



The

# BEACON

FOR THE EMPLOYEES of the SAN FRANCISCO VA MEDICAL CENTER • APRIL 2009

## The Event of A Lifetime: The Presidential Inauguration



Using all possible connections through family and friends, I managed to get inauguration tickets and one ticket for an “official” ball. The fun began while flying to DC; the entire plane was going for the same reason. The mood was high and

everyone was dressed for the cold (although there were many long ball gowns being carried, as well). A favorite moment occurred at Dulles Airport as I was standing behind a very old Southern Black minister and a younger relative—neither obviously used to travel—and hearing him sing, almost inaudibly, spiritual verses in her ear while they walked through the crowd.

My daughter Emily went to the big concert on the mall with 500,000 “friends” but I arrived too late to attend. However, I did sit back-to-back with John Kerry and Natalie Portman at a restaurant that night! Our hotel was near the White House and on Monday I went to the National Mall with Emily to see the preparations and to visit the Lincoln and Vietnam Memorials. People were everywhere, and everyone was smiling and just taking it all in. My wife Molly arrived later on Monday and after dinner the three of us walked the entire parade route, watching as it was all being set up. That was fun, but it was really cold and there was a biting wind.

On Tuesday, we got all bundled up and prepared to spend hours in the cold. We had hand warmers, toe warmers, and layers of socks, hats and scarves. We arrived at our assigned screening gate, now known as

the infamous “Blue Gate,” by 7 a.m. We proceeded to wait with 50,000 others where there was no signage, no staff or volunteers, and an ever-increasing realization that we would never get to see the event on the mall. At 11:15 a.m. we abandoned our attempts and walked to find a hotel where we might be able to watch on a lobby TV. Molly saw a sports bar, the Green Turtle, and we were the last ones allowed in. This was great considering the number of people that were also trying to find a place to see the swearing-in. My daughter was really sad, but we were warmly accepted into what felt like a family event. Most of the people there were African-Americans and Washington residents and they really made this the place to be! The group was absolutely thrilled with the Inauguration and, as it turned out, we arrived just in time to hear all of the President’s speech. On our way back to the hotel the streets were completely empty as everyone else was still on the Mall. A very strange but wonderful feeling.

That night I went to the Ball alone so I grabbed a spot right in front of the stage and stayed there all night, again with a new-found group of “friends” from across the country. I had front row views of performances by Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez, and of the Biden’s and Obama’s appearances complete with short comments and even shorter dances.

Overall, I had a wonderful few days. Seeing people talking together and looking directly at each other across the usual racial and economic divisions that typically keep us apart was an unexpected but most positive aspect.

*by Paul Volberding, MD*

# A Word from Our Director

To All Employees:

In my former position as the Deputy Network Director, I had the opportunity to work with many of you and to know of many of the great things that you do here. It is really an honor to have been selected as your Medical Center Director and I look forward to working with all of you as we tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

As I near the end of my third month as Director, I want to thank everyone for their incredible warmth and hospitality. In these first few weeks, I have met with most of the clinical and administrative managers and chiefs and their passion for the VA mission and enthusiastic praise for the staff was apparent. I appreciate their candor and willingness to help bring me up to speed on all the good work you are doing. I want to take this opportunity to share with you what I believe our priorities should be.

**1. Patient Care:** Without exception, patient care is and should be our number one priority. Of course San Francisco VA Medical Center is highly regarded for providing quality compassionate care - but even the best can improve. I don't mean in the sense of performance measure improvement, you do very well on those scorecards, but rather in the way we organize to deliver care. I believe we need to focus on two aspects of our delivery model - the first is a philosophy and the second is an operational mandate.

- **Veteran-Centered** - We should focus on ensuring that the care and service we provide is “patient-centered.” Care that is patient-centered considers patients’ cultural traditions, their personal preferences and values, their family situations, and their lifestyles. It makes the patient and their loved ones an integral part of the care team who collaborate with health care professionals in making clinical decisions. Patient-centered care ensures that transitions between providers, departments, and health care settings are respectful, coordinated, and efficient. We have a noble mission of caring for America’s veterans and I expect this to be our number one priority without exception.

