

## Summer Youth Volunteers

**H**i! My name is Monica Liu and I am a 14-year-old freshman from Cheshire High School. I am volunteering at the VA for the first time. I believe that volunteering is a great way to make a difference in the society in which we all live. Moreover, I think it's an excellent opportunity to learn and to meet new people. I hope to go into the neurosciences in the future and am very excited to be working in a hospital environment. A few of my pleasures include music, volleyball, reading, and traveling.



*Monica Liu. Student volunteer in the Public Affairs office.*

As part of my volunteer work here, I am writing a series of articles on student volunteers. My first assignment was to locate a few of the more experienced volunteers—students who could provide helpful comments on their time as volunteers – who I then interviewed. My first article is on four students from Foran High School in Milford. I asked them to tell me about themselves and how they felt about working at VA Connecticut. Using this information, I put together the following story to give you a better idea about the volunteer program and the students that participate in it.

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## Future Events:

**American Red Cross  
Blood Drive  
July 28  
Donaldson**

**Training:  
“Orientation to  
Leadership”  
July 30  
Donaldson A**

**ASISTS Training  
(various dates)**

**For more information on these and other events please see *Good Morning VA Connecticut*.**

## **VA's Summer Youth Volunteer Program Kicks Off**

By Monica Liu  
Summer Youth Volunteer

“Volunteering is fun!” agreed many of the students I interviewed.

Every summer, high school students ages 14-18 have an opportunity to volunteer at VA Connecticut Healthcare System. Students are put to work in a variety of environments, according to each volunteer’s interest. There, the students are able to contribute toward making the hospital, and the community in general, a better place for everyone.

For some, this is the first year they have participated in a volunteer program. For many others, though, the VA has become a familiar place filled with familiar faces, the result of several years of work here. I conducted an interview to get the “inside scoop” on a few of these veteran volunteers.

I started on the sub-ground level with Ryan Sartor, 17, and Jenna Benigno, 15, a senior and a junior from Foran High School in Milford. Working in Supply, Processing, and Distribution (SPD), they stock closets and prepare other hospital equipment. Ryan volunteers because it’s an “excellent opportunity to give back to the community.” And besides, he said, “The food is great!”

Ryan likes getting to know a number of good and friendly people, though he commented that volunteers should be given a \$5.00 meal ticket instead of a \$4.25 one. Besides volunteering, Ryan enjoys watching movies, playing Trivial Pursuit and Pinnacle and acting.

Jenna likes to volunteer because it is a fun experience for her, and she likes to talk to the various people with whom she works. Looking to become a nurse, Jenna has benefited from her time here by seeing how a hospital works and by working in a hospital environment. In her free time, she enjoys volleyball, basketball, track, and doing additional volunteer work at her church. Both Jenna and Ryan agreed that volunteering is a wonderful opportunity and, “More kids should do it!”

My next stop was the mailroom, where I met Matt Jennings, 16, a senior at Foran. He particularly likes volunteering because it gives him a chance to be with friends in a “stress-free environment.” Matt described volunteering as being a welcome “change of pace compared to the rest of the week.”

“I feel that I’ve taken a lot from my community, and volunteering is a good way to give back some of what I’ve taken,” he continues. “I was here for credits, but I came back because it was so fun.”

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Lastly, I interviewed Ioana Mazare, 17, and Zack Rosen, 15, a junior and a sophomore from Foran, working in Primary Care, Firm B. Ioana, who looks to work in Europe in international relations, has gained more patience and is more “people-friendly” as a result of her two years volunteering here. She especially likes interacting and having fun with the people at the VA. However, she says, when patients come in without their hearing aids, the difficulties communicating can sometimes be frustrating. In her free time, Ioana volunteers at the Milford Historical Society, does karate, and listens to music.



*Ioana Mazare and Zack Rosen volunteer in Firm B.*

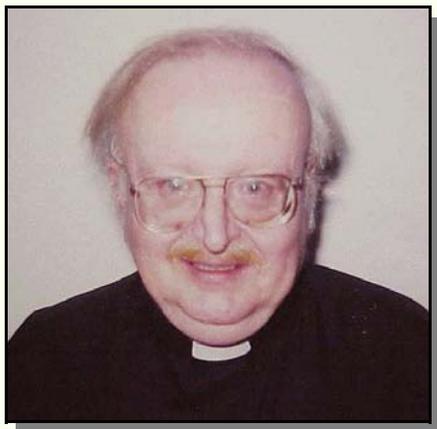
Zack is volunteering for the experience and has also enjoyed working in digestive diseases, local nursing homes and the town library. His main hobby being music, Zack hopes someday to be a musician. Both he and Ioana recommend volunteering to other students.

“It’s fun, you get to hang out with your friends and it keeps you busy. It gives you something to do.”

The youth volunteer program will run until the end of August. Then, it’s off to school again as we resume the regular flow of life. But I think it’s safe to assume that our exciting experiences at the VA will have convinced many of us to return here and be “veteran volunteers” ourselves, for there is always more to do, more to see and more to learn.



## **Employee of the Month**



Congratulations to Father Daniel Scott,  
Chaplain Service, Employee of the Month  
for June at the West Haven Campus.

## Service Award Ceremony



25th Anniversary of Federal Service

A Service Awards Ceremony was held in the Staff Dining Room July 10. Congratulations and thank you to the following employees for their 25 and 35 plus years of federal service:

### 25 Years

Darryel Brown, Donald Daily, Arthur Agan, Robert Foley, Nancy Hetmanski, Gary Johnson, Edward Kobylanski, Karl Larson, Steve Nickerson, James O'Connor, Irene Punsal, Deborah Sieffert, Eula Taylor, Suzanne Teixeira and David Wilson

### 35 Years

Carol Funaro, Wedy Cross, Donna Hryb, Edward Mayes, Lou Morris, Leo Stanlake and Ruth White



## Annual Blind Center Alumni Reunion

Twenty-seven veterans and family members from Washington, D.C. to Maine recently returned to West Haven to attend the Annual Blind Center Alumni Reunion. On July 17, VFW Post 10059 in Trumbull treated the veterans to a day of fishing, hiking, barbeque and BINGO. Blind Center staff hosted a barbeque at the West Haven campus pavilion on July 18 and the Elks Lodge in West Haven held a bowling tournament.



*Blind Center staff prepare hot dogs and hamburgers in the pavilion at the West Haven campus July 18.*



*A ceremony for recipients of the **National Nursing Education Initiative Scholarship** was held in the Staff Dining Room July 21. VA Connecticut recipients, pictured above include: Gayle Bradford, Theresa Conroy, Dana Cervone, Michele Wetmore and Migdalia Hernandez.*

## **Welcome to the Wellness Center**



West Haven - Finding the time to get in a little exercise just got easier now that the Wellness Center is open to employees. Located on the second floor of Building 1 in Room 2-187, employees are welcome to use the weight and cardiovascular equipment weekdays between 7 and 9 a.m. and 4 and 5 p.m. Personnel will be available during those hours to assist with equipment operation and to offer exercise tips. All staff will be required to sign a waiver, available at the Wellness Center.

## **SPIRIT ONLINE**

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