Milwaukee nabs ‘Top Performer’ honors from Joint Commission

The Milwaukee VA Medical Center was recognized as a “Top Performer” by The Joint Commission for hitting consistently high marks in performance measures for surgical care and treating heart failure, heart attacks and pneumonia during 2012.

“This shows the commitment we have to the highest levels of clinical care,” said Marylou Felhofer, deputy manager for the Office of Quality Management and Safety. “We are proud of our record and the care we provide all of our Veterans.”

Before getting such an honor, the Joint Commission uses a variety of data to ensure hospitals are using evidence-based clinical processes that are shown to improve care for certain conditions.

Milwaukee is one of 1,099 hospitals in the U.S. earning the distinction of Top Performer on Key Quality Measures for attaining and sustaining excellence in accountability measure performance. The ratings are based on an aggregation of accountability measure data reported to The Joint Commission during the 2012 calendar year.

Each of the “Top Performer” hospitals met two 95 percent performance thresholds on accountability measure data. First, each hospital achieved performance of 95 percent or above on a single, composite score that includes all the accountability measures for which it reports data to The Joint Commission, including measures that had fewer than 30 eligible cases or patients. Second, each hospital met or exceeded 95 percent performance on every accountability measure for which it reports data to The Joint Commission, excluding any measures with fewer than 30 eligible cases or patients. A 95 percent score means a hospital provided an evidence-based practice 95 times out of 100 opportunities to provide the practice. Each accountability measure represents an evidence-based practice, for example, giving aspirin at arrival for heart attack patients and giving antibiotics one hour before surgery.

“When we raise the bar and provide the proper guidance and tools, hospitals have responded with excellent results,” said Dr. Mark R. Chassin, president of The Joint Commission. “This capacity for continual improvement points toward a future in which quality and safety defects are dramatically reduced and high reliability is sought and achieved with regularity. Such day-to-day progress will slowly but surely transform today’s health care system into one that achieves unprecedented performance outcomes for the benefit of the patients.”

Robert Beller, medical center director, said the honor recognizes the hard work done each day at the Milwaukee VA. To celebrate, the center held employee recognition ceremonies that included a sock hop lunch for nearly 2,500 of our employees in January.

“We work hard to provide high quality, respectful, compassionate, patient centered care to the veterans we are honored to serve. Sometimes it is something as simple as a smile from one of our volunteers or helping someone who is lost in the hallway, all the way to the world-class medical care.”

“At the same time,” he added, “this is not a stopping point. We continue to strive for excellence, and always look opportunities to improve. I am grateful for all of our employees and volunteers for making this happen.”
Diana Sheridan, volunteer, makes one of the 60 cups of coffee for a Veteran. The coffee and cookies are donated by the VFW and Auxiliary, and are served at the east entrance of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center for all Veterans.

Volunteer brews smiles with coffee

By Antony Kamps
Staff Writer

She stands there in front of the picture of the man the building is named after, waiting to put a warm cup of complimentary coffee and a sweet cookie in the hands of a Veteran.

Diana Sheridan is a volunteer from the VFW and Auxiliary located inside the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. Every Monday and Wednesday she brews 60 cups of coffee, and places cookies on a tray, and wheels the cart out by the east entrance. Both the coffee and cookies are complimentary, for patients only.

There she waits.

“People are hesitant at first, but I just smile and offer them a coffee,” said Sheridan. “They start to come around.”

With the weather becoming bitterly cold, a cup of joe is exactly what these Veterans need. Each one walks up rubbing their hands together trying to warm up.

“Cream? Sugar?” Sheridan asks each customer. She makes their coffee and hands it back with a smile, and a thank you.

Laverne Trautman is the head of the VFW and Auxiliary, and coffee and cookies is not the only service they run for Veterans. Men’s clothing, located in building 70, is another program run by the group. They provide clothing for male Veterans Monday through Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

Sheridan, and her cookie and coffee cart, stay put until all the coffee and cookies are gone. She wouldn’t have it any other way.

She is no high-tech barista but she makes due.

“I hope I know what I’m doing,” says Sheridan with a laugh as she makes another coffee for a thirsty Veteran.
VA employee stops mugging, eats burrito as hero’s reward

By Gary J. Kunich

Mick Larson just wanted a sandwich but took a bite out of crime instead.

Larson, the administrative officer for Primary Care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, finished his shopping Dec. 18 at a Pick n’ Save downtown when he heard a woman scream in the parking lot.

“I went there to get a sandwich and was pushing my cart to my car, when I heard someone yelling, ‘Help! Help! Someone’s stealing my purse!’”

Although the bad guy got away, he didn’t get the loot. Larson and another man foiled the thief and forced him to drop the purse before he jumped into a getaway car.