- **Efficient Throughput** - We need to work together to rebuild our inpatient capacity and revitalize our referral stream in the network. Over the last two years

our staffing levels have grown but our workload has remained flat – and is even down in some areas. Demand for our beds continues and comes from various sources – the Emergency Department, the Operating Rooms, the Cardiac Cath Labs, GI, Interventional Radiology, the Community Living Center and scheduled admissions. How we manage our beds directly impacts the productivity of each these services, and in turn, our ability to accept referrals from other facilities in the network. Ensuring the right bed is available at the right time with the right staff support is our daily objective, but it seems we are not always in synch. I know people are working hard and are impassioned about what they’re doing, but it’s not about working harder, but working smarter. Together we will reexamine our processes to ensure each step is value added and where necessary, we will redeploy our resources to make sure we are in synch.

**2. Research and Teaching:** Our strong affiliation with UCSF and our vibrant research institute have created an environment where our world-class clinicians and researchers can pursue their academic interests, produce the next generation of outstanding physicians and discover new and better ways to treat our patients. These missions complement our primary charge – patient care. Our organization’s health is dependent on this interaction and therefore we must protect and nurture it.

I also want to take this opportunity to remind everyone about what is expected regarding our behaviors and how we treat one another that is, with dignity and respect. There will be no bullying or yelling in the work place. The most important resource any organization has is its people. It is our duty and responsibility to value and protect that resource. Our code of ethics – our code of honor – requires that we treat one another professionally and respectfully. Nothing less will be tolerated.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to our noble mission of caring for America’s veterans. I look forward to meeting many more of you in the coming weeks and months. Keep up the great work you do!

*Lawrence H. Carroll*

## John Mayer Visits With VA Researchers



*Singer John Mayer met with OEF/OIF veterans (from left), Kevin, Nathan, Mike and Marabella.*

Singer/Songwriter John Mayer visited the San Francisco VA Medical Center recently to meet with researchers and learn more about the triggers and treatment for PTSD. Organized by NCIRE, he received briefings on current PTSD research being performed by SFVAMC researchers including: Charlie Marmar, MD, Tom Neylan, MD, Karen Seal, MD, and Mike Weiner, MD. Keith Armstrong, LCSW, and Shira Maguen, Ph.D., facilitated a meeting with two OEF/OIF veterans who receive care at the SFVAMC.

He ended the day meeting with a small group of OEF/OIF veterans who are affiliated with NCIRE and the Concord Vet Center. They discussed with him their combat experiences. John was very impressed with what he learned and appreciative of the opportunity to meet with our researchers and veterans to learn about PTSD.

## Vets Needed for Study

SFVAMC researchers studying the effects of military stress and trauma on mental functioning. Medically healthy male veterans age 18 - 65 may be eligible to participate in a new study. Participants are compensated up to \$120 for completing the study. The study can be completed in approximately 5-7 hours, separated into 2 appointments. All procedures take place at the SFVAMC. Please call to learn more details: (415) 418-4360 or (888) 567-6337.

## Nestlé Military Team Volunteers at SFVAMC

A group of 53 Nestlé employees recently spent a day volunteering at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, in their effort to give something back to veterans. Through the coordinated effort of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Canteen Service and the San Francisco VA Medical Center, Nestlé Military Team donated not only their skills and talent, but also \$5,000.

The Nestlé staff broke up into 4 different teams, each tackling a different project. Two teams completed landscaping projects in front of several clinic areas, and work included laying down gravel, placement of decorative rock and pruning shrubs and pulling weeds. At the CLC another team of volunteers placed decorative rock and set up pots with soil and plants. The hard work of these volunteers completely transformed the patient patio. "Clean and Shine" was the theme for the volunteer team who focused their efforts on cleaning and shining the wheelchairs of the residents in the CLC. Nestlé scrubbed wheelchairs until they sparkled, much to the delight and appreciation of the veteran residents. The day concluded with food and refreshments provided by the Veterans Canteen Service.

Nestlé Military Team is a group of employees whose primary function is to accommodate the Defense Commissary Agency. Team Nestlé reports directly to the Department of Defense.



