

VISION

for excellence



COVER STORY

Prosthetics

Learn what surprising ways this program serves Veterans—missing limbs not required.





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Dear Fellow Employees, Volunteers, Veterans and Friends of VISN 4:

People ask me all the time what I like best about my job, and the answer is simple: the Veterans. No matter what era or military branch these men and women served in, they all made the same great sacrifice for our country. And I get to fall asleep every night knowing that I've helped improve their quality of life in some small way.

Take our cover story, for example: The 10 Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Facilities throughout VISN 4 spent nearly \$66 million last year to give Veterans the tools that they needed not only to get by—but to succeed. (As an aside, I'm proud to say that

the issue's cover model, Chris Nowak, is not only a prosthetics user and former Marine—he's also the VISN 4 Prosthetics chief). We highlight Chris's extraordinary program, which provides Veterans with everything from wigs to wheelchairs, starting on page 8 of this issue. Don't miss it!

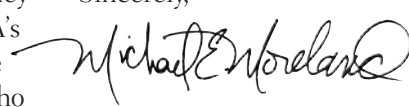
Not surprisingly, if you zoom in for a more intimate look at the VISN 4 community, the view is equally impressive. We support Veterans as they learn the therapeutic benefits of hobbies like kayaking and fly-fishing (page 14). We cheer them on as they drop excess weight through the VA's *MOVE!* Program (page 5). And we can even lay claim to a physician who doubles as a children's author and who wrote a bilingual book in his spare

time (read about it on the next page!).

I'm also excited to report that in the coming months, our network's medical centers are slated to receive nearly \$50 million total in stimulus funds. Check out this issue's back cover to learn exactly how we're planning to put this money to great use.

Now, having let my enthusiasm run its course, I will gracefully bow out and let our VISN 4 Veterans shine. They are—after all—not only the Nation's Heroes, but mine, too.

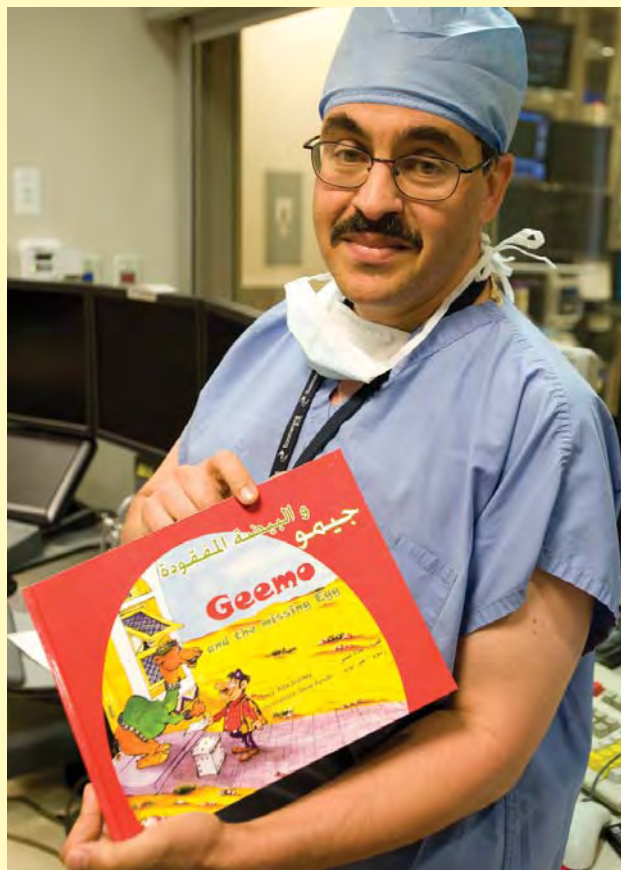
Sincerely,



Michael E. Moreland, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 4

Did **U** Know?!

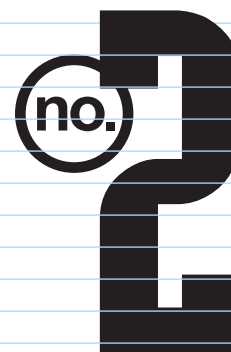
A horsepower-heavy entourage, including 70 motorcycles, visited Veterans at the Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center in Clarksburg on May 21. The motorists began their journey in California and were en route to Washington D.C. to participate in a Memorial Day Service honoring Veterans. **“It was a touching experience to see people who love, care and treat the Veterans with the respect they earned,”** said Army Veteran Denise Moss of the event.



VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System's Dr. Alaa Shalaby is an author! *Geemo and the Missing Egg* is a children's book born out of the physician's desire to teach his own kids about their mixed heritage. A family toy inspired the story's main character—a friendly, curious camel named Geemo. “We had stumbled on a stuffed camel and called him Geemo,” recalls Dr. Shalaby. “I found out that Geemo could be a very useful assistant to get my kids to react to the Arabic language and culture.” The end result—a book penned in both English and the physician's native Arabic—does just that.



In June, the VA Butler Healthcare broke ground on its largest construction initiative yet! The project involves two buildings: a \$15 million, single-story community living center and a \$9 million domiciliary and residential rehabilitation program building.



Coatesville VA Medical Center was recently ranked #2 out of 153 medical centers nation-wide for Overall Outpatient Satisfaction for 2008. Congratulations, Coatesville!

LOOKING AHEAD

Philadelphia VA Medical Center staff is gearing up for their 16th annual Stand Down for Homeless Veterans event in September. This three-day event gives private and government agencies a chance to provide services to homeless Veterans, including benefits and enrollment information.



Always be willing to accept change and enjoy the work you do.

KRISTEN SHOCK
Medical Support Assistant
James E. Van Zandt (Altoona)

Keep a positive attitude. Remember to stay flexible and open-minded.



KAREN VANBLARGAN
Medical Support Assistant
Wilkes-Barre

Focus on the Veteran! When I first started here, I felt like I was in outer space because of all the acronyms everyone threw around.

Just keep focusing on the Veterans and eventually everything falls into place.



DEB KUNTZ
Clinical Dietitian and
MOVE! Coordinator
Erie

What advice would you give to a new VA employee?

attention to documentation and VA regulations. Things are different at this hospital versus a community hospital.



ELIZABETH HART
Nurse
Lebanon

Be responsible with your job and courteous with the Veterans. If you have questions or need help, ask your supervisor.



DANIEL LEE, JR.
Physician Assistant
Coatesville

Work as hard and smart as you can. Take advantage of every opportunity to contribute and showcase your talents. Always look for and accept new responsibilities.



BILL HUCKER
Compliance Officer
Wilmington



It Takes A Village

HOW VA HEALTHCARE – VISN 4 IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF VETERANS

When Chester Nolfi's primary care physician persuaded him to join the VA's MOVE! Weight Management Program in January 2008, the Korean War Veteran was insulin-dependent, tired easily and kept his trusty oxygen tank close at hand. Today, thanks in part to the VA's program, the Pittsburgh-area resident has dropped nearly 100 pounds and says that he "feels like a new person!" Equally impressive, Nolfi no longer needs supplementary oxygen or insulin to get him through the day.

How did he do it? Nolfi has a team of experts from VA Pittsburgh to thank. MOVE! Coordinator Melanie Erskine taught the 78-year-old how to make healthier life decisions, and Allison Morell, a clinical nutrition specialist, helped the Veteran widen his palate and identify quality food choices.

Armed with this new knowledge—and a cheering section that included his wife and primary care physician—Nolfi began performing two daily sessions of 20 exercises (like touching his toes, lifting homemade dumbbells and twisting his torso) at 50 reps each. As for his diet, the Veteran kept breakfast and dinner easy: a bowl of Cheerios plus juice and coffee. For lunch, he enjoyed his wife's cooking at home or—if visiting VAPHS—opted for a Wise up and MOVE! meal from the Canteen.

Turn the page to hear more from the key players in Nolfi's weight-loss journey.



Above:
Chester Nolfi in June 2009 after losing nearly 100 pounds.

At right:
Nolfi in his pre-MOVE! days.



VAPHS Primary Care Physician Erika Hoffman

“When Mr. Nolfi became frustrated with his chronic fatigue, I told him that I was going to beg him to try to lose weight. I explained that his weight was causing his sleep apnea, his hypertension, leg edema and diabetes, and it was making him winded when he bent over. I had done all that I could with medication and machines. I asked him to try the MOVE! program because he had nothing to lose and a lot to gain. He went reluctantly. We gave him lots of positive reinforcement, and once he saw even a little success, there really weren't any barriers on his ability to lose weight.”

