

VA National Salute To HOSPITALIZED VETERANS

Photo - Paula Berger

Joe Mantegna,

Star of Film and Theater, visits WLA Medical Center as 2004 VA National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Chairman



Actor Joe Mantegna visits patients.

Joe Mantegna, has been selected by the Veterans Administration as the Chairman for the 2004 National Salute for Hospitalized Veterans. He visited patients at the VA West Los Healthcare Center on Saturday, February 21st. The National Salute Chairman traditionally visits VA hospitals across the country to visit with patients and provide support for veterans.

VA Voluntary Service staff plan and execute local programs of activities at VA medical centers. The traditional observance during February, close to Valentine's Day is appropriate because

the sentiments of caring and sharing match the Salute's purpose of expressing honor and appreciation to hospitalized veterans.

Also, for many years, the late newspaper columnist Ann Landers devoted her column in January to the National Salute, asking readers to send Valentine cards and letters to hospitalized veterans at their nearest VA medical centers. Hundreds of cards were sent to the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System and provided to hospitalized veterans.

VA WLA HEALTHCARE CENTER INVITES COMMUNITY TO 'SALUTE HOSPITALIZED VETERANS'

The VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System invited the public to participate in activities February 9-13 during the National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans.

"The National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans gave everyone a chance to let those who have given the nation so much know that they are not forgotten," said GLA Acting Director Charles Dorman. "We invited local celebrities, elected officials, school children and other groups to visit during the week. We wanted people of all ages to bring Valentine's Day cheer to our patients".

Mr. Dorman says he hopes visitors also learned more about the important roles volunteers play at the medical center throughout the year and perhaps pursue volunteer opportunities.

"Our medical center's 900 volunteers are an integral part of our health care team and the National Salute program is a great way for people to learn more about helping the veterans we serve here at the VA," Dorman said.

Citizens, young and old, are once again sending Valentine's Day cards and letters to VA medical centers simply addressed "Dear Veteran - GLA, 11301 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles California, 90073. Dorman said "they are being distributed to patients throughout the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System - West LA and Sepulveda, as well as all of the outpatient clinics".

The March on Birmingham, Alabama



Michael Dizaar, Medical Clerk

In September of 1963, if you were black, Birmingham, Alabama, was not the place you wanted to be. The "Jim Crow" laws were still in effect. Racism and discrimination to blacks was not hidden, but blatantly open. "Young black men were hunted down by the white minorities, and were

taught lessons by being castrated. The City of Birmingham had earned the name of "Bombingham" due to the number of racial bombings that occurred. These were difficult times for all. White politicians clung to power and the City's segregationist past as blacks demanded freedom in demonstrations, sit-ins and marches. The police used dogs and fire hoses to suppress demonstrators, many of them children.

Mr. Michael Dizaar, Medical Clerk in Mental Health Building 206, was part of the 1963 March in Birmingham, and later took part in the March to Montgomery. He was recently in the PBS show on Dr. Martin Luther King, "Citizen King".

Things were awful for the blacks in Birmingham and the blacks were demanding change through their demonstrations, sit-ins, and marches. Mr. Dizaar became involved in the movement at 15 years old, he witnessed a white youth, only a few years older than himself, telling his mother to "shut-up", as she was trying to explain why she could not pay a bill. Mr. Dizaar could not stand this disrespect towards his mother.

The turning point for Mr. Dizaar, was seeing Dr. Martin Luther King being released from the Birmingham jail unscathed, and untouched by his white jailers after being in jail for 2 weeks. Dr. King suddenly became Mr. Dizaar's new hero. "Forget all those boyhood comic book heroes like Superman and Batman. Here was a hero that the black community could look up to," says Michael.

Mr. Dizaar and a friend left school to go downtown to hear Dr. King speak at the 16th Street Baptist Church. Upon hearing the words of Dr. King and the call for change through non-violence, Mr. Dizaar knew that he was doing the right thing. The key moment was shaking Dr. King's hand while exiting the church. Mr. Dizaar could not describe

the feeling, but it was like being shocked by electricity or something. He could not contain the feelings or the emotions that were going through him as he joined the March through the City of Birmingham.