*Nestlé employees pruned shrubbery between Bldg. 1 and Bldg. 200 during their volunteer activity.*

# Highlights Around the Medical Center



SFVAMC Police Officer **Eric Leszkiewicz** has been in Kosovo for several months. He has said that many children are displaced and injured by war. He has asked us to help by putting together care packages containing school supplies, coats, blankets, gloves, kids clothing, or toys (no candy

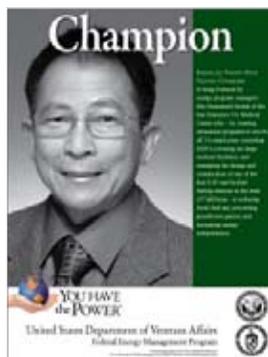
please). If you are interested in helping you can drop off supplies to the VA Police Office. For questions or comments, please contact: Byron R Alvarez Jr., Captain #459, VA Police San Francisco, Office 415-750-2003.



**Marek Brzezinski, M.D., Ph.D.**, recently received the “Best Scientific Exhibit Award,” at the Annual Meeting of the International Anesthesia Research Society. He was the lead author of a presentation entitled “How to Create a Successful Anesthesia Experience for Medical Students: Experiences from UCSF and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.”



Congratulations to **Manny Bernal** who was recognized by the US Department of Energy as an “Energy Champion.” Manny is recognized for creating awareness programs and managing the design and construction of one of the first E-85 and biofuel fueling stations in the state of California. Energy champions are employees of the Federal government who have made extraordinary contributions to the energy savings effort.



**Rebecca Sudore, MD**, has been named a Veterans Affairs Faculty Scholar in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Physician Faculty Scholars Program. The award recognizes Dr. Sudore’s innovative research in health literacy.



The Department of Veterans Affairs celebrated its 20th Anniversary on March 15, 2009. It was in 1989 that the Veterans Administration was elevated to cabinet status, becoming the Department of Veterans Affairs. Thank you to Canteen Service for hosting the birthday celebration.



During a recent ride on his Harley Davidson, **Jeff Joseph**, Chief, Quality Management, had an opportunity to interrupt a robbery in action. Upon passing an Alameda County transit bus he saw a young man running away, with the bus driver and a woman chasing him. The woman yelled, “He stole my purse!” Jeff chased down the young man and knocked him down with his boot. The young man dropped the purse and fled. Jeff got off his bike and returned the purse to the woman who was extremely grateful.



**Sei J. Lee, MD, MAS**, received the Hellman Family Award for Early Career Faculty at UCSF.



**Dr. Benjamin Yeh**, received the Haile T. Debas Academy of Medical Educators Excellence in Teaching Award.



**Susan Heath, RN, MSN**, has received the American Association of Neuroscience Nurses 2009 Excellence in Advanced Practice Award.

**Louise C. Walter, MD**, has received the 2009 Outstanding Scientific Achievement for Clinical Investigation Award from the American Geriatrics Society.



Our Nuclear Medicine staff is excited about the installation of the new hybrid 16 slice SPECT/CT Precedence Philips camera. This camera is a true breakthrough in functional and molecular imaging and the only one in the VA system.



The San Francisco VA Medical Center CLC hosted a special holiday lunch for its nursing home residents thanks to the generous donations of area businesses and the support of more than 50 volunteers, including active duty and retired military staff, among others. Music and entertainment was provided by Bread and Roses. More than 100 residents and their family members took part in this special activity.



**Rebecca Sudore, MD**, and **Brie Williams, MD, MS**, both received the 2009 New Investigator Awards from the American Geriatrics Society



**Mimi Habermelde, RN, MS**, will be presenting a poster at the American Nursing Informatics Association about the successful capture of national skin data related to nursing processes and patient outcomes.



**Debbie Byrd, RN**, passed her certification exam for the American Nurses Credentialing Center for Nursing Administration.

**Karen Arnold** and **Alice Keenan, RN**, represented the SFVAMC at the CFC Eagle Leadership Luncheon. The event was to honor Eagle Donors who contributed to the Bay Area Combined Federal Campaign.



**Sharon Farah, NP**, was selected as an advisor on Medtronic's Co-Management Associated Professional Advisory Board. She is one of 10 Nurse Practitioners selected from across the country.

## Heimlich Maneuver Saves Teenager's Life

While on a ski vacation in Lake Tahoe with her 9-year-old daughter, **Rebeka Silva, DMD**, Chief, Dental Service, was instrumental in saving the life of a teenage girl.

