

Miami Veteran

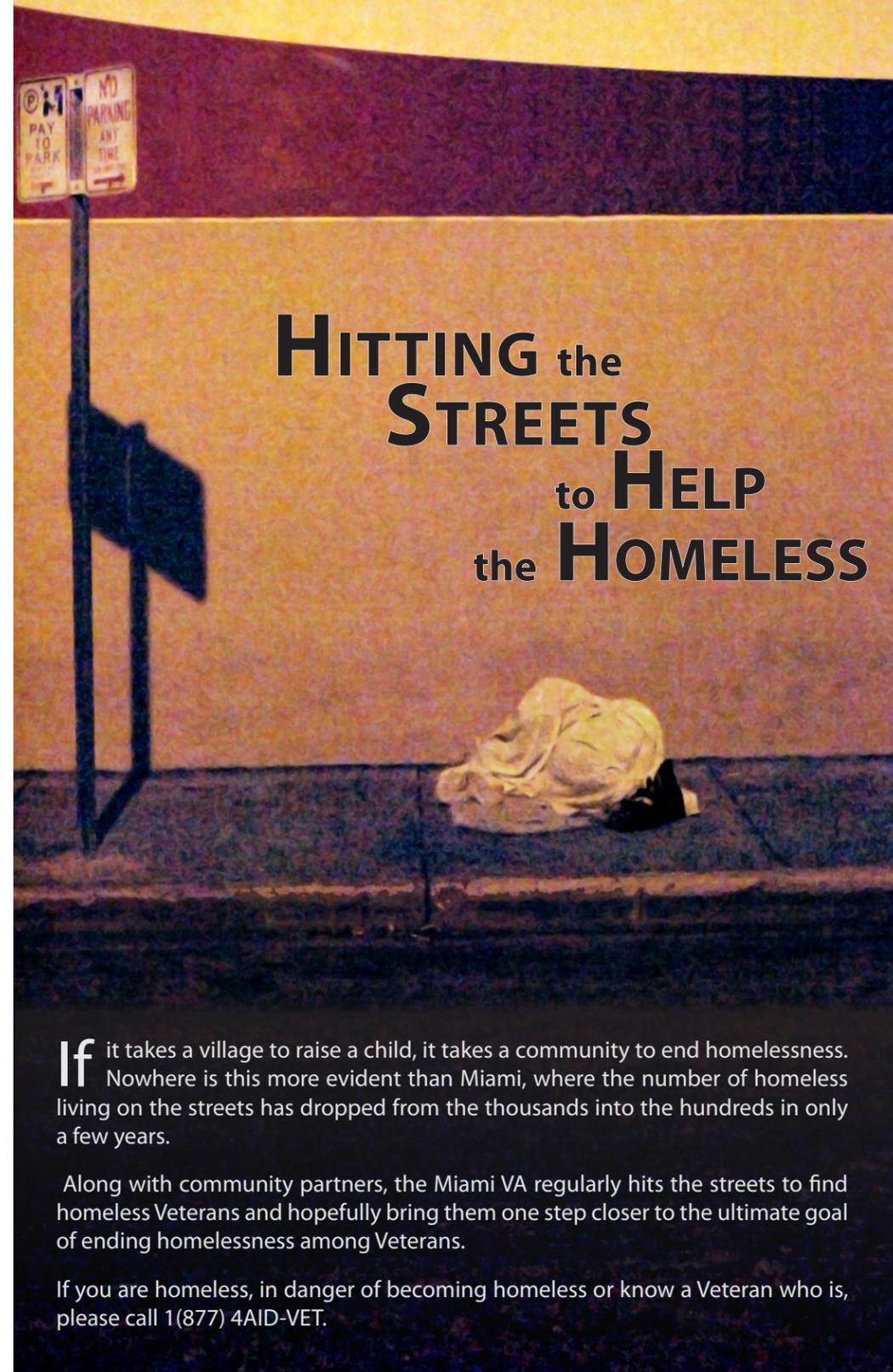
Miami VA Healthcare System

Spring 2012



CARING FOR MIAMI

DOWNTOWN CENTER



HITTING the STREETS to HELP the HOMELESS

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to end homelessness. Nowhere is this more evident than Miami, where the number of homeless living on the streets has dropped from the thousands into the hundreds in only a few years.

