

Veteran pins down director in Wii bowling challenge, 221-138



After a slow start, 76-year-old Mizanuel Phillips finally found what he calls his “sweet spot” and went on to finish with seven straight strikes in the Wii bowling challenge with a 221- 138 victory over the Atlanta VA Medical Center director James Clark April 16.

Phillips, a double-leg amputee and four-year resident at the Eagle’s Nest Community Living Center (CLC), plays the Wii Sports video game as part of his rehabilitation.

“It was close there for a while,” the Philadelphia native commented, “but he couldn’t win. I’ve found something I can do and I’m determined not to give up.”

See Bowling on back cover

EARTH DAY

Vanpooling saves money, environment

If you are tired of a long commute to work, spending your paycheck on gasoline and car repairs, and circling to find a parking spot at the Atlanta VA Medical Center? Then why not give commuter choice alternatives a try? By taking advantage of vanpooling alternatives, you save time, money and energy; its three things that you can spend in better ways than sitting in traffic.

Vanpools are similar to carpools, except they generally involve more people. A vanpool is a group of 7 to 15 people who regularly travel together to work 30 miles or more (roundtrip) in a comfortable van.

Two of the largest benefits of vanpooling are the reduction of parking issues and air pollution.

You have more choices than simply driving alone to work. "By strongly encouraging the use of vanpools and public transit, the medical center's leadership is helping its employees to save money, but it is also taking cars off the road, out

of the parking deck and reducing air pollution," said Larry Dixon, transit manager and a industrial hygienist here.

Other benefits for vanpooling include:

- Reduce wear and tear on your car
- Save money through tax breaks, insurance and financial incentives
- Save time by traveling in HOV lanes
- Reduce the number of vehicles in traffic
- Designated parking for vanpool vehicles
- Eliminate the stress of driving
- A chance to unwind on the way to and from home

Fares vary depending on the size of the van, commute distance, number of riders and fare subsidies. The average monthly fare for a Metro vanpool program rider with a 70-mile roundtrip commute is about \$120 per month per person, saving each rider around \$90 per month in comparison to a non-participating vanpool; plus, the program pays for the gas used during the commute.

Vanpool program subsidies are distributed equally among all vanpool members, Dixon said. The monthly payment covers the van lease, insurance and maintenance costs.

Dixon said one of the questions people ask is, "Will they pick me up at home?"

Most vanpoolers choose to meet at Park-and-Ride lots, shopping center lots or other agreed-upon locations along the way, Dixon explained. A typical vanpool may make anywhere from one to three stops.

"Even if a rider gets sick or has an emergency during the day, there's available transportation to get him or her back to his or her car," Dixon said. "Participants can sign up for the Guaranteed Ride Home program in the event of a personal emergency."

There's no excuse not to share the driving and parking space. Give vanpooling/carpooling a chance, Dixon said.

For more information, call Dixon at ext. 1569.

Hospital saves money, water with new urinals



In an effort to reduce water use, the Atlanta VA Medical Center has installed six water-free urinals in three men's rooms.

The urinals -- on the ground floor across from Dietetics, near the main floor atrium and in Outpatient I and II waiting areas -- could save up to 240,000 gallons of water per year, reduce sewer costs, maintenance and repair bills, and create more hygienic -- odor-free restrooms.

The best feature is the savings of nearly \$20K annually, considering the cost of 1,000 gallons of water used is \$7.93 each. The plan is to replace approximately 62 urinals in the medical center with these water-free units.

Program focuses on going green

Debra Surry

Guest writer

The Atlanta VA Medical Center Federal Woman's Program celebrated Woman's History Month March 25 in the chapel.

Ginger L. Criswell, an environmentalist and the executive director of the Green School Network, was the guest speaker. The theme was "Women Taking the Lead to Save the Planet."

Women have the power to change the mindset of children as well as the world by leading by example, Criswell told attendees. "Small changes make a big difference," she said.

Here is a list of things people can do to get started 'Going Green':

- Recycle
- Switch to CFL light bulbs
- Go meatless sometimes
- Conserve water
- Use compost as an organic plant food source
- Pay bills online
- Use rain barrels
- Buy recycled paper.
- Carpool

Audience members received a reusable shopping bag and a package of seeds to plant for attending.

