

SPIRIT

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SUMMER STUDENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM CONCLUDES AT AWARDS LUNCHEON

The Summer Student Volunteer Program concluded Aug. 17 with an awards picnic in the pavilion at the West Haven campus. More than 65 student volunteers were recognized for their participation in the five-week program. Students worked in various areas throughout the healthcare system. Rama Yalamanchili (300 hours) at the West Haven campus and Peter Skipp at the Newington campus each received awards for having the most volunteer hours.

The Summer Student Volunteer Program is offered annually to area students 14 years of age or older.



Summer Student Volunteers and staff members gathered for a group photo at the West Haven campus on Aug. 17.



BRINGING HOME THE MEDALS...
Donald Mullett won a bronze, silver and gold medal at the Golden Age Games.

See our Golden Age Team on page 2.

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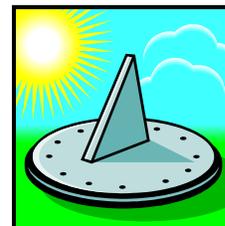
Events:

POW/MIA Observance
Newington Campus
Sept. 14

All Employee Picnics
Newington Campus
September 22
11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

West Haven Campus
September 15
11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

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



Only 27 days of summer remain.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

With summer officially coming to a close next month, I hope that you all had an enjoyable summer. September will be a busy month for us here at VA Connecticut starting off with a visit by VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi to our state on Friday, Sept. 10. Secretary Principi will be participating in a town hall meeting with Congresswoman Nancy Johnson (R-5th) at VFW Post 511 in New Britain (411 Veterans Drive). This town hall is open to the public. The doors will open at 9 o'clock with the town hall beginning at 10. Following the meeting, the Secretary will then visit the Waterbury Clinic.

The Regional Office will begin moving onto the Newington campus next month. After many years and advocacy on the part of the Congressional delegation and veterans service organizations, veterans will now have healthcare and benefits available in the same location. Please join me in welcoming the Regional Office staff to the Newington campus.

On Tuesday, Sept. 14, we will host a Prisoner-of-War/Missing in Action Day program in observance of national POW/MIA Day (observed Sept. 17). Guest speakers will include former POWs and family members of those missing in action. The program will be in the Ceremonial Courtyard and begins at 11 a.m.

The first of our two Employee Recognition Picnics will be on Sept. 15 at the West Haven campus. Food will be served in the courtyard from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. On Sept. 22, the Newington picnic will be on the lawn in front of Building 1 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. If you are interested in volunteering to help serve, please contact Melissa Alpert (West Haven) or Ed Kobylanski (Newington).

The monthly Director's Staff Meeting is scheduled for Sept. 20. These meetings are open to all staff members, and I encourage each of you to attend. This is your opportunity to hear first hand the issues facing the healthcare system and to ask questions. This meeting is held the third Monday of the month at 1:30 p.m. in the Donaldson Education Center (pictel to Newington).

As a reminder, there are two opportunities left for you to attend the Mandatory Poster Training sessions. Sessions are scheduled for Sept 27-28 from 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Donaldson Education Center.



Roger Johnson



VA CONNECTICUT TEAM MEDALS AT GOLDEN AGE GAMES

A contingent of six VA Connecticut veterans competed against 500 veterans from 30 states in this year's 18th Annual Golden Age Games in Fresno, Calif., July 18-23. Our veterans won nine medals.

An awards luncheon in their honor was held on Aug. 24 in the pavilion at the West Haven campus. Congratulations to our Golden Age team!

Veterans 55 and older who receive care at a VA facility are eligible to compete in the many events offered. For more information please contact **Pam Moran**, recreational therapist, at (860) 594-6338).



Pictured are VA Connecticut's Golden Age Games team members and assistants at the awards luncheon in the rotunda. They are (left to right): **Barbara Sergio, Dorothy Mullett, Donald Mullett, Ed Gagnon, Harold Gomes-Gomez, Sam Marabotini, Pat Falcione, Peter Falcione, Pam Moran (coach), Martin Lopez and Robert Erff.**

CHRISTINE COVINGTON

Reflects on 34 years of service at West Haven

By Monica Liu *

“I became interested in medicine when I was very young,” **Christine Covington**, Equal Employment Opportunity manager recalled enthusiastically. “I liked going for physicals, and I loved watching doctors work. I knew I wanted to do what they did, but we didn’t have the money for me to go to school. I decided that if I couldn’t be a hands-on medical person, I wanted to work for a doctor.”