Along with community partners, the Miami VA regularly hits the streets to find homeless Veterans and hopefully bring them one step closer to the ultimate goal of ending homelessness among Veterans.

If you are homeless, in danger of becoming homeless or know a Veteran who is, please call 1(877) 4AID-VET.

MVAHS

MIAMI VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
PROUD TO SERVE VETERANS
★★★★

Our mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

Our vision is to continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based.

This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery, and continuous improvement. It will emphasize prevention, population, health, and contribute to the Nation's well-being through education, research, and service in national emergencies.

For more information about the Miami VA Healthcare System, visit our homepage at www.miami.va.gov.

This publication is presented by the Miami VA Healthcare System. For more information please contact Shane Suzuki, Public Affairs Officer, shane.suzuki@va.gov.



One Man's BEST FRIEND

A Life Saver

Mr. Ralph Carbello and Cody (Medical Assistance Dog)

Ralph Carbello and his small dog Cody are like many other retirees in South Florida. They go everywhere together, enjoying the good weather that Miami offers. For this Air Force Veteran though, Cody is more than just a pet – he's a life saver.

"Cody has been a God sent," said Carbello. "He is a companion, a friend and a nurse all rolled in to one. In the last 3 years he has saved my life numerous times, especially during the night when I am asleep".

Cody, a brown and white Shih-tzu, is trained to stay awake while Carbello sleeps and will bark and pull on his shirt if his blood sugar drops below 100. Cody also monitors him during the day, ensuring that Carbello keeps his sugar levels at safe and appropriate levels.

Before Cody, Carbello had a problem with one of his medications and ended up hospitalized. With his sister's help, he received Cody after a five

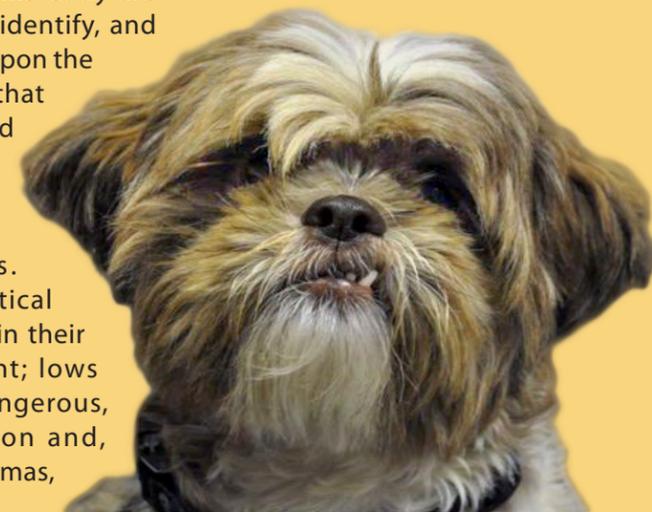
month wait allowing him to sleep at peace knowing that he is around.

"When I first saw Mr. Carbello in his wheelchair with Cody standing and barking on his lap, I asked Mr. Carbello if everything was okay," said Marjorie Valdes, Public Affairs Specialist at the Miami VA. "I was totally amazed that this cute little dog would know the patient's blood sugar had dropped".

Medical service dogs like Cody are specifically trained to identify, and more importantly, act upon the subtle scent changes that hypoglycemia (low blood glucose) creates in body chemistry- changes undetectable to their human companions. These dogs play a critical role for their partners in their diabetes management; lows can be even more dangerous, causing disorientation and, eventually, seizures, comas,

brain damage and even death.

