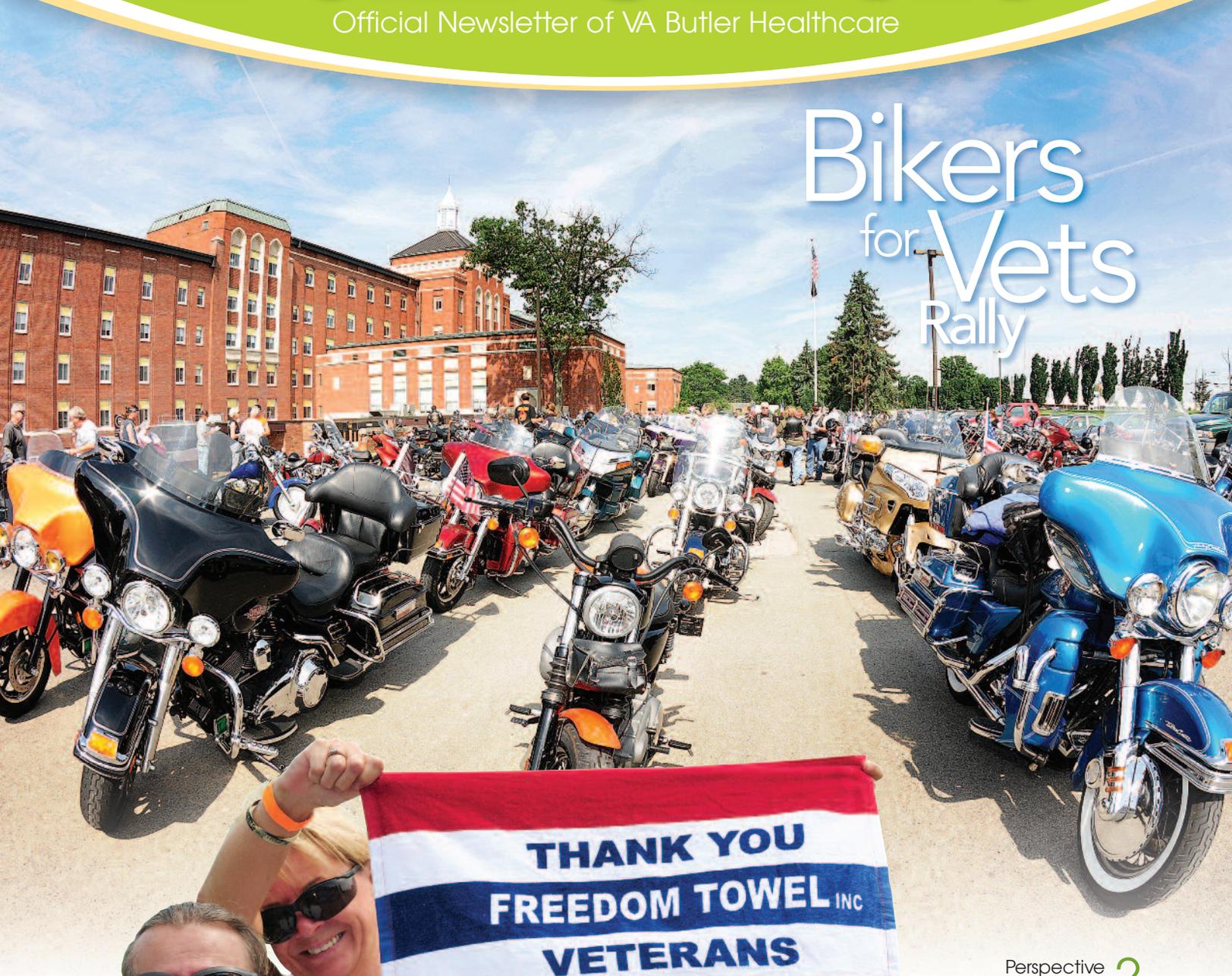


# Full Circle

Official Newsletter of VA Butler Healthcare

## Bikers for Vets Rally



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<http://www.facebook.com/VAButlerPA>