That charge of enthusiasm was also what got Mr. Dizaar into trouble and his picture in the Birmingham Post Newspaper. The City of Birmingham made certain requirements regarding the permit to demonstrate. Unfortunately all of Mr. Dizaar's feelings of joy and enthusiasm forced him to step out of line. It was at the second infraction that a canine police officer with his police dog, pulled him out of the line. The officer was grabbing his sweater and seemed to be pulling him into the dog to provoke him to react. Having grown up with dogs, he knew that if he ran or attempted to break free of the officer's grasp the dog would attack and bite him. He knew that God was with him, so he stood still and held his ground and did not resist. He did tell the officer to let him go, but the officer seemed intent on only trying to provoke matters.

A Police Captain on horseback then yelled to the officer, "Sergeant, stand-down. Put that boy on the bus." At that point, the officer relaxed his grip and Mr. Dizaar was put on a bus to the jail. He believes that the leather pants he was wearing saved him from the dog attack. Had he worn jeans or chinos, the dog would have torn him apart.

Mr. Dizaar spent two weeks in jail. Through the efforts of his mother and his pastor, he was released. But as soon as he reached home, freshened up, and got something to eat, he went back to join the March. He marched from Birmingham to Selma and later to Alabama's state capital, Montgomery.

When Mr. Dizaar returned to the March, he saw instant results from his actions. He was able to eat in places and shop in places that in the past would not allow him in to do so. Also when he returned, his mother told him that she was proud of him and that he was a man.

Michael returned to Birmingham in 2003 to be part of the 40th anniversary celebration of the demonstration. In a Birmingham Park there now is a statue of him, inspired by a photo that was taken of him during the March.

The March on Washington, DC.

After Birmingham, President Kennedy proposed a new civil rights bill. To show that the bill had widespread support, civil rights groups united to organize a March on Washington. Organizers hoped to draw a crowd of 100,000, but instead over 250,000 people from around the nation, arriving in more than thirty special trains and 2,000 chartered buses, descended on Washington, DC August 28, 1963. There, they heard speeches and songs from numerous activists, artists, and civil rights leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered the closing address, his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

The day was an overwhelming success. There was no violence and the event received extensive media coverage. Although it did not have an immediate impact on Congress - Kennedy's civil rights bill was not passed for nearly a year - it effected in some way just about everyone who participated or watched.



Service Quality Council



Top Row:

Cad Shannon, Primary Care;
Celeste Johns, Team Manager
(Green Team) Sepulveda Ambulatory
Care Center, (SACC);
Sandy Rompal, Team Manager
(Red Team) (SACC);
Dr. Irene Marshall, Pharmacy;
Beverly Fitzgerald, Director,
Public and Congressional Affairs
and Customer Relations;
Dr. Michael Mahler, Director,
Organizational Improvement;

Bottom Row:

Elizabeth Gilbert, Mental Health;
Melanie Sapasap, Ambulatory Care;
Paul West, Ambulatory Care

Making A Difference Customer Service Tips

by Beverly J. Fitzgerald
Director, Public Congressional Affairs and Customer Relations

At the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System we make a difference by touching the lives of those we serve with compassion and exceptional service. We look to our service standards as daily guidance.

GLA Service Standards

- **Treat everyone as a valued individual.**
- **Seek out and address customer needs.**
- **Make eye contact, greet and welcome everyone.**
- **Display a positive presence.**
- **Keep customers and co-workers informed.**
- **Work as team.**
- **Maintain privacy and confidentiality.**
- **Keep a clean environment.**
- **Be proud to serve veterans.**

Take time to hear what the customer is saying;

learn to empathize with the patient. Sometimes it is necessary to apologize even if you are not the person who caused the problem. Learn to respond in a positive manner to the customer, and remember to thank the customer for bringing the issue to your attention.

Simple rules to remember:

- **Be courteous.**
- **Give positive feedback.**
- **Listen Carefully.**
- **Feel good about yourself and your job.**
- **Take the opportunity to be positive.**
- **Remember performance is everything.**
- **Deliver the best service possible with a smile.**

These are just a few tips on how to build a service culture that will keep your customers returning again and again.

Special Guest Visitors Support Veterans in National Salute

Participating in the National Salute on Thursday, February 12 with the staff at the West Los Angeles Campus were students from local Elementary Schools. Along with the students were celebrities "look a likes" Marilyn Monroe, and Carmen Miranda. Marilyn Monroe was portrayed by Lou Ann Paoella, and Carmen Miranda was

portrayed by Rosa Velick. Also on hand were Playboy Playmates, Marketa Janska, Miss July 2003, Nefeteri Shepherd, Miss July 2000, and Carla Watelin, Miss November 1999. Staff, invited guests and celebrities toured the Wards of Building 500 giving out gifts and Valentines made by Boy and Girl Scouts from the local area.