In 1962, Christine Covington, a New Haven native, realized part of her dream by becoming a medical transcriptionist in the operating room here at West Haven. Three years later she was working as a secretary in the chief of staff’s office. In 1966, Ms. Covington left to raise her family, but she returned to the VA in 1976, this time as a secretary to the chief of the neurology service.

“Doctors are so busy,” she remarked. “They rely on secretaries to do everything.” She proudly explained that it use to be her responsibility to arrange training sessions for the neurology residents. She did this by locating patients with specific ailments for the residents to diagnose and if patients were not available, she would find staff members to play the role of a patient.

From 1978 to 1980, Ms. Covington served as chairperson of the EEO Committee. She then worked for as the administrative officer in neurology service. In 1993 she assumed her current position. “My goal is to reduce the number of complaints by educating managers and supervisors on EEO-related law, policies, and guidelines,” she said.

Ms. Covington also works with employees and supervisors when reasonable accommodation needs have to be addressed. Together, they develop a plan to resolve the issue. Ms. Covington sees this plan through and monitors the results.

Over the course of her 33 years at West Haven, Ms. Covington has acquired a broad knowledge of the past and present. As a result, she often acts as an informal mentor to others. She related an incident when a young lady called her to ask about internship opportunities. “I guess she had been asking around, and someone gave her my name. I don’t know how my name pops up, but I always get calls for advice. And I know what to do. I know who to contact, and I know the people who are in charge of different services.”

Indeed, Christine Covington is always ready to offer help to anyone who needs it. “I have always liked teaching,” she said sincerely. “The VA is like a community unto itself. There are a lot of unwritten rules that are not discussed in employee orientations. I try to keep them organized in my mind so that I can help other people understand them.”

Meanwhile, Ms. Covington, who enjoys bowling and reading in her spare time, is looking forward to being able to “retire and do nothing!” She laughingly continued, “Actually, I want to take a computer course because technology is changing so fast that I can’t keep up. I’d like to get more involved. I also want to travel and, of course, spend time with my grandchildren. It’s amazing how much energy they have! They really keep you running.”

Looking back on how far she has come, Christine Covington shared a few words of wisdom: “I’ve had a wonderful career, and I wouldn’t have changed it for anything. I’ve always had good bosses that pushed me to be all that I could be. Not all supervisors are like that. You can’t push too hard, or else you’ll squeeze everything out. You need to keep your good employees so that you can get the job done.”



Christine Covington

* Monica Lui is a Summer Student Volunteer in the Public Affairs Office. This is her final article.



in the
NEWS...



Karen Mack, NP, was recently commended by Network Director **Dr. Jeannette Chirico-Post**, for participating on a pilot group for the Clinical Practice Guidelines on Pharmacological Management of Chronic Heart Failure. The goal of the group was to improve the quality care provided to patients with congestive heart failure.

VA Connecticut Director **Roger Johnson** was presented a certificate of appreciation by **Neil Appleby**, Blinded Veterans Association National President, for his support and advocacy for blinded veterans and the Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Service located on the West Haven campus. The award was presented at the 2004 Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST), Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) and Audiology Training Conference held Aug. 10-12 in Reno, Nev.



Penny Schuckers was recently named the VISN 1 Service Line Manager for Sensory and Rehabilitation Medicine. Penny will maintain her position as Chief, Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Service.



The Connecticut Department of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) donated \$13,000 for the conversion of a new van to accommodate wheelchairs. The vehicle will be leased by the healthcare system from GSA. Pictured with the new van are **Gloria Jorel**, VA Voluntary Service Chief, **Burke Ross**, MOPH Adjutant, **Roger Johnson**, VA Connecticut Director, **John Doherty**, MOPH Department Chaplain, **Charles Gallagher**, MOPH Judge Advocate and **Kurt Mischke**, VA Connecticut Transportation Chief.

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