

# Physician assistant takes on disease, shares victory with patients, coworkers



Lori St. Germain, a physician's assistant in the VAMC Eye Clinic, checks a patient.

She's so young and innocent, one might even say. She is a bright light with a gorgeous smile and perseverance, another may add. How could this happen to her? That disease normally affects older women, according to myths.

Lori St. Germain, 27, hopes to shatter the misin-



St. Germain lost all her hair while undergoing chemotherapy.

formation about breast cancer. She is beating the disease and encouraging other patients around the Atlanta Veteran Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) to fight against their ailments also.

"Survivorship is great," St. Germain said as she flung her highlighted brown hair back out of her face. "I was diagnosed early and it has made a world of difference for me."

Doctors found the lump and made her diagnoses of Stage 2 cancer early enough to make a difference. St. Germain was a 25-year-old physician's assistant student attending Emory University and within five days of the news had the lump removed and started the process of living with breast cancer. By the time the South Louisiana native had completed six months of chemotherapy and started the year-and-a-half-long endurance of infusions, she was already on board at the medical center, sharing her victory.

*See St. Germain on back page*

## Briefly ...

### Director's Town Hall Meeting planned

The next Director's Town Hall Meeting, hosted by Medical Specialty Care, will be held April 16 at 2:30 p.m. in the Pete Wheeler Auditorium.

All are invited to attend.

### Volunteer Services accepts Summer student applications

Voluntary Services application packets for the Summer Student Volunteer Program will be available April 13 in the Volunteer Services Office, room 1C158.

Students must be between ages 14 and 21 to be considered

for this program. The deadline for application turn in is May 18. Application packets must also include a completed volunteer application and a 500 word essay.

The Summer program will run from June 16 through July 23. Student orientation will be held June 16. A parent or guardian must attend the orientation with the student. Thirty students will be selected; those selected and non-selected students will be notified by June 1.

For more information, call Beth Taylor-Solano at ext. 3217.



# Leaders take first steps to sustain healthy lifestyle

In today's society, losing weight and staying fit can be challenging. With the enormous demands at work and home, who has time to trim unwanted pounds?

As a class project, the 2008 Leadership Class, Individuals Determined to Excel as Leaders (IDEAL), launched the Atlanta Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) Fitness Mile Walk March 20th to help promote weight loss as well as sustain a healthy lifestyle.

The class members created a walk trail, in- and outside the medical center, so participants can exercise at their leisure. The one mile of twists and turns are colored coded and marked along the hallway walls and on the ground outside starting at the Eagle's Nest foyer. Each color designates a quarter-mile distance.

The fitness walk project can positively impact staff, patients and veterans here. The concept stems from the Managing Overweight Veterans Everywhere (MOVE) program that started in the VA Healthcare System in 2006. This unique program was designed by the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to help veterans, who are enrolled in the healthcare system, to lose weight and keep it off using exercise, nutrition and education.

During training, class members covered other various managerial and leadership tactics that may strengthen leaders of tomorrow and provide opportunities for growth at the Atlanta VAMC.

The IDEAL Leadership class graduation ceremony will be held April 3 at 11 a.m. in the Pete Wheeler Auditorium. All are welcome.

Donald Bullock will be the keynote speaker. Graduating class members include:

- Geraldine Moore, Director's Office (Peer Leader)
- Brook Bloxson, Pharmacy
- Robin Brightwell, Pharmacy
- John Glenn, Customer Service
- Chadwick Johnson, Mental Health
- Donna Jones, Safety
- Teri Thompson, FEE



## Reminder

### Voluntary Leave Transfer Program —

The following are approved participants in the VLTP and are eligible to receive annual leave donations.

Atlanta Vet Center-Anita Salamon.

Logistics-Omega Dunn.

Patient Care-Erma Boykin, Brandy Davis.

Pharmacy-Sharita Reese.

Extended Care- Deborah Campbell.

Primary Care- Hadiyah Oluremi-McCutcheon, Shereta Jones.