“It happened fast,” Larson said. “At first I thought it was a joke, and I had trouble seeing since they were behind two rows of cars. That’s when I realized she was holding onto her purse and he was trying to rip it out of her hands. He finally ripped it out, but then his pants fell down and he kind of stumbled.”

Larson said the would-be thief jumped up and ran his direction as someone in a Chevy Tahoe with tinted windows started driving toward him.

“That’s when another Good Samaritan jumped in and slammed the guy into a car. He got away from him and kept running when I took a big kick at his knees with the biggest kick I could muster. He went down hard. Luckily, I was wearing my Timberland boots.

“I figured he was trying to get to that car, but then it looked like the driver was going to leave him there, before he circled around again,” Larson said.

The thief lost his coat during the scuffle, but was able to jump into the getaway vehicle that sped out of the parking lot.

Police took down the license plate and make of the car when they arrived a few minutes later.

A Milwaukee police official confirmed the account. He said police located the vehicle five days later, but it had been stolen at the time of the incident, so they weren’t able to find the thieves.

But for the woman who almost lost her purse, it was still a happy ending.

“She was pretty scared but really thankful,” Larson said. “She told us she was worried because she still had Christmas shopping to do, and all her money was in her purse. I’m just glad we were all there at the right time and right place.

“I think the guy who tried stealing her purse looked to be the most scared,” he said. “You’d think he would have surveyed the area and saw a bunch of six-foot-tall guys standing around.”

Larson never got the sandwich, but settled for a bigger reward.

“A chicken burrito at Chipotle,” he laughed. “Normally, I reserve that for after a workout at the gym, but figured that was a good excuse.”
Valets drive on despite record cold weather

By Antony Kamps
Staff Writer

Baby it’s cold outside, but the cold isn’t going to stop Ty Zweber and his valet crew.

The Milwaukee VA Medical Center provides free valet service for all visitors to the hospital. The service is at the east entrance only, and is available 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

“It’s a very essential service to provide to Veterans,” said Zweber.

In extreme cold weather the service is more important for patients who have difficulty walking. Navigating from the parking lot to the entrance of the hospital, depending on the day, can be difficult for some Veterans, especially, when you factor in the weather and the amount of cars driving around.

“We do it for those patients who have trouble, or just can’t, walk,” said Zweber. “We have to help them.”

The cold affects the valet crew too, but even with temperatures dropping to -52 with the wind chill Jan. 6 they handle it with ease.

“Layers, layers, and then more layers,” said Zweber as he chuckled. “I have one gal here who is wearing three coats.”

The valet crew park 320 to 375 cars on a daily basis. Fast and efficient is the key to success. When a Veteran is ready to go home the crew strives to get their car to the front as quickly as possible.

“It should take no more than 2 ½ to 3 ½ minutes from the time we receive the ticket to having the car brought up,” said Zweber.

Unlike other valet services the crew can’t accept tips.

“The service is completely complimentary provided by the Milwaukee VA,” said Zweber. “But there are just some people who won’t take, “No” for an answer, and try to shove money in your pocket.”

The valet crew may be an overlooked group, but their service to the hospital, and the Veterans, is worthy of recognition.

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Veterans Career Fair
at the Milwaukee War Memorial

presented by the Milwaukee VA
in conjunction with
Milwaukee County Veterans Service Office
and DWD Office of Veteran Services

Thursday, March 6 • 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Free parking and free admission to the Milwaukee Art Museum
For more information: Andy Hendrickson, ext. 42442
The Latimore Brothas open the observance with their rendition of the national anthem, Jan. 21 inside the Matousek Auditorium.

Milwaukee VA revisits the dream

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”
— Martin Luther King, Jr. (Jan. 15, 1929 – Apr. 4, 1968)

By Antony Kamps
Staff Writer

We witness greatness all the time. We see it in sports, movies, and during our everyday lives. But there are times we witness greatness and don’t realize it until years later.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a pastor, activist, humanitarian and leader in the Civil Rights movement. His life was about speaking up for those who could not speak up for themselves, giving courage to those who never knew they had it themselves to be brave. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill creating a federal holiday to honor King.

The Milwaukee VA Medical Center celebrated King, and his wife Coretta Scott, Jan. 21., inside the Matousek Auditorium. The 2013 recipient of the President’s Volunteer Service Award was announced at the end of the program.

The Rev. Daniel L. Fitten opened the celebration with a prayer. Flashes of pictures came across the screen of the life and times of King. The Latimore Brothas, a musical group hailing from Milwaukee, sang the national anthem.

“We celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. because his voice and vision filled a great void in our nation,” said James McLain, deputy director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, in his welcoming speech. “We also celebrate his wife, Coretta Scott King. Her words echo with the same voice.”