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*Director*



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*Associate Director for Operations*



**Varsha Mehta, M.D.**  
*Chief of Staff*



**Patricia Corr**  
*Behavioral Health Executive*



**Sharon Parson**  
*Associate Director for Patient Care Services*

## Perspective from the Director

AS I REFLECT ON THE GOOD WORK WE ARE DOING, transforming VA Butler Healthcare into a 21st Century organization focused on people, results and progress, I have noted two common characteristics that are essential to this transformation—perseverance and commitment. Perseverance to move forward in the face of adversity with the belief that there is something better and commitment to staying true to the course, seeking not to be better but great. And these characteristics are not just limited to staff and volunteers, but to our community partners and friends who are also helping to transform the lives of Veterans in many different ways each and every day.

John's story (page 4) is an example of commitment and perseverance in the fight against homelessness. Staff and community partners work together, traversing the rural countryside, back alleys and rickety bridges, in order to reach out to homeless Veterans providing them not only with items of comfort, but a friendly smile, a helping hand and solutions to their situation. The support we receive from our community partners, such as Catholic Charities, VOICE, and the American Legion Riders, is indicative of their commitment to helping improve the lives of our Veterans by augmenting VA care and services and/or by providing essentials necessary for daily living (i.e. safe shelter, blankets, food, clothing). Staff are continually seeking new ways to make the lives of our Veterans and their families better. The commitment and perseverance of several nursing staff to improve the number of Hepatitis A & B vaccinations among high risk Veteran patients resulted in a rating of 100%, achieved with a commitment to improving the health of our Veterans and perseverance through continuous follow-up and the involvement of community agencies to stay true to the course of helping these high risk Veterans attain a better quality of life. And, our perseverance and commitment to providing Veterans with state-of-the-art care in state-of-the-art facilities will be realized with the opening of the first 30-beds of the new Community Living Center later this year, breaking ground on the new Domiciliary in late August and site selection and announcement of VA Butler's new Health Care Center later this year as well.

As Director of VA Butler Healthcare, I am committed to insuring that our focus is on you (Veterans, Veteran families, volunteers and staff), that everything we do achieves results that make your lives better, that we create an environment of continuous learning and improvement, and that we move forward with purposeful strides—persevering amid uncertainty and adversity—to create a VA healthcare system that provides a continuum (full circle) of programs and services that are right for you.

*Patricia Nealon*

Patricia Nealon  
Medical Center Director

on the cover

Motorcycle enthusiasts from Butler and the surrounding counties converge on VA Butler Healthcare to support the **Bikers for Vets Rally** coordinated and sponsored by the American Legion Riders of Butler County. For several years now, VA Butler has played host as the starting point for the hundred-mile ride through the rural countryside.

To submit articles, editorials, letters or story ideas for possible inclusion, please contact Paula McCarl at 724-285-2575 or email at [Paula.McCarl@va.gov](mailto:Paula.McCarl@va.gov).

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# Stats

As of June 30, 2010  
(End of 3rd Quarter, FY 2010)

Number of  
Veterans Served

17,530

Number of  
Outpatient Visits

106,351

Number of  
Unique Patients

17,530

Number of  
Inpatients Treated

286

Number of  
Volunteers

572

Number of  
Volunteer Hours

29,581

Number of  
Employees

650

## Veterans News

### What's New For YOU?

#### Medication Co-pay Change

**Effective July 1**, medication co-pay charges for each 30-day supply of VA prescription medications increased \$1 for Priority 7 & 8 Veterans. This change does NOT impact Veterans in Priority Groups 2-6.

#### Post-9/11 GI Bill—Yellow Ribbon

The VA has entered into **over 3,000** Yellow Ribbon agreements (a program that pays tuition expenses for Veterans) for the 2010-2011 Academic year, with more than 1100 colleges and universities.

If you are eligible at the 100% level of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, you can receive additional funding for programs that exceed the maximum public, in-state tuition and fees limit.

#### Coming Soon! Online Claims System

The VA is developing a fully automated, online system for handling Veterans' disability compensation claims.

