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VA Butler’s Director Jon Lasell presented Volunteer Jeremy Fleeger with a special recognition award this fall to thank him for his volunteer service to VA Butler for the last 22 years, which included 21,834 hours of service.

VA Butler partnered with the local community for the third Stand Down event in Butler County. The event provided an opportunity for homeless Veterans to access community resources and receive essential day-to-day items that many often take for granted.

As part of White Cane Safety Day, Navy Veteran John Neudorfer shared his story leading to his blindness, and training that he has received to maintain independence. John even demonstrated some tandem cycling!

VA Butler Healthcare held its annual “Pink Out” to show support and raise awareness during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October.

VA Butler’s seventh annual Healthy Living Recognition Event recognized 59 local Veterans for successes made toward making healthy living choices resulting in positive outcomes.

Veterans from VA Butler traveled to Heinz Field in September for the annual “Heroes at Heinz Field” event hosted by the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Pete Albert, VA Butler’s Suicide Prevention Coordinator, shared important crisis information during the sixth annual Mental Health Summit. The summit’s goal is to enhance mental health care for Veterans and their family members through dialogue and collaboration between VA and the community.

In October, VA Butler Healthcare received a new van for DAV use at the Abie Abraham VA Health Care Center! A big THANK YOU to everyone who contributed and worked hard to make this possible.

VA Butler’s Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Program and the Women Veterans Health Care Program partnered to host the first National Women’s Health and Fitness Day Event. The event included tai chi and yoga demonstrations, low level workout stations, and more.
Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VA Butler,

I’m grateful to everyone who has taken time to meet me and share their insight, stories, questions, and concerns with me during my first few months at VA Butler. I encourage you to keep doing so!

In honor of National Veterans and Military Families Month celebrated this November, as well as the VA’s mission (which I personally and professionally believe is the best in this country), I’d like to share my sincere and heartfelt appreciation for our Veterans and their families. Thank you for your service and sacrifice. I look forward to meeting many more of you, and serving and seeing you soon at VA Butler.

Jon, Director

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Butler Healthcare
This fall, 33-year-old U.S. Army Veteran Benjamin Knight and 84-year-old U.S. Navy Veteran Paul Starr started classes at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) as part of a new Master Gardener Program, Healing Gardens, and Greenhouse pilot program at VA Butler.

Through a partnership with Penn State Extension (College of Agricultural Sciences) Master Gardeners of Butler County, and with funding from VA’s Office of Rural Health (ORH), two Veterans are training to become Master Gardeners at Penn State and will then become educators for the official program at VA Butler. The program will include a comprehensive green job skills program focused on master gardening and sustainable landscaping education, and skills training.
“I am learning more than I ever knew was available about gardening,” shared Knight. “It is nice connecting with others interested in horticulture. I will use the skills learned to volunteer in my own community and to help my fellow Veterans.”

“Some people like to jump out of planes as a hobby, I like to play with dirt! This program is great for Veterans interested in horticulture,” said Starr. “It’s nice to meet new people in the program, and I am learning a lot of new stuff, like there are 700 types of pine trees!”

The Master Gardener program teaches research-based and sustainable horticultural practices. Sustainable gardening concepts and practices are included as an integrated component throughout basic training. After successful completion of basic training, each trainee must complete the following requirements within a period of one year: pass the final examination, complete county-required activity, and fulfill a 50-hour volunteer service commitment.

“The Master Gardener Program, Healing Gardens, and Greenhouse project is exciting and will provide great opportunities for our Veterans,” said Karen Dunn, VA Butler’s Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Program Manager and program lead for this pilot program. “Once completed, this project will positively affect many programs and services and will be of great benefit to many Veterans for many years to come.”

Once the two Veterans have become certified gardeners, the Greenhouse and Healing Gardens will be a sustainable strategy for Veterans to receive education, vocational rehabilitation, compensated work therapy, and continuous employment opportunities year-round. Additionally, the Healing Gardens and Greenhouse will provide volunteer opportunities for Veterans and community members.

The practice of horticulture provides a unique opportunity to leverage the positive interaction between people, plants and gardens to achieve improvements in physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. There is evidence that Healing Gardens can reduce stress and promote a sense of well-being, improve clinical outcomes, reduce the cost of care, and increase overall patient satisfaction.