While most people are familiar with seeing-eye dogs for the visually impaired, many do not realize that there are other types of service dogs. Seeing-eye dogs were first introduced into the US in the early 1900's, with other assistance training began in the 1970's.





WARRIORS RIDING for a CAUSE



When the 7th Annual Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride came to the Miami VA in late January, the Miami VA was ready with a special ceremony, and more importantly lunch, to show our appreciation and welcome the returning servicemen and women.

These wounded Veterans and their family members visited the medical center as part of a nationwide event aimed at raising public awareness for those who have been injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Soldier Ride is part of a cycling event sponsored by the Wounded Warrior Project; a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville that provides customized missing limbs to Veterans along with many other services.

The annual ride starts in Miami, ends in Key West and is the first of many Soldier Rides across the country each year.

“The dedication and drive, not to mention perseverance, of these Veterans is an inspiration to us all,” said Cheri Szabo, interim director of the Miami VA. “Through events like the Soldier Ride, you are bringing to life the phrase ‘leave no one behind’. It’s been a great experience watching the Soldier Ride grow into the great event it is now, and all of us want to thank The Wounded Warrior Project for working nonstop to increase awareness



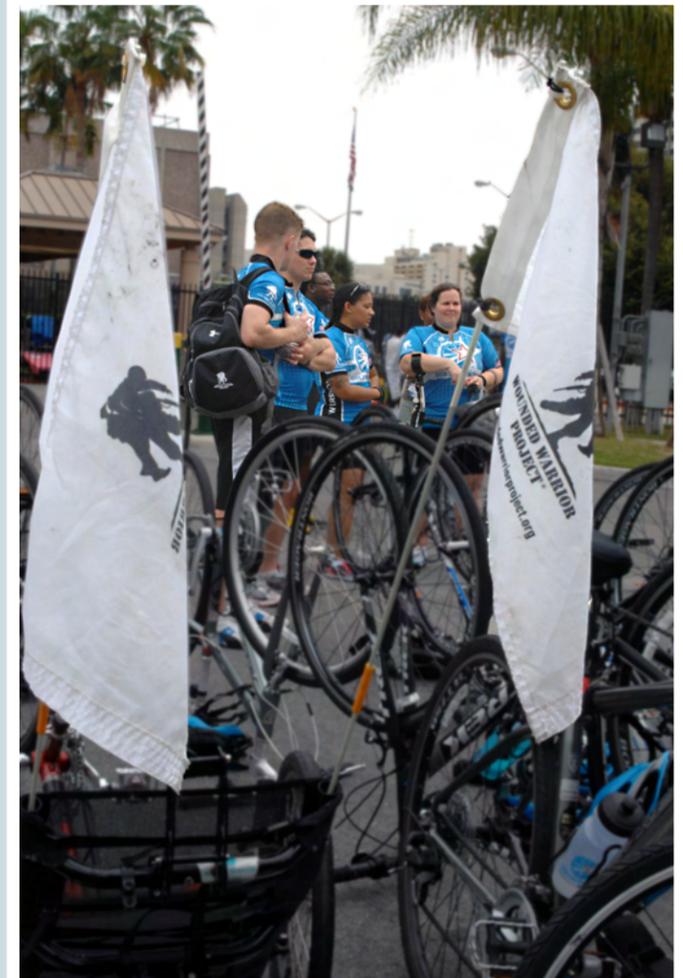
Soldier Ride from left to right: Riders received a warm welcome when they biked into the Miami VA Hospital. Patients, staff, and family members stood on both sides of the entrance waving American flags and cheering the heroes onward. Later, the riders were honored with a service and handmade quilts from the Gold Coast Quilter’s Guild.

and raising support for Veterans in South Florida and across the country”.

Following a short presentation, each rider was presented with a handmade quilt, made by the Gold Coast Quilter’s Guild, as a token of the love and support the community feels for these wounded warriors.