All of King’s speeches spoke of bringing equality to all men, women and children. It wasn’t about white and black, but equality among all races everywhere. The most famous speech King gave is his “I Have a Dream” speech. Those words touched not just black Americans, but Americans of all races.

“He felt what he said, and he believed in his words,” said guest speaker Amy Crumble, director of operations and special projects for Centro Hispano

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See King

Robert Beller, medical center director, presents Phyllis Mills with the 2013 President’s Volunteer Service Award.

Photo by Benjamin Slane
Milwaukee VA set for local Creative Arts competition

By Gary J. Kunich

Veteran artists are invited to participate in this year’s local creative arts festival, Feb. 24 at the Milwaukee VA.

There are more than 50 visual arts categories in applied, fine art and craft kit categories, and numerous performing categories, including song, dance, instrumental and dramatic readings.

First-place winners go forward to national judging, and those top winners are invited to participate in the National Creative Arts Festival. The national festival takes place Oct. 27 to Nov. 2 in Milwaukee and will feature Veterans from throughout the United States. The weeklong event culminates with an art exhibit and two-hour, Broadway-caliber stage show.

“The event is amazing, and the artwork is world class,” said Marisa Straub, a creative arts therapist and one of the organizers for this year’s local and national event.

“This is a chance for Veterans to not only show their artistic skill, but it also serves as therapy for some of the participants. They tell their stories, and they heal, through their artwork and their performances.”

Four local Veterans from Milwaukee participated in the 2013 National Creative Arts Festival in Reno: Jeff McNeil, Randy Diem, David Skinner and Michelle Vento. McNeil, Diem and Skinner participated in the stage show and Vento was part of the art exhibit with her ceramics piece, “Jay’s Lanes,” featuring a human head as a bowling ball rolling into pins and bottles of liquor.

For more information, or to sign up, call the Creative Arts hotline at 414-384-2000, ext. 48653.

Photo by Gary J. Kunich

Michelle Vento’s national award-winning piece, “Jay’s Lanes.”

Vento’s ceramic piece features a human head used as a bowling ball rolling into beer bottles shaped like bowling pins.

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King

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Milwaukee. “He believed change could happen through him.”

Since King’s assassination in 1968, segregation of races with signs reading “Whites only” has been deemed illegal. The Civil Rights Act of 1968, also called the Fair Housing Act, prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

“He wanted social justice, and wasn’t OK with doing nothing. He contributed to the change,” said Crumble. “I saw the needs of the community, the disparities in this community, socially, that’s why I work for the company I work for.”

Service to the community is a big part of what King is also remembered for bringing about, volunteering to make the community a better place. Will Johnson, Equal Employment Opportunity program manager, brought the program to a close with the announcement of the 2013 President’s Volunteer Service Award, Phyllis Mills.

“In announcing the recipient of the award we must recognize the good she has provided,” said Johnson. “She has given over 1,000 volunteer hours in 2013 as the executive director at the Brentwood Health Organization.”

Brentwood Health Organization is a non-profit faith health program. It’s their goal to go out into the community and teach about healthy living. Mills believes King’s influence can still be felt today.

“It’s all about service for others, which is what he wanted,” said Mills. “It’s about what you can do to help others not yourself.

“Fill in the voices for those who feel they have falling through the cracks.”

King spoke about having a dream that one day his children would be judged by their character, and not the color of their skin.

He hoped to be there the day this occurred, but was assassinated before the day would arrive. The day before his assassination, King gave a speech in Detroit called, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” In the speech King acknowledged he may not be around to see the day, but believed it would happen.

“Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind.

“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.

So I’m happy, tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” – Martin Luther King, Jr., from “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech given the day before his assassination, Apr. 3, 1968.
FM works behind scenes to keep hospital running

By Antony Kamps
Staff Writer

It’s bitterly cold as the wind whips into patients as they walk toward the entrance of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. Relief of warm air embraces them as they cross the threshold into the hospital, never fully realizing who is to thank for keeping the warm air circulating.

Facility Management keeps this hospital running. They work behind the scenes to ensure there are no malfunctions to prevent the hospital from operating. If there is an occurrence, like the boilers shutting down, the highly skilled staff of mechanics and operators fix the problem without anyone the wiser.

Temperatures dropped below freezing the week of Jan. 6, dipping to almost 60 below with the wind chill. It’s the job of Facility Management to ensure the cold stays on the outside.

“It’s extremely important to keep the boilers running during cold weather,” said Adam Kreger, utilities supervisor at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. “They are what make the hospital run.”

The boiler plant keeps three boilers running at all times, leaving two as standby. It’s not what you would expect walking into the boiler plant. Rather than a dingy, damp, dirty building with workers frantically running around spinning dials, the plant is extremely clean with the constant roar of the massive boilers creating steam in the background. The boilers look like oversized furnaces, with computer screens giving readings the operators need to know to ensure the boilers are working properly.

