**Meet Erma Harris**

**How many years have you volunteered at the VA?**
I have been a volunteer at the McGuire VA for 26 years.

**What areas do you volunteer in?**
I volunteer all over the medical center. My favorite area is the Community Living Center.

**What has been your most memorable experience volunteering at the VA?**
My most memorable experience was working with the spinal cord unit. I never realized how much they go through and achieve day to day. You see it, but you don’t understand it until you work in that area.

**Tell us something about you that most people would not know.**
I have always worked in the community. I spent 14 years as the Chief of Voter Registration and worked with the Teens of Richmond at the same time. I am a part of the American Legion Post 137 as well as a member of First Baptist Church under Pastor Derrick Jones.

**What does being a VA volunteer mean to you?**
Volunteering means serving and giving back to the Veterans, which is a passion of mine. A long time ago, I used to volunteer with the Red Cross. Seeing young men and women go into the service, and seeing them not have anyone to list as their emergency contact really hurt me. So, I decided I could be a friend to them. That’s how I started volunteering.

Cover photo: Richmond Fisher House gets a holiday makeover from Wal-Mart volunteers.

Back photo: Throughout the month of December, various musical acts performed in the Mall area at lunchtime for Veterans and staff. On Dec. 6, the flute choir Altissimo performed during the annual holiday tree lighting ceremony.
Marine Cpl. Dustin Braun, 24, a field radio operator, was in a car accident on June 23 in Okinawa. He is currently recovering in McGuire's polytrauma center. His wife Samantha gave birth to their first son, Hunter Curtis Braun, on Nov. 29. The day before, a baby shower was held to make things easier for the new mother at the Richmond Fisher House, where Samantha and her mother are staying while Dustin recovers. This was the first baby born to a family while staying at the Fisher House.

The morning of Nov. 28, Dustin Braun spoke his first words since the accident. He greeted and thanked guests at the baby shower.

“I appreciated it,” said Samantha Braun. “I can’t even tell you how much it meant to me and how truly special of a day it was for both of us. The experience itself was amazing and something I’ll never forget.”

Marine Cpl. Dustin Braun and his wife Samantha met in high school in Evansville, Indiana, and married in March of 2014. They were stationed in Okinawa, Japan for three years and Dustin has deployed to the Philippines and South Korea. A baby shower was held for them at the Richmond Fisher House on Nov. 28, the day before their first son was born.
More than 200 guests gathered Dec. 19, for the fifth annual McGuire's Got Talent show. Employees and Veterans at McGuire VA Medical Center performed 11 acts to showcase their diverse talents.

In 2013, Director John A. Brandecker created McGuire’s Got Talent to bring everyone together and let staff express their artistic side.

“We knew we had lots of talent in the building,” said Brandecker. “We wanted to show how alike we are. We have fun enjoying everyone’s performance.”

After the first year, he knew the talent show would be a McGuire tradition.

“The first year, there was a poet who lit up the room,” Brandecker said. “People came out of the woodwork, pouring out support for their service. The room was packed with people jumping up and down, screaming for everyone they knew.”

This year’s show opened with Chatiqua Ellison who, overcame technical difficulties to rock the room by singing a cappella to the audience. People in the crowd cheered her on as she completed the song.

The show consisted of a variety of acts to include poetry, interpretive dance, instrumental performance, and sing alongs.

One notable act was performed by Herman Thompson, who serenaded his wife of 25 years, Sheila Thompson, with “For Your Precious Love.”

On stage, the couple stood hand-in-hand as Herman sung in a deep voice to his wife like it was the first time they’ve ever met. At the end, he surprised Sheila with a bouquet of flowers.

“I appreciate my lovely wife,” said Herman. “Surprising her today with flowers and such was my way of saying I love her every day.”

The crowd responded with a standing ovation. After the show, Sheila said there was no special occasion for the doting performance. He is like that all the time.


“People love it,” said Brandecker. “It’s just great entertainment.” •
Several local chapters of the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary served dinner to Veterans, Dec. 21.

Mason Mills, left, director and producer of Polytrauma Rehab in the VA: Compassionate Care, a PBS documentary about the polytrauma care program at McGuire, presents a copy of the documentary to Marine Veteran John Koenig, center, and Medical Center Director John A. Brandecker. Mills and PBS film crews spent more than two months at McGuire capturing footage of the recovery process, interviewing Veterans and staff, and learning about polytrauma care within the VA system.

Congratulations to our Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC) team at McGuire for being recognized recently for its technical accomplishments and leadership with "Engineer of the Month" award. This group of six includes, from left: Margaret Clarke, Angela Satariano, Tiffany Lewis, Dr. William Walker, Dr. Michelle Hoot, and Austin Smith. The team performs critical research work supporting improved clinical care through a better understanding of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy.
**MARINE GIFTS ARTWORK TO CAREGIVERS**

Hanging on a wall at the foot of the bed lies a rendition of Santa Claus in colored pencils. The image depicts a jolly face with a red hat and gray beard nestled by holly on each side.

The art belongs to World War II Veteran Robert Siegfried, 93, who served for more than a decade in the Marine Corps. He survived conflicts in the Marshall Islands and continued his career as a hydraulic specialist for the VMF 422 Fighter Squadron, where he maintained 24 aircraft.

“Santa Claus was the first picture I drew when my daughter gave me this adult coloring book two years ago,” Siegfried said. “It’s enjoyable; something that I do to keep me busy.”

Since, Siegfried has colored more than 100 drawings that fill an entire wall at his home in Richmond.

While receiving care at the McGuire VA Medical Center, Siegfried asked his daughter to bring those drawings to his bedside. Now, he uses the drawings from home and new ones to thank employees who help him.

“I didn’t have any money and they helped me out with all my treatments,” Siegfried said. “It’s what I can do to thank them for the service they provide.”

It takes him two or three days to complete one page, and even longer for pictures with extensive details and shapes. Staff who’ve received artwork have shown appreciation for the gesture of gratitude.

“I feel very special he gave me one,” said Teresa Anning, medical support assistant. “I haven’t yet, but I’m going to frame mine.”

He signs each artwork “Siegy” before offering it to someone who cared for him in one form or another to signify his personal pride for the special gift.

Nursing Assistant Fred Lee received his for helping the Veteran back in bed.

“They are nice, mine was autographed and all,” said Fred Lee, nursing assistant. “I received mine when I stayed late one day to help him out.”

Siegfried has maintained his attention for detail. Each page is meticulously filled in with a color pencil organized by number for ease of accessibility.

Before beginning, Siegfried selects a color from the box set color key, then locates the corresponding pencil by a numbering system to create his masterpiece.

“At home, I have a different method of doing things so my pencils are in order.”

As a retired plumber and former Virginia State Secretary for the Knights of Columbus, Siegfried said he’s had a good life. He wishes to return home after the holidays.