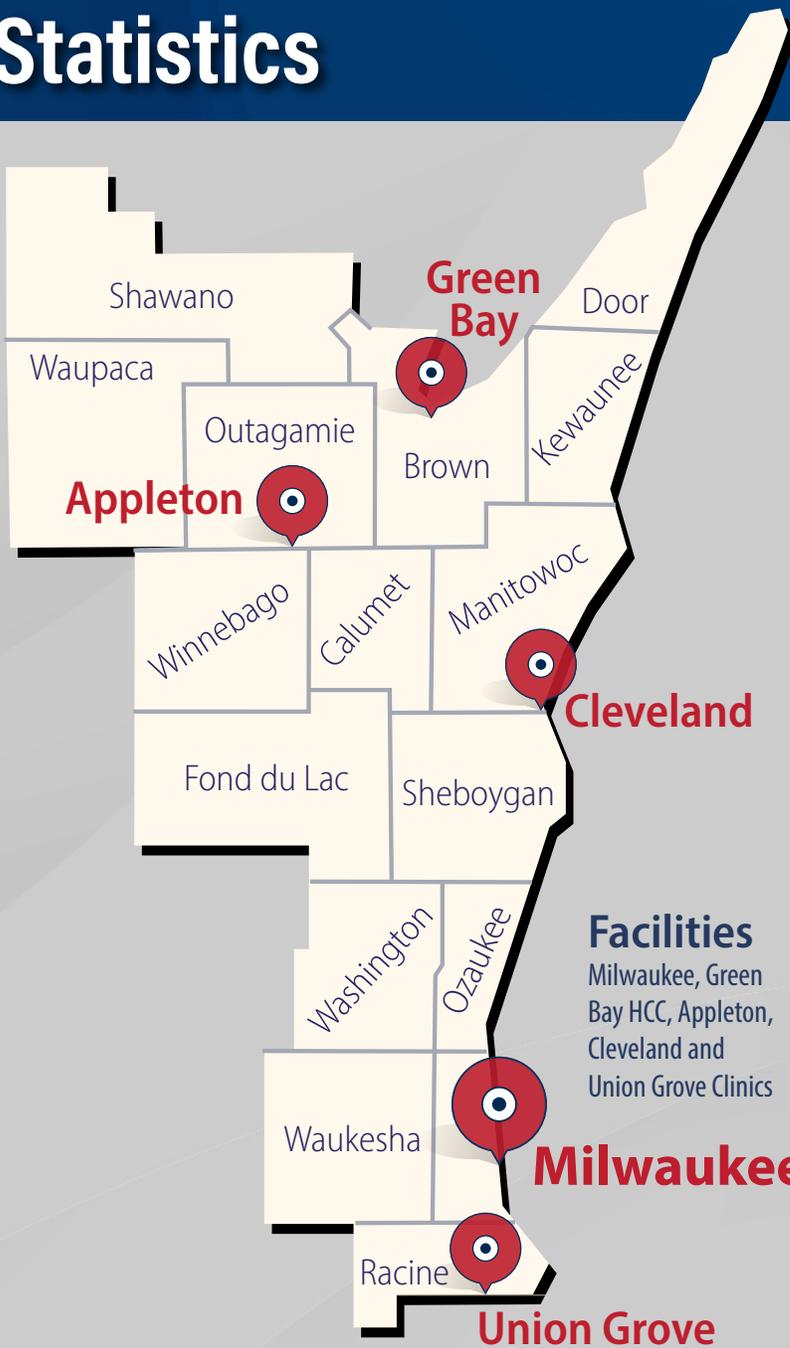
Established in 1996, this award program recognizes outstanding VHA health care practitioners who are deserving of special recognition for their contributions in enhancing clinical care. It was named after Dr. Mark Wolcott, who dedicated more than 40 years to serve and improve the quality of health care for VHA's Veteran population.

Spinal Cord Injury Center Wins ASCIP Awards

Therapists Katie Powell, Katie Schultz and Jaclyn Raab won the Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals Poster Award presented at the 2019 national conference in Nashville, Tennessee, for their poster titled, "Maximizing Veteran Quality of Life through 3D Design and Printing."

Schultz also won the People's Choice Award for the video game dock she designed and made on a 3D printer. The video game dock holds the game controller in place that allows a Veteran to play a variety of video games. The dock also was designed with the flexibility to accommodate controllers for more than one type of gaming system.

Statistics



Veterans Served	63,891
Male	58,411
Female	4,480
Bed Totals	443
Hospital	196
Community Living Center	113
Domiciliary	125
Transition	9
Total Bed Days of Care	117,668
Hospital Visits	850,297
Outpatient	817,863
ED Visits	23,855
Inpatient Admissions	8,579
Surgical Procedures:	4,006
Clinical Laboratory Tests:	2,904,915
Prescriptions Filled	1,364,934
Prosthetic Services Rcvd	148,383
FY19 Expenditures	\$734,203,394
Construction	\$32,800,000
Volunteer Hours	112,988.5
Donations	\$2,106,886.11

**16 counties served
7,500 square miles**

Workforce





VA BEATS & EATS MILWAUKEE

www.milwaukee.va.gov

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