VA Butler’s local pilot program is part of the Veterans Affairs Farming and Recovery Mental Health Services (VA FARMS). The VA FARMS Pilot Program was established in 2018 in response to Senate Report 115-130 and The Joint Explanatory Statement (JES) to the Consolidated Appropriations Act [Omnibus], 2018, directing the Department of Veterans Affairs to “create a pilot program to train veterans in agricultural vocations while also tending to behavioral and mental health needs with behavioral healthcare services and treatments from licensed providers.”
Visit Your VA Doctor at Home

VA Video Connect Continues to Expand

VA Video Connect (VVC) is a new program available at VA Butler this year that allows Veterans to connect with their health care teams over live video from the comfort of their homes. As of August, there have been more than 130,000 successful Video Connect encounters, and nearly 9,000 VA providers across the country are set up to use the system.

“VA Video Connect provides our Veterans with a flexible, convenient option to connect with their providers,” said Laurie Conti, Connected Care Manager at VA Butler Healthcare. “We have had great success utilizing this new technology for many of our behavioral health programs, as well as our primary care teams.”

Dr. Niebauer, a clinical psychologist and the PTSD Team Lead for VA Butler, has been using VVC for several months to “visit” Veterans for behavioral health appointments.

“VA Video Connect really improves our reach,” Dr. Niebauer shared. “It is a way for us to offer mental health care to Veterans who might not be able to access care due to transportation, financial strain, or other reasons they are unable to drive.”

VA Video Connect can be used on almost any computer, tablet or mobile phone with an internet connection, a web camera and microphone. The way it works is pretty simple: If you have a VA Video Connect visit scheduled, you get an email. In that email is a link with the time for the visit. You click on that link, and you are brought into a virtual medical room. The virtual medical rooms that are setup during each “visit” allow for multiple participants, so family members and caregivers can join visits too.

VA Video Connect is similar to Skype or other video conferencing solutions, but it is encrypted, private, and meets all of the requirements for delivering health care in a secure way.

This fall, VVC at VA Butler expanded its use to the VA RN Triage Call Center. Now, Veterans can use live video to meet with a nurse practitioner from wherever they are. The Call Center offers a same day care option through VA Video Connect to allow Veterans to participate in a video call with a nurse practitioner.

“The nurse will help to decide if a video visit is right and a technician will assist with the set-up of a device to make sure a connection can occur,” said Conti. “These video visits can save Veteran’s time and travel to the VA medical center, without a copayment, to get feeling better faster!"

While the program is still new (and continuously growing), the overall feedback has been tremendously positive from Veterans. For example, working Veterans have been able to receive care without leaving or missing work, and travel issues for Veterans living further away have been resolved thanks to this new care option.
“We realize weather, transportation, illness, children, and work can all be issues requiring interruptions to care visits and we want to be more accessible at the right place and time for Veterans,” added Conti.

Veterans and their health care providers jointly decide whether to use VA Video Connect for a behavioral or medical visit. Not all care can be conducted over video, and some appointments may require in-person follow up to ensure thorough care is provided.

If you are a Veteran who is interested in using VA Video Connect, here are three steps to get started:

- Talk with your VA care team at VA Butler to see if video appointments can be part of your care plan. Veterans and their health care providers jointly decide whether to use VA Video Connect for a medical visit.
- If the answer is yes, a VA staff member will schedule the appointment and help you determine how you will connect to the video visit.
- Finally, when your appointment is scheduled, you will receive an email with your scheduled appointment time and video visit link.

https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect
Welcome to VA Butler

New Director and New Chief of Staff Appointed

A new Medical Center Director and a new Chief of Staff joined the VA Butler Leadership Team this fall!

Jon R. Lasell Jr. was appointed as the Director of VA Butler on October 14, 2018. Mr. Lasell came to the VA from the U.S. Army Medical Command Healthcare Contracting Activity in San Antonio, where he served as the Director of Business Operations. He also has served as chief operating officer at the Winn Army Community Hospital in Hinesville, Georgia, and deputy chief of staff for the Regional Health Command – Central in San Antonio.

In addition to his military experience, Lasell holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Prairie View A&M University and a master’s degree in health care administration from Baylor University. He is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

“The job satisfaction I get from serving fellow Veterans as the Director of VA Butler is immeasurable. I can’t think of a better job,” said Mr. Lasell. “My goals as the new Director include; continuing and improving upon the excellent care at VA Butler and creating a greater sense of community among our staff, Veterans, family, and the communities we serve.”