For more information on going green, visit www.greenschoolnetwork.org.

DFAS conversion to be easy transition for employees; new chief finance officer takes helm, comes home

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) is the new payroll system for Atlanta VA Medical Center employees. The DFAS system will help avoid duplicate information technology systems across the federal government.

Since the conversion in February, there have been little or no differences in the way employees are paid, said the new Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Pamela Watkins. The most significant difference is DFAS is a “less forgiving” system.

Here are a few tips for working with the DFAS system:

- Leaders can ensure timekeepers have ample time to process timecards and corrections.
- Actions must be approved and completely entered in the system by the published deadline each pay period in order for the employee to be paid or paid properly.
- Timekeepers should post time everyday; the system will not accept any actions passed the deadline for each pay period.
- Follow up on human resources and payroll actions to ensure they have been forwarded timely.
- Payroll can process a “remedy ticket” to DFAS once the information is approved and corrected.
- DFAS will not longer process conven-

ience checks.

- Employees should review their time cards on a regular basis.
- The not-to-exceed (NTE) date must be changed for temporary employees who are being extended; the payroll payment will automatically stop on the NTE date in the DFAS system.

Weekly conference calls are held with the DFAS staff, VISN CFO staff and local payroll staff members to discuss updates and resolve issues.

“Let your local payroll representative know if you encounter problems that could be addressed during these calls,” Watkins pleads. “Meanwhile, timekeepers can answer timecard questions and payroll staff members can address pay inquiries.”

Payroll staff members include: David McCrory at ext. 6311; Brazil Shell-Jones at ext. 6315; Connie Turner at ext. 6340; Kathy Moore at ext. 6314; Vince Covington, Assistant CFO, at ext. 7685; and Watkins at ext. 7615.

For information on debt repayment, call the DFAS customer service line at 1-888-332-7411.

Watkins returns

No stranger to the Atlanta VA Medical Center, longtime employee, Pamela Watkins, is returning April 27 as the Chief Financial Officer.

Watkins served at the Atlanta VA more than 14 years and recently moved to the VISN 7 headquarters as the lead budget analyst.

Watkins says she’s “excited to be back home” and looking forward to working in the new role.

With her return she plans to “to develop and execute a strong financial plan to best serve our American heroes and achieve our medical center’s initiatives,” Watkins said.

In addition, her goal is to “strengthen our partnership with both internal and external customers through fiscal transparency, open communication and exceptional customer service.”



Congratulations to Bessie Ainuddin, a registered respiratory therapist, for her promotion to Assistant Chief of Respiratory Care.

Ainuddin has been a dedicated employee of the Respiratory Care Department for 34 years. Her commitment to exceptional patient care, positive attitude and dedication to the VA has never wavered. She has been the lead therapist since 1993.

My HealtheVet meets healthcare needs

My HealtheVet, is the Veteran Affairs’ online Personal Health Record. It provides access to health information, links to Federal and VA benefits and resources, the Personal Health Journal and online VA prescription refill.

There are a number of benefits on My HealtheVet that users must be logged in to access. To register on My HealtheVet, www.myhealth.va.gov, click on the “Register” button located in the right-hand column of home page. Registration takes only a few minutes.

My HealtheVet is also where you can find information about specific veteran communities. There are links to news



and events, information on volunteering and VA benefits, and a special veteran tribute. To access the information, click the “MHV Community” tab in the main menu.

The Website is just one of the many ways to help you manage your healthcare needs. Its not just for veterans; employees can use some of the service also.

“A leader is a dealer in hope.”