The next day was filled with more riding, along with a stop at the Dolphin Research Center for an afternoon of swimming with the dolphins there. The three-day trip ended in Key West where the Veterans were welcomed by a crowd of supporters.

According to the Wounded Warrior Program, each Soldier Ride is a unique opportunity for Wounded Warriors to use cycling and bonds of service to overcome physical, mental, or emotional wounds. 2012 saw Soldier Rides in Miami, Tampa, Fl., Jacksonville, Fl., Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York, Seattle, North Fork, Phoenix, Nashville, San Antonio, and Landstuhl, Germany.



VISIT from the VHA CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER



What an honor to have Mr. Schoenhard, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations & Management visit the Miami VAMC! During his visit, he met with leadership, Service Chiefs, and other key staff. In addition, he was shown the Special Processing Service (SPS), the Operating Room (OR) Renovation, the OR temporary surgical trailers, and Emergency Room.



THOUSANDTH MVP PATIENT

VA is continuing to revolutionize health care, this time with the Million Veteran Project. At the Miami VA, which was one of the first VA healthcare systems to begin the program, recently reached a special milestone when they enrolled their 1,000th patient!

The MVP program is an ambitious research program looking to change how health care is delivered to future generations. Find out how at www.research.va.gov/mvp.

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT UNDER CONSTRUCTION

See the latest updates
on our website

The Miami VA is renovating
our Emergency Department
to meet the needs of the
next generation of Veterans.

See the latest updates of all our
construction projects at:

www.miami.va.gov/construction





B.J. Thomas concert from left to right: Miami VA Veterans waiting in anticipation for the V4V concert to begin. Shane Suzuki thanking Julia Dale, singer of the national anthem. **Below:** B.J. Thomas entertaining a nearly packed house. Volunteers help distribute flags to the hundreds of guests. The audience included both Miami VA patients and staff, thanks to the generous support of the South Florida Community.

VALENTINE 4 VETERANS

Hundreds of Veterans, family members, friends, and staff that attended the 2nd Valentines for Veterans Concert hosted by the Miami VAHS featuring BJ Thomas at the Fillmore Theater. For 90 minutes, this talented recording artist and song writer truly put a performance for our Veterans, singing songs that we all grew up with. Young and old were dancing and singing in their seats.

This event was one of 16 concerts held across the country as part of National Salute to Veterans Patients, an annual recognition throughout VA to honor

the men and women who served our country. The concerts are also intended to raise awareness of the VA's role in providing comprehensive care to our nation's heroes and to promote volunteerism at our facility.

Timed to coincide with Valentine's Day, the National Salute observance connects the holiday's sentiments of caring and sharing to express honor and appreciation to Veteran patients.

VA's National Salute to Veteran Patients Week and the Valentines for Veterans Concerts are also a wonderful

opportunity for the local community to come together and show their appreciation for the dedicated men and women who served our country in uniform.

There was no entrance fee for the concerts because concert donors and organizers believe "the price has already been paid" by this nation's Veterans.