Veteran Chester Nolfi



“When Dr. Hoffman suggested I join MOVE!, I thought it was a bunch of baloney, but I didn't want to disappoint her. Today, when I look at myself in the mirror, I can't believe it.”



“When I have to spend the day at VAPHS, I'll wake up at 1 or 3 in the morning to do my exercises before I leave. While at the VA for appointments, I'll go up to the eighth floor and walk around the elevators for exercise.”



“Melanie gave me pamphlets to hand out, so I talk with the guys in Heroes Hall and encourage them to join MOVE!. And no matter what time I get home from the VA, I make sure to do my exercises again before I go to bed.”

Wife Phyllis Nolfi

“I made sure he had juice and a banana for his breakfast. I would cook at lunchtime; I made sure he had a protein, a starch, a vegetable and sometimes some fruit. Now he can move better, and he looks better.”



MOVE! Coordinator Melanie Erskine



“Exercise became easier over time. His biggest challenge was incorporating a variety of foods. He saw something that worked—the cereal—and didn’t want to change; the compromise was a healthy lunch and encouraging his wife to cut up fruit and vegetables. He has my phone number in his cell phone, and he would call me from the Canteen and say, ‘I want to know how much fat is in this item. I don’t want to make the wrong choice.’”

Clinical Nutrition Specialist Allison Morell

“Chester had some difficulty with portion control at the start of the program, but as he put this into practice each week, you could see the difference it made. Each time I would see him, whether in class or in the lobby, he would excitedly tell me about how he was now able to wear all of the nice suits that he had in his closet that were too small before.”



Are you ready to
be **healthy?**

5 Easy Tips

1. Catch your Zs Experts recommend getting 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night for good health and weight gain prevention. ▶



2. Don’t go hungry Eat small meals every 3 to 4 hours to keep your metabolism humming.

3. Choose foods wisely Fill up on foods packed with fiber (think berries, bananas, oats and nuts) and protein (like meat, eggs, dairy and peanut butter).



4. Stay hydrated Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day—and save the soda for special occasions.

5. MOVE! Take the ▶ stairs, garden, sweep, wash the car. Do any activity that gets your heart rate up!



To learn **more**
about **MOVE!**

visit
www.move.va.gov



Tino Yaccich at home with wife Leslie (in white) and daughters Briana and Julia.

A PROSTHETICS PRIMER

By Bethany Miga

**Five Veterans tell their stories—
and reveal a program that's packed
with unexpected perks**

Tino Yaccich's life is full of small victories. Due to an immunization gone awry, the retired Army police officer has spent the last two decades watching his mobility diminish. Today, Yaccich—who doctors have diagnosed with multiple sclerosis—has lost the use of his legs and right arm. As a result, “I am completely totally dependent on my wife to do everything.” The married father of two teenage girls now spends his days in a motorized wheelchair.

Count the fighter down, but not out.

Last fall, the VA's Prosthetics Program outfitted Yaccich's home in Rochester, Pennsylvania with an Environmental Control Unit (ECU). Thanks to the ECU, the Veteran can now better control his environment through voice commands. "I use it to turn lights on and off. I turn the television on and off, change channels, turn the volume up and down," says Yaccich. "I can answer the telephone and dial

the telephone through voice commands. It even opens and closes doors for me. It seems very insignificant, but it's given me quite a bit of independence."

The ECU has also given Yaccich's wife, Leslie, and their two daughters some much-needed breathing-space. "Before, I couldn't go to the store and pick something up—there were times where I would leave a full grocery cart in the middle of the store because he would call and say 'I fell,'" says Leslie. "Now, we are able to go out for a few hours. Now, I can go to the grocery store and not have to worry."

The total cost to the Veteran and his family? Nothing.