The new system will drive faster claims decisions by guiding Veterans through automated, program-assisted menus to capture the information and medical evidence. This new system will provide all Veterans with high quality decisions on their claims in no more than 125 days.

#### Did YOU Hear?

VA Butler Healthcare is now hosting Streaming Audio podcasts the first Thursday of each month! If you missed our first two podcasts about Returning Service Members and Vietnam Veterans VA Health Benefits & Services, visit the Chat Link to enjoy the saved podcasts:

<http://www.talkshoe.com/talkshoe/web/talkCast.jsp?masterId=85029&cmd=tc>



#### AND DON'T MISS OUR UPCOMING PODCASTS:

**Sept. 2** - VA's National Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline

**Oct. 7** - VA Butler Healthcare's FREE Flu Clinics—onsite/in the community

**Nov. 4** - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) VA Health Benefits and Services

**Dec. 2** - Women Veterans Healthcare Services Program

#### Health Care Reform: What does it mean for YOU?

**Nothing in the new law changes anything about VA health care.** Enrolled Veterans may still rely on VHA for their health care in the same manner as before the law.

**Beginning in 2014, everyone will be required to have health care coverage.** Congress wrote into the law a provision that says the Veterans' health care program, administered by VHA, meets

the standard for health care coverage.

**Enrolled Veterans do not have to purchase additional coverage.**



Because the Veterans' health care program meets the standard under the law, Veterans enrolled in the VA health care program do not need to obtain additional health care coverage. Veterans may continue to purchase additional coverage if they wish, but the law does not require them to do so.

## calendar

**Sept. 6** | Labor Day, Offices Closed

**Sept. 15** | Flu Clinic, VA Butler Healthcare, Auditorium 7AM-12PM

**Sept. 17** | POW MIA Luncheon & Ceremony, VA Butler Healthcare, Auditorium (by invitation only)

**Sept. 28** | Blood Drive, VA Butler Healthcare Auditorium, 7AM-5PM

**Oct. 11** | Columbus Day, Offices Closed

**Nov. 11** | Veterans Day Ceremony, VA Butler Healthcare Auditorium, 9A

**Nov. 25** | Thanksgiving, Offices Closed

**Feb. 13-19, 2011** | National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week

For more information about upcoming events, visit our website, social media sites, or call us at 800-362-8262.

**SLEEPING IN A BED**, getting food from a refrigerator and cooking on a stove, taking a warm shower, and watching TV are everyday things that most of us take for granted. However, this April, for the first time in six years, U.S. Army Veteran John Harding, 52, was able to do all these things. Thanks for his new life are due to the Homeless Veterans Outreach Program of VA Butler Healthcare, Catholic Charities of New Castle, and several charitable organizations in Lawrence County.

Prior to April, Harding said he drifted in and out of various homeless camps. He became involved with drugs and alcohol. He also became alienated from his family in Fayette County. After a short stay in a halfway house in Aliquippa, Harding came to New Castle in 2004 where he came to live in a tent in a makeshift camp on the outskirts of town with five other homeless Veterans.

During the bitter winter of 2009/2010 he said he heated the tent with a small Coleman heater. He and other residents of the camp also tried to keep warm with a campfire.

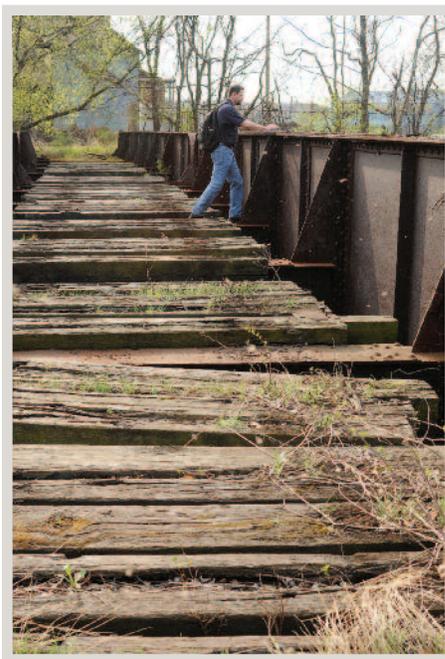
"I couldn't always get fuel for the stove," he said. "And last winter was pretty bad. Lots of snow and very cold. Somehow I stuck out the winter but I also knew that I wouldn't survive another winter living out there."