While waiting for the lift to open on a sunny but cold (18 degrees) morning, Dr. Silva saw a young girl collapse onto the snow and heard her family screaming the girl's name. Dr. Silva ran up the hill and found that the girl was not breathing. She dropped to her knees and asked the family to pull the girl into a sitting position. Her first two attempts at the Heimlich Maneuver were unsuccessful because between her bulky ski jacket and gloves, and the girl's bulky jacket, she couldn't get her arms and hands into a good position. She repositioned her arms and gave one more abdominal thrust with all her might. Suddenly she heard someone say, "There it is!" A large wad of cold bubblegum had come flying out and was lying in the snow. The girl took a deep breath and began wailing and crying.

Amazingly, Dr. Silva saw the girl and her family about 2 hours later standing outside in the snow watching the other skiers. Needless to say, they were very grateful for Dr. Silva's lifesaving efforts. Dr. Silva is thankful she was familiar with the Heimlich maneuver and believes everyone should be trained in this lifesaving technique.

## Thumbs Up for New Program

“Two thumbs up!” is the vote on the new Continental Breakfast now offered weekly in the San Francisco VA Medical Center’s Community Living Center (CLC), as part of a new program to enhance patient satisfaction. When the CLC Resident Council veterans asked for a lighter breakfast later in the morning, the facility’s Cultural Change Committee proposed the breakfast buffet as a way to provide a more resident-centered meal.

Instead of having breakfast served on a tray, residents arrive at the dining room between 9 and 10 a.m. to eat in a more social, drop-in type environment. Residents choose from a buffet of assorted fruits, hot/cold cereals, breads/muffins, hard-boiled eggs, yogurt and granola. The smell of coffee and toast wafts down the hallway, and piano playing and singing, voluntarily provided by Veron David, CNA, Escort Service, adds to the ambiance.

Kevin Rayburn, RD, CDE, Administrative Section Chief, Nutrition & Food Service and some of their dietetic interns, designed the buffet to enhance the esthetics of eating. Simple changes in presentation, such as cottage cheese displayed on a bed of ice next to a bowl of sliced fruit, can stimulate the appetite and enhance the eating experience.

This new program has been an overwhelming success as measured by the satisfaction of the CLC residents. As one veteran said, “This is the greatest morale booster I’ve had since I arrived. I usually eat in my room, but this got me out and eating with my buddies.”



*VA Employee Sabina Jackson serves the Continental Breakfast that has been a big success at the CLC.*

## MyHealthVet: Sign Up Today!

MyHealthVet, [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), is VA’s award-winning e-health website, which offers employees, Veterans, active duty soldiers and their dependents and caregivers anywhere, anytime Internet access to VA health care information and services. Launched nationwide in 2003, MyHealthVet is a free, online Personal Health Record that empowers Veterans to become more informed partners in their health care.

With MyHealthVet, Veterans can access trusted, secure, and informed health and benefits information and record and store important health and military history information at their convenience. Veterans or employees can register by logging on at: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>. Once registered you will need to be authenticated (positively identified) by approved VA staff. Authentication ensures that users will be able to view their own personal health information. With MyHealthVet, the authenticated user can access:

- VA Prescription Refill Services
- VA Benefits & Services
- Personal Health Journals
- Vitals Tracking & Graphing
- Military Health History
- VA News & Feature Stories
- Disease & Condition Centers
- Trusted Health Information
- View VA lab results (coming 2010)

To receive your MyHealthVet authentication, please call x3843 or x2015. Please encourage all staff and Veterans to sign-up for MyHealthVet today!



## Police Beat

Recently a San Francisco VAMC employee was the victim of an attempted car-jacking just a few blocks from our facility. This occurred in the morning hours as he was on his way to work. Three suspects followed him on motorcycles, and while one perpetrator blocked his vehicle, the other two pulled the employee from the car and attempted to steal his vehicle. Fortunately, San Francisco VA Police were nearby and came to his rescue.

While there is no guaranteed way of avoiding being car jacked, there are some common-sense precautions you can take to put the odds in your favor.

### **Before you enter your car...**

- Pay attention to your surroundings.
- When approaching your car to enter it, have your keys in your hand, and check the handles, locks and back seat before entering.
- If there is someone loitering near your unoccupied car, keep walking until they leave.