In addition to the ECU, the VA's Prosthetics program—officially titled the Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service—has provided Yaccich with a long list of items in a quest to improve his mobility and quality of life. These items include a stair glide, motorized wheelchair, lower kitchen cabinets, wheelchair-friendly kitchen appliances, an auto-adaptive grant (that enabled Yaccich to drive his family's van before losing the use of his arm) and a roll-in shower to make bathing easier. Even more,

"We are like snowflakes," says Yaccich of disabled Veterans. "No two of us are the same."



From a **77-cent** cane tip to a **\$40,000 computerized leg:** a peek into the Prosthetics toolkit.



4

Questions for VISN 4 Prosthetics Chief Christopher Nowak

the Prosthetics program is currently processing an order to get Yaccich a special lift so that he can use his family's pool for hydrotherapy.

The total cost to the Veteran and his family? Nothing.

But the end result for Yaccich? Priceless. "I can't even describe to you the level of independence the VA has given me," he says. "I love to write. I am a daddy. I support my daughters in their activities. Whatever games, whatever academic or athletic events—they don't need to look far to find a guy in a chair, I'm right there."

Today, the Veteran is reveling in these successes. "I know there is a lot that I can't do, but I don't have time to worry about that stuff," he says. "I'm too busy doing things that I can do."

Yaccich uses the ECU to change the channel on his TV.



In his supervisory role, Nowak oversees Prosthetics and Sensory Aid Services at each of the network's 10 VA Medical Centers.

What is the purpose of the Prosthetics department?

CN: "Our mission is simple: We provide equipment and appliances that restore or replace a body part or body function. In doing this, we give Veterans the tools that they need to improve their quality of life."

How large is the VISN 4 Prosthetics program?

CN: "Last year, our Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Program spent more than \$65 million to serve some 81,000 Veterans. A very small portion of these numbers reflect our work with artificial limbs—our program is actually much broader than that and nearly every clinical branch of the hospital uses our services."

What is one surprising way that the Prosthetics program serves Veterans?

CN: "We offer some Veterans a clothing allowance, which is surprising to many people. Eligible Veterans wearing an orthopedic or prosthetic appliance for a service-connected condition can receive compensation annually if their medical appliance damages their clothing."

What advice do you have to Veterans who are new to the program?

CN: "If they see something that they think is going to help them and there is a medical need for it, talk to their primary care provider about it. Don't be scared to ask and to try something new."



John O'Brien was just 28 and finishing up a routine training exercise near his base in North Carolina when his AV-8B Harrier plane bounced off the runway and burst into flames. Then a Captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, O'Brien suffered third degree burns over 35 percent of his body. As a result, doctors amputated below the knee on his left leg and above the elbow on his left arm.

But O'Brien hardly missed a beat. The Philadelphia resident, now 43, trains pilots on flight simulators and says he doesn't even notice his limb loss.



"I work hard. I do everything around the house: I mow my grass. I rake my flower beds. I don't think I have any limitations at all. I have gotten everything from the VA that I've needed to reestablish my life."

As a testament to his active lifestyle, the married father of three girls boasts an impressive list of special-use legs: a beach leg, a running leg and—soon—a ski leg. "Anytime I've needed a prosthesis, the VA has been phenomenal," he says.

Despite moving through life at a pace that would leave most people gasping for breath, O'Brien has been known to pause and bend down in shopping centers to show curious children how he ties his shoelace with his hook hand.

As for his own young children, they see a man without limitations, says O'Brien. "My kids see me as active, outgoing and independent. That's more important to me than anything else."



"My life, from a physical standpoint, has been totally regained," says O'Brien, out for a jog in Philadelphia.

Wesley Hodges

The Vietnam Veteran lost some mobility on his left side after a stroke in 2005.

“ After the stroke, I couldn’t walk or sit up. But between Prosthetics and Therapy, they brought me right back. I expected it to be more of a hassle, but it wasn’t. Whatever I needed—canes, walkers, wheelchairs, an electric wheelchair, braces for my legs and arms—it was taken care of. ”



Bob Melcher

The former Marine Corps Veteran—and avid runner—is on pacemaker No. 3.

“ I received my first pacemaker in 1993 because of a heart arrhythmia. Once they realized that it was a necessity, the VA really acted quickly. Before, I used to try to run and I’d get dizzy, but with the pacemaker it’s almost like second nature—I feel like running. I’m up to 18 marathons total in 10 different states. ”



Leroy Scott

The OEF/OIF Veteran lost his right leg during combat in Iraq.