Jo-Anne Suffoletto, MD, MSc, was appointed as Chief of Staff of VA Butler on November 11, 2018. Dr. Suffoletto received her MD from Loyola University, Stritch School of Medicine, and completed her Internal Medicine Residency-Women’s Health Track at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. She served as a Chief Medical Resident at UPMC prior to joining the Internal Medicine faculty within the Division of General Internal Medicine at UPMC and VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS). Dr. Suffoletto joined the VAPHS medical staff in 2008. Since 2013, she served as the Associate Chief of Staff for Education and Innovative Learning and Medical Director of the Simulation Program at VA Pittsburgh.

Dr. Suffoletto also holds a Masters in Medical Education from the University of Pittsburgh. She served as a champion of medical education, systems improvement, and the Just Culture initiative at VA Pittsburgh. She has been Interim Chief of Staff at VA Butler since July 9, 2018.

“It is an exciting time in health care, especially with all the advances VA is making in telehealth and technology to better serve our Veterans,” said Dr. Suffoletto. “Health care is constantly changing and growing, and I look forward to leading VA Butler in this area.”
In November, Mr. Lasell joined fellow Veterans in the annual Butler County Veterans Day Parade aboard VA Butler’s Firetruck.

In September, the annual Community Living Center Carnival was held and Dr. Suffoletto volunteered in this year’s dunk tank!
NEW Health & Wellness Programs for Veterans

Whole Health: Not the Same Old Grind!
What exactly is “Whole Health” and how is VA Butler Healthcare supporting Veterans’ Whole Health? Join us on the first Tuesday of each month from 12:30pm to 1pm in room 1RT004 for a brief introduction to Whole Health and the many programs and services VA Butler Healthcare has available for Veterans. Free coffee!

Free Water Classes at the Butler YMCA
Free, weekly water classes are available to Veterans at the YMCA in Butler on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Water classes are appropriate for all fitness levels! For more information, or to register to begin participating, call 878-271-6484.

Stay Active & Independent for Life (SAIL)
SAIL is a strength, balance, and fitness program for older adults now available weekly at VA Butler Healthcare. Performing exercises that improve strength, balance, and fitness is the single most important activity adults can do to stay active and reduce their chances of falling. Learn more by calling 878-271-6484.

Tai Chi
Tai Chi was developed as an ancient Chinese martial art. Tai Chi is a widely practiced form of exercise with numerous health benefits. Studies have demonstrated Tai Chi to have potential positive effects for falls, hypertension, cognitive performance, osteoarthritis, depression, pain, balance confidence and COPD. If you have any additional questions about Tai Chi, or are interested in trying Tai Chi at VA Butler, please talk to your health care team or call VA Butler’s Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Nurse at 878-271-6459.

Day of Prayer for Veterans
Pastoral Care at VA Butler

This fall, VA recognized National Pastoral Care Week October 21-27, 2018 and celebrated a Day of Prayer for Veterans on November 1. Veterans have provided selfless service to our nation, often at a great personal cost. In recognition of their service and sacrifice, VA is designating the first Thursday of November each year as a Day of Prayer and Reflection for Veterans. On this day, VA is asking all Americans who pray, regardless of personal religious beliefs, to ask for healing for our Veterans, their families, the Department, and the nation.

Did you know VA Butler Healthcare has three chaplains in its Pastoral Care Department who provide emotional and spiritual support to our Veterans and their families, and as needed, to our staff? Learn more about Pastoral Care at VA Butler Healthcare: www.butler.va.gov/services/Pastoral_Care.asp

www.butler.va.gov/services/Pastoral_Care.asp
Decline in Veteran Homelessness

Veteran homelessness in the U.S. continues to decline, according to a new national estimate announced in November by U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson.

HUD’s Annual Homeless Assessment Report finds the total number of reported Veterans experiencing homelessness in 2018 decreased 5.4 percent since last year, falling to nearly half the number of homeless Veterans reported in 2010.

Each year, thousands of local communities (including VA Butler’s Homeless Team!) around the country conduct one-night “Point-in-Time” estimates of the number of persons experiencing homelessness — in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs and in unsheltered locations.