Homeless camp residents sometimes sought refuge in a local rescue mission; however, the mission limited stays to one night only. Harding said that he and other camp dwellers would sometimes get a hot meal from two charitable organizations, Patches Place and Feed My Sheep.

"Someone at Patches Place said I should go to Catholic Charities to see if they could help me get out of the camp. I contacted Heidi Christy and Misty Miller. They were very helpful and put me in contact with Dan Slack, Homeless Veterans Program Manager of VA Butler Healthcare.

Christy, Miller and Slack eventually arranged to obtain an apartment for Harding. Patches Place donated some

# WELCOME HOME JOHN



furniture and a TV. Catholic charities paid several months rent for Harding, helped with utilities and assisted him in getting on the Food Stamp program. Community Action of Lawrence County and the Salvation Army also provided aid.

Harding said that at one time he was employed building mobile homes, but hadn't worked or been able to hold a job in several decades. He would like to pay an occasional visit to his friends who are still living in the camp but has no desire to return living there.

"Last summer we had vandals

come and burn us out and sometimes people would harass us," he said. "You always had to be alert. We were along a river and sometimes caught fish. But no one had a fishing license, so we had to be careful not to get caught by the Fish Commission people. They checked on us once in a while. Sometimes the

city police would come and check on us too, but just to make sure we were OK. They were pretty nice and didn't really bother us. But the worst thing was the winter weather. There were many times last winter that I thought I just wouldn't make it through."

Miller said that Catholic Charities and VA Butler Healthcare worked with Harding for nearly four months before they were able to arrange for him to have an apartment. "John is very persistent," Miller said. "He tries to keep all of his appointments but has difficulty walking, so he missed a few. He also has difficulty reading and writing." But, despite these obstacles, he continues to be optimistic and meet his obligations.

"Last winter, a man froze to death while trying to sleep in a bus shelter. John is very lucky. We are working with Dan Slack and other agencies to help these men. Helping them is a sad but rewarding experience. Their plight is such that anyone with real compassion is forced to not ignore it," comments Miller.

Slack said that his job often requires him to "...beat the bush" (shown above center) to find homeless Veterans and offer them help. He said some accept the offer, some do not. Many have mental health issues and suffer from

## Putting the Pieces Together to Solve Homelessness



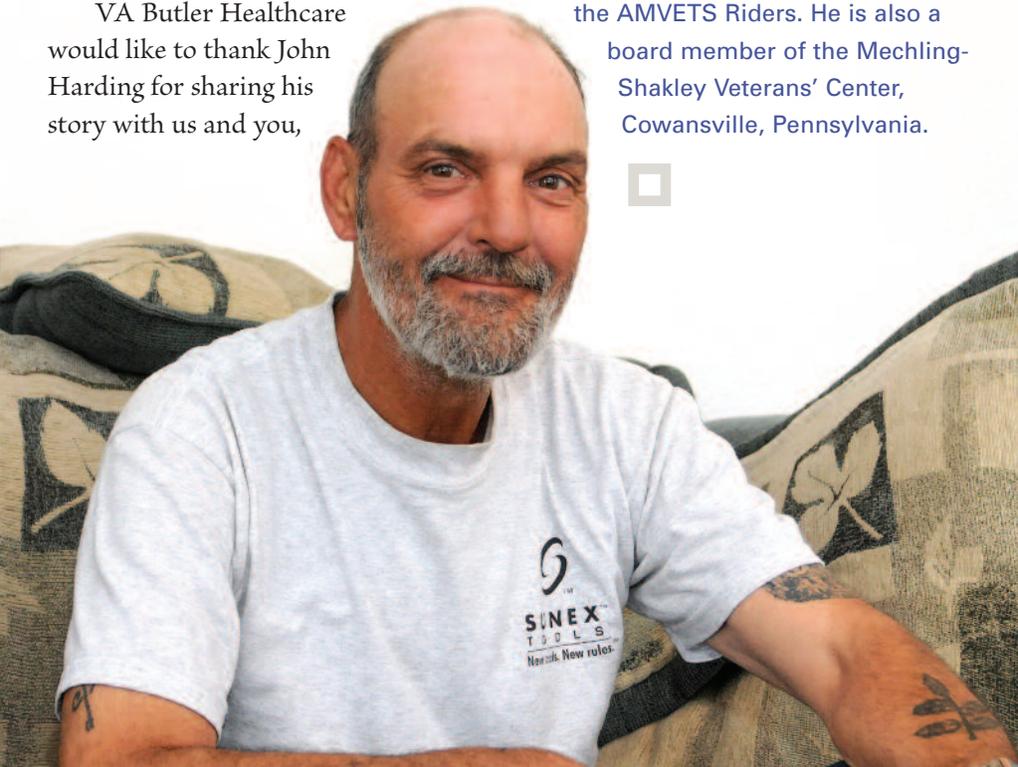
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Like Harding, most are alienated from their families.