“ The VA gave me choices. They let me see who I wanted. I ended up selecting one of the best companies in the nation—Prosthetic Innovations. When I first came in, I could barely walk. Now, my leg is perfect. I walk, I play softball. I even have a swim leg, and I’m going to take scuba lessons. ”

Want to learn more about the **Prosthetics and Sensory Aid Program**? Check out

www.prosthetics.va.gov

B E Y O N D H O S

Check out the innovative ways that

Novice paddlers take to the water.



WHAT:

Team River Runner, an all-volunteer, nonprofit therapeutic program that teaches Veterans the joy of kayaking.

WHERE:

Coatesville VA Medical Center

THE DETAILS:

Under the direction of Lewis McCullough, Coatesville's Environmental Management Services program manager, and in joint effort with recreation therapy, Team River Runner Coatesville is off to a great start. The group is using Coatesville VAMC's heated indoor pool for kayak rolling sessions during cold weather and in late June, they completed their first outdoor trip to Brandywine River in West Chester, Pa. The program "is a great experience," says Veteran participant Richard Harkless. "I feel good about myself, my stress is less, and I am learning how to do something new."

PITALL WALLS

Veterans receive care around VISN 4

Mascot Rocky Bluewinkle bonds with Veteran John Elliott.



WHAT:
Blue Rocks Baseball, a night of minor-league baseball excitement.

WHERE:
Wilmington VA Medical Center

THE DETAILS:

In late May, a local Disabled American Veterans chapter sponsored a trip for a group of Veterans from the Wilmington VA Medical Center's Community Living Center. At the stadium, chapter members treated Veterans to VIP seating, and everyone enjoyed hot dogs and refreshments while watching the Wilmington Blue Rocks defeat the Frederick Key, 4-2.

Rock poses with the day's big catch.



WHAT:
Project Healing Waters, a national, therapeutic program that helps Veterans learn the art of fly-fishing.

WHERE:
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

THE DETAILS:

On May 20, a group of Veterans and volunteers went on a fly-fishing expedition in Farmington, Pa., about 60 miles south of Pittsburgh. Chuck Rock, a Vietnam Veteran, participated in the event. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world," said Rock, who had been fly-fishing only once before.

VISN 4 facilities will receive nearly \$50 million as part of President Obama's economic recovery plan.

See how we plan to invest those funds.

	VA MEDICAL CENTER	AWARD	PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS
	Altoona	\$2,676,000	Renovate the canteen and outpatient areas. Upgrade the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system. Upgrade and replace the electrical and security systems.
	Butler	\$11,506,000	Replace boilers and windows and improve site drainage. Renovate diagnostics and the electrical distribution system.
	Clarksburg	\$1,191,440	Renovate the emergency room and dental lab. Upgrade and replace boiler plant equipment.
	Coatesville	\$3,900,000	Renovate the pharmacy and boiler plant controls. Upgrade and replace the electrical distribution system.
	Erie	\$365,710	Upgrade the boiler plant.
	Lebanon	\$5,570,000	Renovate the bathrooms and patient check-in and appointment area. Install chiller.
	Philadelphia	\$6,651,440	Upgrade the behavioral health clinic, emergency department and boiler plant. Design a new computer room and plan renovations for a modernized dental lab.
	Pittsburgh	\$11,501,950	Upgrade the surgical intensive care unit and emergency power distribution. Replace the main plumbing system.
	Wilmington	\$5,866,440	Replace the elevator. Upgrade and replace boiler plant equipment as well as the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system. Upgrade the secondary electrical distribution system.



VA Healthcare-VISN 4
323 North Shore Drive
Suite 400
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
412-822-3316 | phone
412-822-3275 | fax
www.visn4.va.gov

VISN 4	Vision For Excellence	<p>In our next ISSUE</p> <p>The VHA Office of Rural Health recently awarded VISN 4 more than \$3 million in funds to ensure that Veterans in geographically rural areas have better access to top-notch health care.</p> <p><i>Check out the next issue of Vision for Excellence to learn what's new in the network's ongoing commitment to Rural Health!</i></p>
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