### **Once you're in your car...**

- Keep your doors and windows locked.
- Be suspicious of people approaching your car asking for directions, change, or giving out flyers.
- When stopping in traffic, leave enough distance between your car and the one in front of you, so you can pull away quickly if necessary.
- If a suspicious looking person approaches your car, drive away carefully, even if you must go through a traffic light.
- If another driver bumps your car, or your tire goes flat, keep your doors and windows closed and wait for the Police to arrive, or drive slowly to the nearest Police Station.
- If you have a cellular phone, call for help.
- If you are confronted, don't resist.

As always, if you have any concerns about your safety while on VA grounds, notice anyone/anything suspicious, or need an escort to your vehicle late at night, please call our VA police at x2003 (non-emergency) and x2222 (emergency).

## AES 2009: It's Coming

The 2009 All Employee Survey will begin April 20 and will run until May 11, 2009. Many of you completed the 2008 survey and our results were outstanding! In fact, more than 69% of our employees responded and our scores were better than the VHA national average in most areas. By voicing your opinion you can influence your work destiny and assist all of us in making changes where needed. Completing the survey is completely voluntary.

As we did last year, we will be holding a drawing for employees from those departments/services that have at least 75% participation in the survey. This year's prizes include:

- One 42" Sharp "Aquos" television with built-in DVD**
- One 22" Sharp television**
- One Nintendo Wii**
- Two Nano iPods**

So be sure to take a few minutes to respond to the survey (and encourage your co-workers, too) so you can have a chance to win one of the great prizes—and let your thoughts and opinions be voiced, as well.

## ISO Here to Help

The Information Security Office (ISO) office provides numerous security services including: processing VPN and PKI requests; approving thumb-drive requests; and responding to security incidents, among others. They are responsible for the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information systems.

Some of the most common security violations are: visiting "inappropriate" web sites, using unencrypted thumb drives, sending Personally Identified Information (PII), not locking or logging off your work station, not shredding PII documents properly, and installing non-approved 3rd party software – such as Skype.

You should report information security issues to the ISOs who will investigate and take corrective action. Staff can be reached at: Rachele Ramos x 4964, or Ashley Reede x 2375, or Ken Kronen x5525. The ISOs are available via e-mail at: *V21SFC ISO Staff*.

# Service Awards

Congratulations to the following employees who have been honored for their years of service between January - April 2009.  
[SOURCE: SFVAMC Human Resources]

## •10 Years •

Peter-Reuben Calixto	Martin London
Carl Canimo	Tony Lowe
Crisanto Canosa	Danilo Mallari
Lina Chan	Josanna Martinez
Randall Cockshott	Mandeep Nagra
Elia Dubon	Ronald Perez
Renato Duerme	Arnel Sanchez
Anthony Epps	Kendrick Shunk
Janet Jule	Luong Thai
Jane Lai	

## •15 Years •

Laurie Anderson	Duane Ray
Gwendolyn Brown	Daniel Schwartz
Tenisha Eskridge	Leonard Thanos
Dennis Fulgueras	Louis Valla
Yun-Fai Chris Lau	
Judy Lee	
Leta McClymonds	
David Previtali	

## •20 Years •

Angelita Bitanga	Donna Moisant
Gary Cecchini	Helen Novero
Estella Harris	Romerico Offril
Carl Henry	Cathy Pridlides
Kendra Hill	Roberta Rosenthal
Julia Kwan	Kathy Weinberg
Charles Marmar	Carolyn Wong
Cleaferse McCowen, Jr.	

## •25 Years •

Brian Cason	Edgardo Ravago
Don Chin	Donald Reed
Vernon Clevenger	Dwayne Scruggs
Edna Evans	Tak Kai So
Steven Freedman	William Wilson
Edmund Keung	
Natividad Mariano	
Clifford Park	

## •30 Years •

Emmanuel Bernal  
David Dea  
Judy Lawing  
Jack Liberati  
David Lovett  
Wanda Saini  
Anthony Smith  
Paul Viduya

## •35 Years •

Jean Brown  
Nathaniel Mallory, Jr.  
Patrick Ong  
Randy Turner  
Georginie Wong  
Joan Zweben

## •40 Years •

Robert Carter  
Richard Fernandez

Have you thanked a  
veteran today?

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