“Not what you’d expect when walking into a boiler plant,” said Pete Swanson, lead boiler plant mechanic.

Patients and employees came close to realizing how important the boilers are to the hospital not too long ago.

The hospital, and other buildings on campus, runs on gas. But whenever there is an expected influx of gas use in the area, We Energies calls on companies who can run on alternative fuel to cut off some of their gas use. This occurred Jan. 6 and 7.

“We get a reduced rate on gas because we can run on alternative fuel,” said Swanson. “When asked by We Energies we switch to burning oil.

“We have enough oil to run the boilers for roughly 12 to 14 days.”

The oil pressure fluctuated and caused a flame failure in one boiler.

“It was a domino effect. One boiler went down and then the next until they were all out,” said Swanson.

It took the team less than 45 minutes to reignite the boilers and get them back to working levels of steam output. The flame inside the boiler can be seen through a small portal. It looks like a jet engine firing at full throttle. Everything in the boiler plant is computerized so reigniting the boilers was as simple as pushing a button. It could’ve been a lot worse.

“If those boilers stop working for more than two hours we’d have to start looking at evacuating the hospital,” said Kreger. “The boilers create steam which is essential to the hospital on a variety of levels.

“Steam is used to humidify the air and sterilize equipment, and provide heat for some of the buildings.”

Evacuation plans are in place in case of emergencies, but Swanson wasn’t worried.

“We’d have to be closer to the 90-minute mark for me to even think about evacuation,” said Swanson with confidence.

The air patients and employees breathe must be sterilized as well. Air handlers on top of every building force air through the hospital.

Heated coils inside them cause steam to create humidity inside the hospital. The air in the hospital must be recirculated a minimum of every 24 to 48 hours depending on the department. The air handlers are regulated in Graphics, otherwise known as the control room.

“It’s the heart of the hospital,” said Kreger. “It’s manned 24 hours a day, and the entire hospital is basically controlled from that one room.”

There is a minimum of one operator on duty at all times to make sure the boilers are working and running properly. During the day a mechanic is on duty to fix any issue. There are some cases when a mechanic is required 24 hours a day.

“During the times we are running on oil a mechanic is required to be on-site at all times,” said Kreger.
In Service

Congratulations to the following Zablocki employees who have reached career milestones in January and February:

**40 YEARS**
Mary Jo Jankovich

**35 YEARS**
Christine L. Turnbull

**30 YEARS**
Diane H. Stolarczyk
Jeanne L. Halverson
Linda D. Merklein
Pascal M. Malassigne
Rose M. Aveiro

**25 YEARS**
Eleanore M. Mullins

**20 YEARS**
Eric L. Gonzales
Mary R. Rabideau
Monica H. Marino
Patrick J. Flintrop
Prentiss Johnson
Russel Henry Bachman

**20 YEARS**
David A. Hill
Deborah Colorez
Deborah J. Rogers
Diane M. Guenther
Diane M. Appleby
Jane M. Barbian
Jeffrey A. Wesson
Jody A. Hersh
Joseph S. Tripp
Lisa J. Rogers
Michael F. Walden

**15 YEARS**
Barbara A. Walsh
Brian G. Brown, Jr.
Carol I Ping Tsao
Craig L. Holmes

**10 YEARS**
Eileen T. Meyer
Jamie L. Olsen
Jill S. Feldman
Josephine M. Mancuso
Julie A. Lichner
Kathryn C. Krieg
Kelly A. Knox
Lynn M. Hermanns
Mary E. Ohanison
Matthew L. Henry
Maureen P. Lavin
Michaele W. Kulick
Michelle K. Pruitt-Franz
Nancy P. Kotajarvi
Nicole M. Nance
Patricia A. Boyer
Phillip J. Reitz
Sabrina D. Shaw
Steven Phifer
Suzette D. Franklin
Terry L. Wise
Trudy D. Powers
Willie Spivey, Jr.
Yee Chung Cheng

VA Voices

What do you think of the new Green Bay VA clinic?

Ankur Patel, chief dentist: “It feels like a smaller, closely knit group of providers. Patients aren’t overwhelmed when they come here, yet we are a state-of-the-art facility.”

Barbara Smith, patient advocate: “The size and vast number of services we offer is amazing. It makes us feel bigger, better, and ‘badder.’”

Mary Spencer, medical support assistant: “Veterans have come in and are really impressed with the size and services we offer. They are happy they no longer have to go to Milwaukee to get care.”

Kenneth Higgins, housekeeper: “The people, atmosphere, is just so nice to be around. They pay attention to detail, and being a Vet, and a part of this clinic, it means a lot to me.”

Glenn Borths, volunteer: “This facility was long overdue in this area. The previous one was too small, and everybody raves to me about how impressed they are with the facility.”