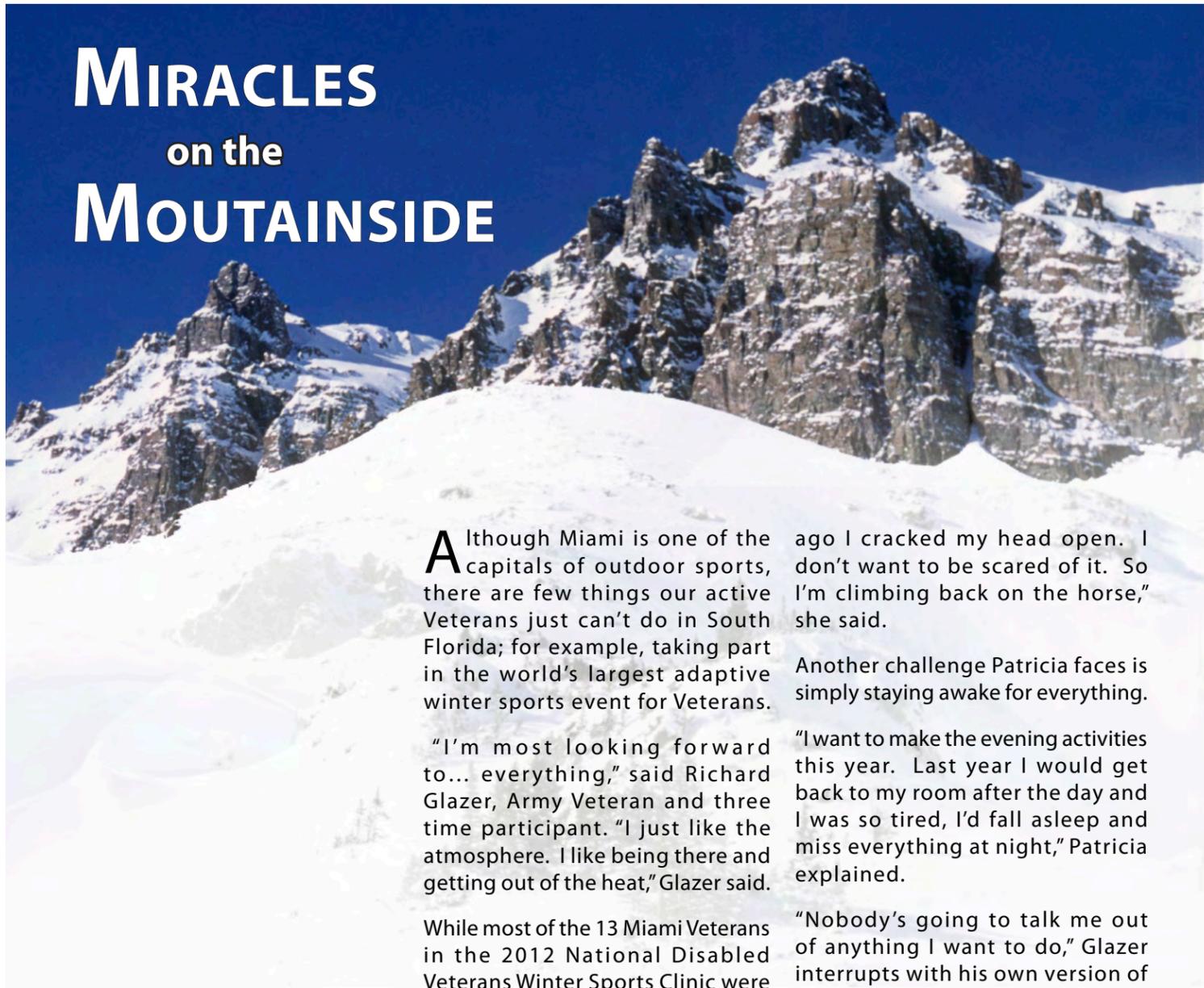
During the week of Valentine's Day, the Miami VA Medical Center hosted a week-long event at the Medical Center, Community Living Center, and Outpatient Clinics.