Joe Mantegna

The final special event was actor, Joe Mantegna, well-known star of films as "Rat Pack", "The Last Don", "Pontormo", and recently starring in CBS's Joan of Arcadia, has been selected by the Veterans Administration as the Chairman for the 2004 National Salute for Hospitalized Veterans. He visited patients at the West Los Angeles Healthcare Center Saturday, February 21st.



Photos -
Paula Berger
Danny Mercado
Larry Wong



Bonnie Jill Laflin

Former "Baywatch" star, Bonnie Jill Laflin, made a guest appearance at the West LA Campus, meeting and greeting veterans and wishing them a Happy Valentines Day.



Attitude!

The Secret to Survival.

"POW Turned Motivational Speaker Credits Attitude as the Secret to Survival"

Captain (Ret.) Charlie J. Plumb

***Former Navy Fighter Pilot - P.O.W.
One of Today's Top 10 Professional Speakers***

Charlie Plumb graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis and went on to fly the F-4 Phantom jet on 74 successful combat missions over North Vietnam. On his 75th mission in May 1967, with only five days before he was to return home, Plumb was shot down, captured, tortured, and imprisoned in an 8 foot x 8 foot cell. He spent the next 2,103 days as a Prisoner Of War in communist prison camps.

Since his return home, more than 4,000 audiences in nearly every industry have been spellbound as Captain Charlie Plumb draws parallels between his P.O.W. experience and the challenges of everyday life. He has shared his message to an even wider public through appearances on Good Morning America, Nightline, Larry King Live, and The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.

Captain Plumb's Military honors include two Purple Hearts, the Legion of Merit, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and the P.O.W. Medal.

Captain Plumb talked about his experience and the qualities needed that would allow you to survive in a prison camp. "You'll see that the same kind of challenges you face as a teenager, a student, a leader, or a parent, are the same

basic challenges I faced in a prison cell: feelings of fear, loneliness, failure and a breakdown of communication. More importantly, your response to those challenges will be the same response I had to have in the prison camp just to survive," says Captain Plumb.

"My secret for enduring nearly six years of hell is really not a secret at all. I found I already had a foundation of survival tools learned in life from my parents, preachers, youth leaders, and teachers. And the life-saving techniques I used in that prison camp had more to do with my value system, integrity and religious faith than anything I had learned from a textbook."

First I simply trusted God's promise to answer my prayers", says Captain Plumb.

Second, I had self-discipline. Strict self-obedience gave me the ability to persevere.

Finally, I had pride. I was proud to know an omnipotent God. I was proud of my country and its heritage. I was proud of my family. I was proud of myself.

Faith, discipline, and pride - each of these nurtured the others. Combined, they allowed me to endure.

Article from: <http://www.charlieplumb.com/>

December Employees of the Month



Catherine Royer, LCSW

WLA Medical Center

Ms. Catherine Royer coordinates the GET SMART program, a nationally ground-breaking substance abuse program assisting older adults. With her work in GET SMART, Ms. Royer is available to the veteran throughout the entire process of recovery.

Catherine has also demonstrated dedication to the Social Work Department by spearheading the development of a mentorship program for new social work staff; pairing them with long-time staff to provide orientation and support as they become acquainted with the VA. She also shares her expertise with other staff by providing in-service training and educational reading to social work staff.

Catherine Royer is an innovative and compassionate employee who provides invaluable services for a growing under-served population and empowers her social work colleagues to provide better care. She is a true asset to the organization and our veterans; she is most deserving of this award.



Isabel R. Arias, EMS Supervisor

WLA Medical Center

Mr. Isabel R. Arias is a Supervisor in Environmental Management assigned to NHCU. He is a hands-on supervisor. Mr. Arias is fully aware of the environmental needs of our residents and staff. He and his staff respond in a timely manner to assure that patient rooms are clean and aesthetically pleasing to patients, staff, and visitors alike. In addition, he provides his staff with in-services of current environmental trends, or any procedures unfamiliar to his staff.