VA has a wide range of programs that prevent and end homelessness among Veterans, including health care, housing solutions, job training and education. More information about VA’s homeless programs is available at VA.gov/homeless.

Fall is the Time for Flu Shots

This fall, VA Butler hosted 15 flu vaccination clinics for Veterans at the main campus, community-based outpatient clinics, and other community locations. While clinics are over for the year, Veterans may still receive a no-cost flu shot during any scheduled VA appointment.

Enrolled Veterans also have the option of getting their flu shot at any of Walgreens’ 8,200 locations from now through March 31, 2019. No appointment is required. Simply go to any Walgreens and tell the pharmacist you receive care at a VA facility and show your Veterans Health Identification Card and another form of photo ID.

Vaccination is the surest way to protect against getting the flu. Get your flu shot every year to protect yourself and help keep the flu from spreading to others.

Intimate Partner Violence Resources are Available

In October, VA Butler Healthcare recognized Domestic Violence Awareness Month with events and information for VA staff and Veterans. VA Butler remains committed to helping Veterans, their partners and VA staff who are impacted by Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a serious, preventable public health problem that affects millions of Americans. The term “intimate partner violence” describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. IPV can happen to anyone. In the United States, about 1 in 4 women (or 27%) and 1 in 10 men (or 11%) report having been harmed by sexual or physical violence, or by stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

VA’s IPV assistance program focuses on the individual and works on developing a culture of safety. This holistic approach involves understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. The ultimate goals are to end violence, prevent further violence and promote healthy relationships.

Veterans can ask their providers for help, contact VA Butler’s Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Program Coordinator at 878-271-6124, or call the National Domestic Violence (NDV) Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).
Celebrating 100 Years!

On November 12, 2018, retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel John Mahler celebrated his 100th birthday! VA Butler Healthcare hosted a birthday celebration for him, and Butler County declared his birthday to be “John Mahler Day” across the county.

Mr. Mahler served with the 15th Air Force Division, 97th bomb group, flying 38 missions during WWII. He received various combat and campaign medals, including two Presidential Unit Citations.

Mr. Mahler is frequently at VA Butler Healthcare’s Wellness Center...exercising! To him, age is just a number and he likes to keep moving. Interested in learning more about exercising in VA Butler’s Wellness Center? Call 800-362-8262, ext. 6484 to get started today.

Veterans Serving Veterans

VA operates one of the largest health care systems in the U.S. VA employs highly trained professionals who are dedicated to providing quality health care to Veterans, and many are Veterans themselves! Currently more than 30 percent of VA Butler Healthcare’s employees are Veterans.

“Throughout my military career, I always had my fellow Servicemembers’ backs. Being in the Coast Guard for 25 years with a motto of Semper Paratus (Always Ready) I always wanted to be ready to serve and save. After retirement, I wanted to continue that legacy into my next career and was honored to find that in the VA. Lots of great people living out the same principles that made me successful in service and now in the VA. We all have each other’s “six”s.”

Voluntary Services Specialist and U.S. Coast Guard Veteran Andy Pepe

Hey Veterans! Share your stories with us in Vet Chat.
Email Amanda.Kurtz2@va.gov. We’d love to hear from you!
Health Quiz: Mental Health Myths

We all likely know someone who has experienced poor mental health or mental illness at some point in their lives. Yet there are still many harmful attitudes and misunderstandings around mental health. Take the following quiz and see if you can separate the myths from the facts.

1. Poor mental health increases the risk for long-lasting (chronic) physical conditions like:
   a. Heart disease  
b. Stroke  
c. Cancer  
d. All of the above

2. Mental illnesses are:
   a. Very common  
b. Not very common  
c. Fairly common

3. Suicide is the ____ leading cause of death among people ages 15-34 in the United States
   a. 24th  
b. 10th  
c. 40th  
d. 2nd

4. Mental illness
   a. Cannot be treated  
b. Can be treated

5. Mental health is
   a. More than the absence of mental disorders  
b. Only important for some people  
c. An important part of overall health and well-being

6. Half of all mental illness occurs before a person turns____ years old, and three-quarters of mental illness begins before age 24
   a. 14  
b. 18  
c. 10

7. Mental illness is caused by
   a. Personal weakness  
b. Lack of willpower  
c. A number of factors including biological factors, stressful or traumatic life events, and long-lasting health conditions such as heart disease or cancer

8. If you know someone with poor mental health, you can help by:
   a. Reaching out and letting them know help is available  
b. Helping them access mental health services  
c. Learning and sharing the facts about mental health, especially if you hear something that isn’t true  
d. All of the above


Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
HEALTH TECH – 3D-PRINTED ARTIFICIAL LUNG

Researchers Strive to Help Veterans with Lung Disease

VA scientists at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System in Michigan recently announced that they are working to create a 3D-printed artificial lung that could potentially revolutionize treatment of Veterans affected by lung disease.