“VA Butler covers Armstrong, Butler, Clarion, Lawrence, and Mercer counties,” Slack said. “As far as we can determine, there are about 250 homeless Veterans in our area. Many are Vietnam veterans in their 50’s. However, over the past several years, the number of homeless Veterans has declined, thanks to a nation-wide five year VA plan to eliminate homelessness among Veterans. John is one of our success stories. It’s a real challenge, but we’re up to it.”

VA Butler Healthcare would like to thank John Harding for sharing his story with us and you,

our readers, to generate awareness and support in order to combat homelessness. In the next issue of Full Circle, read about the next chapter in John’s success story, from a “homeless” Veteran to a “hopeful” Veteran.

—Article submitted by guest writer Tom Mitchell. Mitchell is a retired staff writer from the Leader Times, part of Tribune Review Publishing, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and who is now an active freelance writer. A USAF Veteran, he is liaison officer and a trustee of AMVETS Post 13, Kittanning, Pennsylvania, and Public Relations Officer and Chaplain of the AMVETS Riders. He is also a board member of the Mechling-Shakley Veterans’ Center, Cowansville, Pennsylvania.



What does homeless mean? Being homeless is defined as any person who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, or a primary nighttime residence that is:

- a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, and abandoned buildings
- an emergency shelter
- transitional housing for homeless persons and who originally came from the streets or emergency shelter

Approximately **23%** of our adult homeless population is Veterans. On any given night an estimated **107,000** Veterans live without shelter. VA Butler Healthcare works everyday to lower these numbers and address the multiple needs of homeless Veterans.

VA Butler helps homeless Veterans improve their quality of life through a variety of VA benefits and services. Disability benefits, education, health care, rehabilitation services, residential care, and compensated work therapy are among some of the services offered to eligible veterans.

## Community is a BIG piece of solving homelessness for our Veterans.

VA Butler also works to help our homeless Veterans by doing outreach in the community and partnering with local community agencies. Dan Slack, VA Butler’s Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator works with over 50 homeless Veterans per day. “I just get out and connect. You need to be persistent. I let them know that we are here and that the VA has resources.” Slack constantly works in the community to build partnerships and resources for our homeless Veterans. “Community is a big piece of solving homelessness for our Veterans,” Slack says.

VA has about 4,000 agreements with community partners nationwide. These partnerships have shown that Veterans who participate in these collaborative programs are provided with more services and have a better chance of breaking the cycle of homelessness and unemployment.

Since 1987, VA’s programs for homeless Veterans have stressed the value of collaboration with community partners in order to increase services to more and more Veterans. These community partnerships are recognized with reducing the number of homeless Veterans by more than half over the past six years!