To make a leave donation, call Freida Philpotts at ext. 6306 or Marie Robinson at ext. 4376 for help completing form OF-630A.

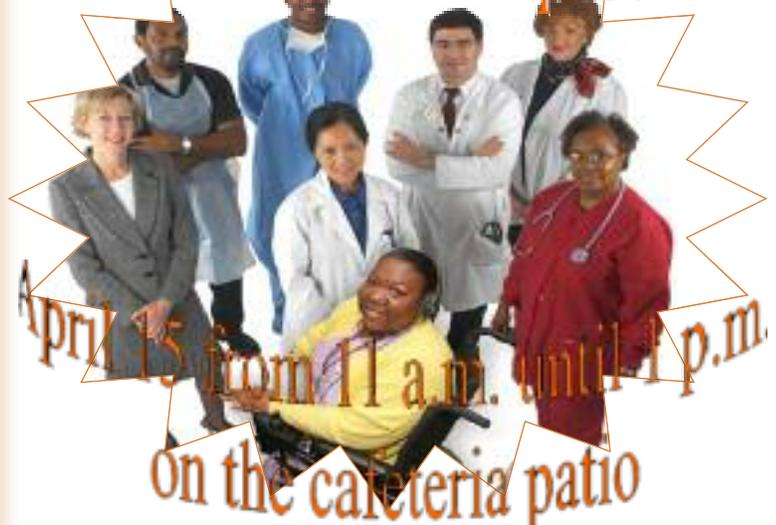
**Hotline** — Did you know you have a direct line to the Medical Center Director? Would you like to send an anonymous email to the Medical Center Director to share your concerns and suggestions? To send an anonymous vista email: Access Code: ATL1997 Verif-y Code: ATLANTA1

**Joint Commission** — For patient safety concerns, contact Patient Safety at ext. 4823; to file a complaint, contact the Office of Inspector General at 800-488-8244 or VA IG at 53E/P.O. Box 50410, Washington, DC 20091 or contact Joint Commission at 800-994-6610 or via email at: complaint@jointcommission.org. No adverse actions are taken against those who report safety or quality of care concerns.

**Dial-A-Prayer** — VAMC's Chaplain Service provides a Dial-A-Prayer service/ministry. Dial-A-Prayer is always available. If calling from an outside telephone, dial 404-321-6111, ext. 4161.



## Diversity Membership Drive



## What's new about parking?

Reducing the challenges of parking at the medical center is a high-priority mission; therefore, to help relief some congestion we have taken and are planning the following actions:

### Taken

- Freed up approximately 110 parking spaces by relocating staff to Administration Building I in June 2008 and Administration Building II in March 2009.
- Leased 99 parking spaces off site for the Research Department staff.
- Leased 99 parking spaces in Decatur for employees to park.
- A shuttle van is provided to transport employees to and from the Decatur Clinic, nearby MARTA station and both administration buildings. The shuttle service runs every 15 minutes, Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m.
- Continue to encourage employee participation in the Transit Benefits Program, which provides MARTA Breeze Cards and vanpool service, resulting in fewer employees occupying parking spaces.
- Increased the size of our Valet staff to support parking demands.
- Extended clinic hours to reduce the demand for parking during the peak hours between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Some clinics have Saturday appointments, when parking is plentiful.

### Planned

- Construction on the large parking deck extension is scheduled to begin in August; however, during the construction period, approximately 80 parking spaces will be lost. The completed construction will produce 380 new spaces.
- Lease 150 parking spaces in the South East metro area and provide those employees shuttle service to and from the medical center. We will repeat this process until we have leased 450 parking spaces in locations around the perimeter.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR...



... these two women.

The VA Police Investigation Division needs your help trying to identify these subjects.

If you have any information on these individuals, notify Detectives Foster and Robinson at ext. 7641.

## St. Germain continued from cover

"I enjoy being here with patients," said the brown-eyed St. Germain. "I was sympathetic to patients needs prior to getting my own news, but now I have even more empathy as I hear what they are going through. I don't hesitate to share my experience and make that connection, especially if we're talking cancer."