Mr. Arias is always there to help the veterans, either to give directions if they are not familiar with the facility, or to assist family members visiting their loved ones in the NHCU. Besides being hard working he is very polite, and respectful with everybody. Mr. Arias is an excellent team player and well liked by staff; his daily upbeat attitude and pleasant outlook on life is valuable to the Department of Veterans Affairs and makes him much deserving of this award.



Mae Myart, Family Services Rep.

WLA Medical Center

Ms. Mae Myart is the type of employee that goes way beyond her call of duty to help veterans and their families. She is dedicated and sensitive to their needs in difficult times.

An example of her dedication can be seen in a particular day when a mortuary called Ms. Myart wanting a veteran's paperwork ready for burial, requiring an immediate, same day response. She continued handling the paperwork with the necessary information, even under stressful conditions. Due to her dedication the veteran got a proper burial with dignity.

Her dedication and contribution to veterans deserves recognition as an employee of the month.-



Debbie Verner, PSA

WLA Medical Center

Debbie Verner is a VISN 22 Telecare employee. Ms. Verner provides excellent service to both the internal and external customers throughout the VISN. She goes beyond her usual duties to assist veterans troubleshooting a problem until it is resolved. Ms. Verner is pleasant to work with and is well liked and respected by her peers and supervisors. She is honest and caring and is able to convey those qualities through the phone line to the veterans that call Telecare. On a daily basis, Ms. Verner transcends the normal boundaries of customer service in order to fulfill the mission of GLA. One of the reasons Telecare gets a positive customer service rating is due in part, to Ms. Verner's actions and her ability to provide Telecare with a positive work environment. Debbie Verner is an excellent employee and an asset to GLA.

January Employees of the Month



Suemantha Johnson, Support Clerk

Lompoc CBOC

Suemantha Johnson is an employee at our Lompoc CBOC. She is the sole clerical support clerk at our CBOC and is responsible for all data entry at the facility. She is responsible for all aspects of the "business office" (enrollment & eligibility), reception, patient advocacy, scheduling, supply, physical plant, and employee support. Ms. Johnson assures that all means tests, vesting, scheduling, and data are entered timely. She has received countless compliments from patients and family members regarding her extraordinary customer service skills. She also serves as a subject matter expert and mentor to other administrative staff in the Northern CBOCs. But, these are just the nuts and bolts of what she does. She is so much more than an excellent staff member. She is a person full of light and compassion. I have heard countless compliments from patients and family members regarding her extraordinary customer service. She is simply the embodiment of all the VA strives for in service delivery.

Photo - Paula Berger

Zenaida Ezquivel, R.N

WLA Healthcare Center

Zenaida Ezquivel is an R.N. in the hemodialysis unit at WLA. She consistently strives to provide the highest quality of care for our veterans. She has demonstrated excellent professionalism, leadership, outstanding patient compassion and empathy. She is well liked by the veterans and staff members. She consistently works to make all new staff members feel welcome quickly, which helps to establish a stable and comfortable working environment. She is always willing to give that extra hand and take charge. Ms. Ezquivel's dedication has strengthened the dialysis unit to be one of the most productive, patient friendly and efficient units in the hospital. She is regarded by all new staff members for her training skills in teaching staff about hemodialysis. She's a very dependable, resourceful, hardworking and responsible individual. We are very proud to honor her with this award.

John Benavidez, File Supervisor

Los Angeles Ambulatory

John Benavidez is a supervisor in the file room at the LAACC facility. Mr. Benavidez is responsible for maintaining the file room and assuring that medical records are delivered to all clinics for appointments. Mr. Benavides has shown exceptional and outstanding performance in his duties particularly in customer service. There are many occasions our physicians have approached Mr. Benavidez with problems with documents that could not be found. Mr. Benavidez takes the time to assist these physicians in their needs and does this with a positive attitude. Although these are routine duties, they do not reflect the uncommon service and dedication that he provides. He is a roll model for his subordinates and deserves the employee of the month award.

Retirements January & February

Howard Cooperman

Isaac Pierre

Elissa Cerone

Eugenia L. Medina

Daniel M. Delgenovese

Regina Sperber

Marilyn J. DeGroot

Charles Thomas

Rita Unger

Jerry Gistorb

Diane M. Bondiotti

Michael Delavigne

Annette Veney

Dolores Vieira

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