Though still in its infancy, VA researchers hope to build what they call the first artificial lung that closely replicates the natural lung, resulting in compatibility with living cells and a very small size for portable or wearable short- and long-term respiratory support.

In the near term, the device could be used as a temporary measure – a bridge to help patients waiting lung transplant or an aid for Veterans with recovering lungs. According to researchers, future versions could have longer-term applications.

Dr. Joseph Potkay, a biomedical engineer at the VA Ann Arbor Health Care System in Michigan, is leading the VA-funded research. In 2011, Potkay unveiled a prototype of a 2D-printed artificial lung that used traditional microfabrication techniques. Lab testing of the 2D artificial lung has provided a glimpse of what Potkay and his colleagues are capable of achieving in a 3D format.

Exposure to burn pits, sand, diesel exhaust and chemicals are some of the most commonly cited factors that lead to lung problems for active-duty military. About 20 percent of patients with severe traumatic brain injury also have acute lung injury.

One lung disorder VA researchers hope to tackle someday with the 3D-printed artificial lung is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), regarded as one of the most prevalent and costliest ailments in the Veteran population.

COPD affects 5 percent of American adults and 16 percent of the Veteran population. Most people with COPD have emphysema, in which the air sacs of the lung are damaged and enlarged, and chronic bronchitis, a long-lasting cough caused by chronic inflammation of the bronchial tubes. The disease is characterized by an airflow limitation that is often linked to an abnormal response of the lungs to noxious particles or gases, such as those in cigarette smoke.

# Health Tastes – Curry Pumpkin Soup

## Ingredients
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 tsp canola oil
- 2 cups low sodium chicken broth
- 1 can (15oz) pumpkin
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp curry powder
- 1 tsp sugar
- dash pepper
- 1/2 cup evaporated milk
- chopped fresh parsley, optional

Serving size = 1 cup, makes 4 servings

## Directions
In a saucepan over medium heat, sauté onion in oil until tender. Add the broth, pumpkin, lemon juice, curry powder, sugar, and pepper; bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Stir in evaporated milk; heat through. Garnish with parsley, if desired.

Source: VA Nutrition and Food Services

Fat: 2g ★ Calories: 74 ★ Carbohydrates: 11g ★ Protein: 3g

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## Mental Exercise

Older adults can improve their cognitive abilities with mental exercise just like exercising the body. Sudoku and crossword puzzles could help. The puzzles may help keep memory sharp, reduce stress and even improve concentration.

### ACROSS
1. Oily or greasy (9)
5. Bet (5)
7. Young eel (5)
9. Land measure (4)
10. Sultry (6)
12. Dairy product (6)
13. Hex (4)
15. Crowd scene actor (5)
16. Hidden drawback (5)
18. Accumulated (9)

### DOWN
1. Cutting tool (3)
2. Remedy (4)
3. Wildcat (6)
4. Contradiction in terms (7)
6. Article of clothing (7)
8. Findings of a jury (7)
9. Of times long past (7)
11. Attack (6)
14. Dull pain (4)
17. Concealed (3)

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# Health Tip—Try “Seasonal” Eating

Food should taste good and nourish the body at the same time. Seasonal eating can help with both. As the seasons change, so does the fresh produce selection. Your local dietitian is a great resource to help guide you in learning to eat seasonally.
VA Butler Healthcare, located in Butler County, Pennsylvania, has been attending to Veteran's total care since 1947. We are the health care choice for over 18,000 Veterans throughout Western Pennsylvania and parts of Ohio and are a member of VA Healthcare VISN 4 under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Butler provides comprehensive Veteran care including primary, specialty and mental health care – as well as management of chronic conditions and social support services for our nation's finest, America's Veterans.