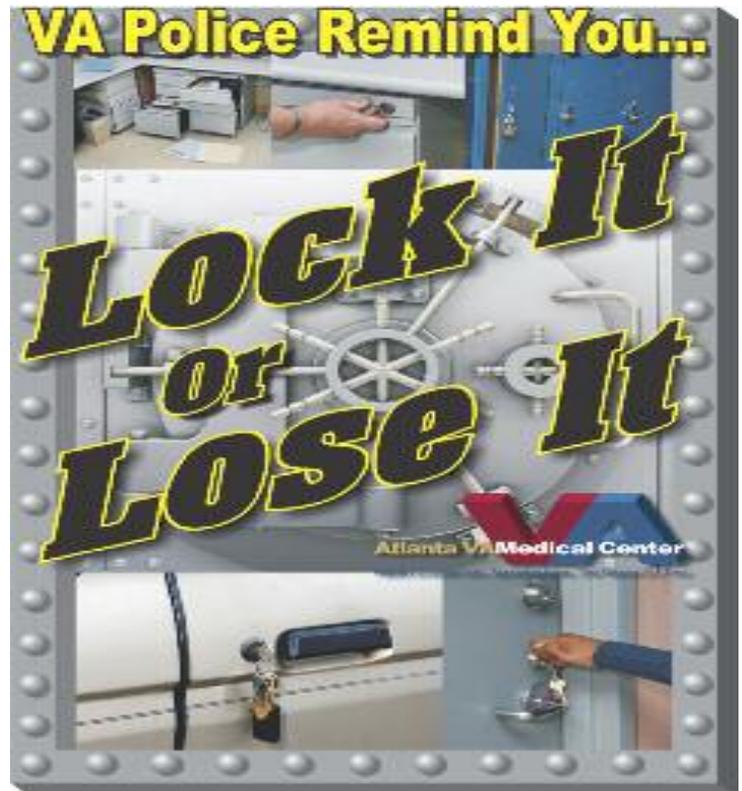
– Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French; King of Italy

VA welcoming Vets home with new Web site, blog

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched its new "Returning Veterans" Web site www.oefoif.va.gov to welcome home Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with a social, Veteran-centric Web site focusing on their needs and questions.

"VA is entering the world of Web 2.0, because that's where this generation of Veterans is already communicating," said Dr. Gerald M. Cross, VA's Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Health. "We're opening our doors to them virtually to let them know what they can expect when they step through our doors in reality."

The Web site will feature videos, Veteran stories, and a blog where Veterans are encouraged to post feedback. The site also will restructure the traditional index-of-benefits format found on other VA pages into question-based, categorized, and easily navigated links by topic. This will allow Veterans to find benefits of interest easily and discover related benefits as they explore.



Phillips continued from cover

Phillips, with seven straight perfect bowling games to his credit, said it takes practice and determination to be the best. He's tried other video games, but has trouble getting into the swing of it.

"I've been bowling for six or seven months," said the 15-year Army veteran. "The secret is where to place the line and how to hold and turn the controller. I try to throw with strength, and I control the swing with my upper body and relax my mind. If you don't do that, the ball is subject to go anywhere."

According to Atlanta VAMC recreational therapist Chauncey Rozier, "Around the world, recreation therapists now know that a Wii game is one of the greatest therapeutic activities right now that's going on in community living centers."

Nervous with the crowd, media reporters and flashing camera lights, Phillips missed the mark the first few frames allowing Clark to stay close with an early strike. "It's time to get serious," Clark said. But, the tables would quickly turn for Phillips. Lop-

sided in favor of the resident, the cheering crowd waited on his next move. Phillips got in the groove and the strikes came back to back in the 5 through 10th frames sealing the deal for steak dinners for all the CLC residents – courtesy of the director.

Bringing in this technology is another way to give quality back to the lives of the residents. Clark explained, "You can take a veteran who has lost both of his limbs, who is confined to a wheelchair," and that veteran can "get up to the line and bowl a beautiful game," said Clark.

Society judges us on how well we take care of its veterans, and "we do a fine job here," Clark said. "The care we give shows well at the VA. This isn't my father's VA. The VA has come a long way and there's much more emphasis on creating a family-type atmosphere.



"We have three promises here:

- We will provide care, second to none the best care anywhere; quality wins over efficiency
- We will maintain and expand veterans' health care services
- Every veteran will be personally satisfied with the care that they receive from us, based on the outcome."

Having mastered Wii bowling, Phillips says he's open to play against all comers and "may soon tackle table tennis."