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*"... It is both an honor and a privilege to take care of those veterans who took care of us."*

*-- Lori St. Germain*

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No one knows the exact causes of breast cancer. Physicians can seldom explain why one woman gets breast cancer and another does not. We do know that bumping, bruising or touching the breast does not cause breast cancer. Cancer is not contagious; however, there aren't a lot of studies out there regarding how many women younger than 30 are diagnosed. The media and most educational material focus on the women 40 and older.

"It's important to talk about it and that allows me to give back. It feels good. The younger cancer patients that I've talked with are more in tune with their physical appearance," she said. "They have to choose whether vanity or life is more important when it comes to getting the treatment, even if it's uncomfortable. Younger women need to be watchful; this disease is aggressive and can be more advanced by the time it's diagnosed. Some studies show it can take 10 years for a lump to show, so check your breast regularly and get the mammogram early."

Women ages 20 to 39 should have a clinical breast exam at least once every three years, according to the American Cancer Society. Doing a regular exam is optional, but doing it regularly is a good way to get to know how your

breasts normally look and feel. This way, you can more easily notice changes. The best time to do a breast self-exam is when your breasts are not tender or swollen, such as a few days after your period ends.

While beating cancer is her goal in life, the overall care for others is probably St. Germain's heritage.

She hasn't served in military uniform; however, St. Germain is no stranger to veterans. St. Germain's maternal grandfather was a Navy medical corpsman in World War II and paternal grandfather was a sergeant in the Army during the Korean War. Even her younger sister is adding to the family tradition; she's in basic combat training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri.

"My grandfather often told me stories of being a medical corpsman in the military and helping wounded Soldiers on site," St. Germain recalls. "My sister wishes to accomplish the same goals to help wounded Soldiers overseas in Iraq. Their bravery and selflessness astonishes me as I don't feel that is something I could do; however, without those individuals willing to risk their lives to defend our country in times of crises our future (as a nation) would be uncertain. I feel that it is both an honor and a privilege to take care of those veterans who took care of us."

Engaging veterans here since June 2007, St. Germain's bubbling personality leaves a lasting impression with her coworkers too.

"Lori deals with a roller coaster of emotions every two to three months with each breast MRI showing something that needs a biopsy or close follow up," commented Cheryl Boudreaux, VAMC Eye Clinic manager, "and, through it all she is still a wonderful person when dealing with our clients and amongst the staff. Some may not even realize what a creative baker she is. She has kept all of us in the eye clinic fat with her goodies."

St. Germain said as a method to cope with the stresses of treatment during

chemotherapy, she started baking pastries for the nurses who were lovingly caring for her. "It was my way to show my appreciation."

Now, in her free time, St. Germain uses that talent to help raise money for the fight against breast cancer. She recently accepted the challenge run the 19th annual Komen Atlanta 5K Race for the Cure scheduled May 9.

"One in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime," St. Germain explained, "and the more money we raise, the more foundations can give back in the local communities through breast cancer education, screening and treatment programs as well as supporting the national search for a cure."

This will be St. Germain's first breast cancer 5K, and she hopes to fly to San Francisco for another in October.

"I would like to help her as much as possible to meet her monetary goal," Boudreaux said. "The more money she raises, the more goes to research development. Every dollar helps."

Other than skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. This year, more than 215,000 women nationwide will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and more than 40,000 will die from the disease. Each year, about 1,300 men in this country also learn they have breast cancer, yet it occurs more often in white women than Hispanic, Asian or African-American women.

A mammogram is used to find breast cancer early and a biopsy is the only way to tell for sure if cancer is present. St. Germain challenges the younger and more seasoned patients to, "help the cause with self breast exams; stop ignoring the possibility that it could happen to you, your mother, sister or daughter and get screened."

For more information about supporting the race for a cure, call St. Germain at ext. 5378.