Concert with B.J. THOMAS



MIRACLES on the MOUNTAINSIDE

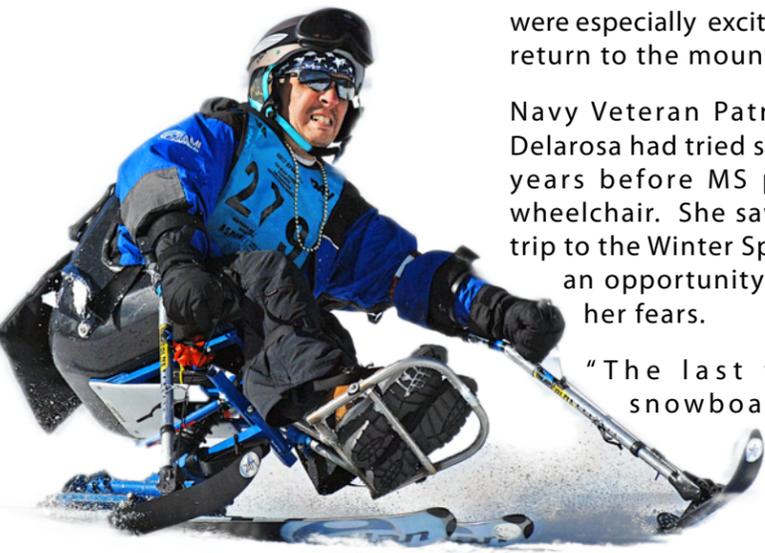


Although Miami is one of the capitals of outdoor sports, there are few things our active Veterans just can't do in South Florida; for example, taking part in the world's largest adaptive winter sports event for Veterans.

"I'm most looking forward to... everything," said Richard Glazer, Army Veteran and three time participant. "I just like the atmosphere. I like being there and getting out of the heat," Glazer said.

While most of the 13 Miami Veterans in the 2012 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic were 'first-timers', two of the 'veteran' Veterans knew what to expect and were especially excited about their return to the mountain.

Navy Veteran Patricia Aguiar-Delarosa had tried snowboarding years before MS put her in a wheelchair. She saw her second trip to the Winter Sports Clinic as an opportunity to overcome her fears.



"The last time I did snowboarding years ago I cracked my head open. I don't want to be scared of it. So I'm climbing back on the horse," she said.

Another challenge Patricia faces is simply staying awake for everything.

"I want to make the evening activities this year. Last year I would get back to my room after the day and I was so tired, I'd fall asleep and miss everything at night," Patricia explained.

"Nobody's going to talk me out of anything I want to do," Glazer interrupts with his own version of the underlying goal of the Winter Sports Clinic, "That's what it's all about - opening your eyes to the possibilities".

The clinic has helped motivate Veterans with traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputations, visual impairments, certain neurological problems and other disabilities to live life to the fullest for 26 years. For more information about National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic visit <http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wsc/index.asp>.

GRILL DONATION for the COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER

As part of the "14 Days of Neighborly Love" program, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz and Keith Wittbeck from the Miami Military Hospitality Center donated a new grill to the to the residents of the Miami VAMC Community Living Center.

This initiative to show love for your Neighbors and your neighborhoods by performing random acts of kindness, uniting the efforts of the different cities

in the District as well as non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals who are joining in donating their time, services or talent, within this span of 14 days, in order to positively impact our community.

Thanks to Commissioner Diaz and Mr. Wittbeck for their generous donation and support of Veterans!



Pharmacy has Moved. *Temporarily*



The Outpatient Pharmacy Service room and pickup location has moved.

Our new location for the pharmacist (Room 2A135B) and the pickup window (Room 2A136D10) is located near Pharmacy Administration on the second floor.

 *Don't Forget!*

You can also re-order your prescriptions by mail, online, or by telephone at (305) 575-3133 or 1(888) 276-1785, Ext. 3133.

HEALING in the EVERGLADES

The power of nature to help heal is well documented, especially for those who are recovering from the invisible wounds of war like PTSD and TBI. In South Florida, nature is nearly synonymous with one of the largest protected natural wonders in the United States – The Everglades.

Recently, wounded Veterans from the Miami VA Healthcare System were invited to spend a special day in the Everglades. Hosted by the Airboat Association of Florida, this event brought Veterans and their families into the heart of the “River of Grass” for a day of food, music, prizes and airboats.

“We were so excited to do this for these Veterans,” said Mary McKinney from the AAOF. “We are already looking forward to next year so we can do it again”.