# Women Veterans

This is the second installment of an on-going series saluting women Veterans—their unique accomplishments and their perspective on their military service. Look for more interesting and exciting stories in upcoming issues.



**Don't let age keep you from getting involved—it's just a number anyway!**

**79-YEAR-OLD** retired schoolteacher and Army Veteran Marilyn Hilliard of Butler, Pennsylvania, is staying active and, like the Energizer bunny, keeps on going! Last year, Hilliard became the first National Veterans Golden Age Games (NVGAG) athlete to win a Gold Medal at the National Senior Games. She won all 17 games of the horseshoe competition. Despite some recent setbacks, she continues to train with the hopes of competing again—adding more medals to her collection.

Hilliard takes pride in what she does and enjoys the camaraderie the

games offer. She has been competing since 2003 participating in events such as bicycling, basketball, and, obviously, horseshoes. Her philosophy is to get involved—participate in physical activities, meet new people, and experience new places—and she strongly encourages others to adopt the same philosophy. Of attending and participating in the games she says, "It's a good opportunity to make friends and a way to keep active. Even if you are limited physically, there are still things you can do."

As an inspiration to all women Veterans, Hilliard exemplifies the notion that *age is just a number. you are as young as you feel*, and staying active and getting involved is an important component of a healthy lifestyle.

—For more information about competitive senior events, log onto: [www.veterans-goldengames.va.gov](http://www.veterans-goldengames.va.gov) (National Veterans Golden Age Games), [www.nsga.com](http://www.nsga.com) (National Senior Games), and [www.keystonegames.com](http://www.keystonegames.com) (PA State, Keystone State Games).

VA Butler Healthcare wants all Veterans to adopt a healthy lifestyle and the HealthierUS Veterans/MOVE initiative is an on-going program that seeks to do just that. The program provides education to Veterans and their families about health risks, such as obesity and diabetes, and how healthy diets and exercise can reduce these risks and promote a healthy lifestyle. To learn more about the program, contact your Butler MOVE! Team at **1-800-362-8262 ext. 5504**, or visit [www.healthierusveterans.va.gov](http://www.healthierusveterans.va.gov).

## KRISTI MARIE NEIMAN

Enlisted in the United States Navy (6 years active duty and 8 years reserves) as a Combat Photographer, Combat Camera Group, NAS North Island Coronado, California, achieving the rank of E-5-PH2. Neiman works as a Chiropractic Assistant for Discover Chiropractic. Of her military career, Neiman states: "My experience with the Navy was the best thing I did. I received my education, traveled the world and done things I thought I would never get to do."



# Her Story

## BARB FAIR

Enlisted in the United States Navy from 1979-1985, Shipboard Repairs and Damage Control, achieving the rank of Hull Technician Second Class. Fair is currently employed with VA Butler Healthcare as a Supply Technician in the Logistics Department. Of her military career, Fair comments: "My years in the Navy gave me a terrific educational opportunity and was an experience that will always be with me."



A broken bone or a broken spirit...

# DOMESTIC ABUSE HURTS

*I told him no. I told him to stop. I told him to get off of me... BUT, He held me down so strongly that I was afraid he'd break my arms. He punched me with closed fists in my face and my stomach. He told me I was ugly, stupid, and fat. He told me to shut up as I screamed...*

**DID YOU KNOW** women suffer about 4.8 million assaults and rapes every year? Men experience about 2.9 million attacks. Teen dating statistics are worse: one in 11 adolescents reports physical dating violence, while one in four reports verbal, physical, emotional or sexual violence each year. Originally believed to be only a human rights issue, domestic abuse or partner violence is also a *significant* public health problem.

VA Butler Healthcare provides numerous programs and resources for women Veterans, including counseling and treatment for sexual trauma. Examples of sexual trauma include rape, physical assault, domestic battery and stalking. Additional services include couples therapy, anger management groups/counseling, and individual counseling. On Saturdays, a family group session is offered for those willing to include family into their care plan. VA Butler also offers a PTSD Basic Training Class that provides educational training on the symptoms of trauma and awareness of treatment options. Resources such as videos, journals, and other literature are available.