This event is one example of a growing partnership between the Miami VA and organizations dedicated to preserving The Everglades. By combining outdoor activities with therapeutic staff and resources, many Veterans are finding peace in the opportunity to connect with fellow Veterans and their families in a natural setting.

“The therapeutic benefits of being in nature are well documented,” said Tabitha Aragon, recreational therapist at the Miami VA. “What makes an event like this so special is the community involvement. By partnering with the airboat association, we are able to get our Veterans involved in activities and outings that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to. It’s another example of what makes South Florida such a special place”.

The Airboat Association of Florida is one of the oldest, active conservation organizations in the State of Florida. The group was established in 1951 by a group of sportsmen and conservationists to promote the preservation and conservation of all native species of flora and fauna in the State of Florida and The Everglades so that residents and our many visitors will always be able to enjoy them.

Find out more about the Miami VA Recreational Therapy program at www.miami.va.gov/services/rehabilitation.asp.

More photos of the “Day in the Everglades” can be found on our Facebook page at - www.facebook.com/vamiami.



GUIDED by WIRE

Mr. Charles Blank is a 65 year old USMC Veteran, who served during Vietnam. Born in New Orleans, Louisiana he has lived in South Florida most of his life. Prior to taking jewelry making as a hobby, he worked on oil fields or construction.

Mr. Blank recalls, "I started working with wire to keep my hands busy when I stopped smoking, then I started incorporating gem stones into the jewelry pieces. I soon realized the more wire work I did the less it became about not smoking and the more it was about being able to express my feelings that otherwise I was not able to. Now it helps me to relax and stay out of trouble".

Not in his wildest dreams, did he think that this hobby would take him to win this year's 1st place in the National VA Creative Arts Festival under the Jewelry competition and 2nd place last year. Charles said, "I only entered the competition last year to please everyone and

was surprised to have won 2nd place".

The piece that won him 1st place is titled "The Heart of a Marine". When Mr. Blank was asked how he came up with that name he stated, "I showed the piece to my mother-in-law and told her it looked like a flower pot." Charles said, "She told me that I better take another look at it because it did not look like a flower pot and to find a different name".

When Mr. Blank was asked how he comes up with the designs, he stated "I start with an idea, I guide the wire but ultimately the wire does its own thing. The better I got the more wires I used; I went from wire wrapping to wire sculpturing. The pieces became more detailed as I studied books, watched videos and DVDs and taught myself". He stated that his knowledge of gems came from studying gem books.

His extensive collection of pieces he's created are for his wife and mother-in-law, even though on occasions he makes special orders or creates special pieces that are auctioned by charities.

The approach to making wire was something that was discovered in Ancient Rome, and invented over 2,000 years BC. Wire was first made from gold nuggets pounded into flat sheets. The sheets were then cut into strips and the strips were first twisted and then rolled into the round shape we call wire. This early wire was used in making jewelry.

Charles stated, "I truly enjoy making the pieces and what better way to keep my wife happy".



CELEBRATING HISTORY

Across the nation, millions of people celebrated the contributions of African American's throughout February. The Miami VA hosted several guest speakers highlighting the contributions of blacks to the history and growth of the United States, along with other educational, social, cultural and entertainment events.

One event, organized by the Miami VA Black Employment Program, specifically honored African American women during a fashion show celebrating the 2012 theme: "Black Women in American: Culture and History".



February 4, 2012

Dear Congressman,

A special commendation is due to the staff at the Miami VA office who were assigned to my case file. They immediately ascertained the required information and processed my application in a very expeditious manner. I trust they will be recognized for their outstanding help and I want them to know that their effort has helped to instill confidence in the VA.

Again, many thanks.

Yours truly,
A Veteran

RESPECT and SERVE

While the Miami VA takes pride in ensuring each and every Veteran is provided the respect they deserve and the benefits they have earned, we thank those who take the time to share their experience with us.



Thank you Jimmy Giocalone for sharing your 101st birthday with the Miami VA!