Dedicated behavioral health and clinical staff at VA Butler assess for domestic violence and utilize not only VA resources, but will partner with community agencies as well to provide the most appropriate assistance for each Veterans unique situation. Staff maintain a referral system of local community service and support agencies to augment treatment plans. For example, VOICe (Victim Outreach Intervention Center) and HAVIN (Helping All Victims in Need) are two community service organizations that provide assistance to victims of violence. VOICe provides free and confidential services to individuals and families who are survivors of violent crime. HAVIN provides free and confidential supportive services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

If you are a victim of domestic violence, assault and/or abuse, VA Butler Healthcare encourages you to speak up and ask for help. No situation is hopeless and you are not alone. Confidential inquiries can be made by calling, toll-free, **1-800-827-1000** or by contacting Brenda Sprouse, Women Veterans Healthcare Program Manager for VA Butler Healthcare, at **1-800-362-8262 (ext. 2756)**.

Women are now the fastest growing subgroup of U.S. Veterans and the number of Women Veterans is expected to increase dramatically in the next 10 years. VA Butler understands the health care needs of Women Veterans and is committed to meeting these needs.

**Women Veterans served and they deserve the best quality care.**

### HAVIN

724-543-1180  
24 Hour Hotline: 724-548-8888 or 1-800-841-8881  
[www.havinpa.org](http://www.havinpa.org)

### VOICe

724-283-8700 (Butler)  
724-352-3020 (Saxonburg)  
24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-400-8551  
[www.voiceforvictims.com](http://www.voiceforvictims.com)

## VA Butler Nurses Receive Nursing Leadership Award



**VA Butler Healthcare** nurses, Danielle Weisenstein, RN, and Marne Bilanich, BSN, CARN, pose with their Future of Nursing Leadership trophies for their award winning project practicum to increase Hepatitis A and B vaccinations among high risk Veteran patients. This is the first time that VA staff have received this prestigious award through The Center for Frontline Nursing Leadership.

## We're Building On Our Promise

**Construction continues** on the new Community Living Center (CLC). With a total of three phases to the process, phase one is about 65% complete, phase two is about 20% complete, and phase three is still in the design process and expected to begin early next year. VA Butler Healthcare will soon begin construction on the NEW Domiciliary. In mid-July, VA Butler awarded the contract for the construction of phase one of the 56-bed Domiciliary that will be built on the facility's campus. The contract was awarded to R.A. Glancy and Sons, Incorporated, of Gibsonia, Pennsylvania. The modern residential design concept of the new facility was developed by Radelet McCarthy Polletta Architects and Interior Designers. Construction for phase one of the new Domiciliary will begin this summer with an anticipated completion date the end of fiscal year 2011. The estimated cost, phase one and two, is \$8,500,000.



## Bikers for Vets Rally

**On Saturday, July 17, 2010**, VA Butler Healthcare hosted the registration and Kick-off for the American Legion Riders Annual Bikers for Vets Rally, a 150 mile trek through Butler and Mercer Counties. There were 219 bikes and almost 400 individuals participating in the event. VA Butler residents were provided an opportunity to join the festivities, getting a closer look at the motorcycles and interacting with the bikers. "Some of our residents rode motorcycles themselves, so this was a great opportunity for them to relive and share some of their own experiences," comments Paula McCarl, Voluntary Services Specialist and Public Affairs. Money raised from the event supports various Veteran needs within the community such as VA Butler's Homeless Veterans Program.



## Employees with 20 or more years of service

### 20 Years

**Bonnie Raybuck**  
*Primary Care*

### 25 Years

**Donna Mitchell**  
*Chief of Staff's Office*

**Connie Pakutz**  
*Human Resources*

### 30 Years

**Terry Miklos**  
*Patient Care Services, ADHC*

**Deborah Peitz**  
*Nutrition & Food Services*

### 35 Years

**Cheryl Stich**  
*Behavioral Health/CBH*

*(The employees listed achieved these milestones at the end of the 3rd quarter of Fiscal Year 2010.)*

