McGuire Monthly
Serving Our Nation’s Heroes
What do you do at VA?

I work in Engineering Service as a material handler. I set up for events and deliver chairs and furniture. I'm coming up on a year here at the VA. I have been here nine months.

Tell us something interesting about yourself.

I have served for 17 years in the United States Marine Corps. Being promoted to Gunnery Sergeant was a big step for me and I am very excited.

What was your most memorable experience while working at the VA?

My most memorable experience was on Sept. 1, when I was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant in the Multipurpose Room at McGuire. It's not normally done at a hospital, so I was very grateful that my family could make the trip to see it. Eight family members came from out of state to view the pinning ceremony.

Tell us something about you that most people would not know.

I make a mean peach cobbler.

What does being a VA employee mean to you?

Being an employee at the VA means a lot. It allows me to give service to the Veterans who paved the way for me and gave their lives for my freedom. It gives me great honor to be able to serve them at McGuire, as well as serving in the military.

Gordon Shannon

Cover photo: Dr. Mack Hendrix performs the first TEVAR procedure at McGuire. See full story on page 3.

Back photo: Nurse Mercy Oriogbo wears a traditional outfit during the annual McGuire Cultural Diversity Fair.
Ever since the Interventional Radiology (IR) ribbon-cutting last November, the IR team has made great strides to ensure Veterans receive cutting-edge procedures at McGuire VA Medical Center. Some of these interventions include advanced procedures to treat liver cancer and aortic aneurysms.

“I have worked in Radiology at McGuire for 2½ years, and I have seen significant changes in what we are able to offer our Veterans,” said Jennifer Farrell, Nurse Clinical Coordinator for Radiology and Nuclear Medicine. “Interventional Radiology has developed tremendously, with two dedicated fellowship-trained interventionalists and a new state-of-the-art lab. Dr. Jonathan Ha and Dr. Mack Hendrix are extremely innovative and always in-tune with the latest medical practice.”

Many of these minimally invasive procedures are considered by the medical community to be a safer alternative than surgery, have less recovery time, and provide targeted treatment options where there were once few options.

In July, McGuire successfully completed its first radioembolization procedure to treat liver cancer. Radioembolization is referred to as Y-90 because of the radioactive isotope Yttrium-90, which is used in the procedure. In order to bring this procedure to the facility, it required a complex approval process spearheaded by Hendrix, Director of Interventional Oncology, and a special permit through the National Health Physics Program.

The Joint Commission, which oversees the accreditation process for hospitals in the U.S., was present at this first procedure. According to Jinsy Babu, Health Physicist and Radiation Safety Officer at McGuire, The Joint Commission was impressed and said they would ask other IR labs to emulate the processes for Y-90 procedures.

“Our dedicated staff providers are excellent,” said Babu. “If I was a patient, I would come here for Y-90.”

Dr. Ha, Director of Interventional Radiology, working in conjunction with Dr. Gundars Katlaps, Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery, performed the hospital’s first Percutaneous Thoracic Endovascular Aneurysm Repair (TEVAR) in September.

TEVAR keeps a thoracic aortic aneurysm, or dissection, from rupturing by inserting a self-expanding stent graft across the area of injury. Different from traditional TEVARs, this procedure was done all through small skin incisions, allowing the patient to be on their feet the next day.

“It’s a minimally invasive therapy for potentially life threatening aortic disease,” said Hendrix. “It was a great collaboration between Cardio Thoracic Surgery and IR. Everything went really smooth.”

The IR team constantly works together between the procedure room and adjoining control room to ensure valuable information is exchanged before, during and after each procedure.

According to Babu, McGuire’s interventionalists are among the highest-trained individuals in healthcare, and the IR labs are some of the best he has ever seen.
VA employees are **highly encouraged** to sign up and attend the next VA Voices opportunity.

Contact [Ruben.SantosColon@va.gov](mailto:Ruben.SantosColon@va.gov), [Keishonna.Barrett@va.gov](mailto:Keishonna.Barrett@va.gov), or [David.Hodge6@va.gov](mailto:David.Hodge6@va.gov) for assistance with enrollment.

VA Voices uses specific training techniques to help staff connect with the importance of relationships, and to extend, sustain and reinforce this focus across the organization. These two components are designed to help everyone in VA:

- Understand each Veteran’s experience and perspective
- Genuinely connect with what matters to Veterans
- Respond to each Veteran’s needs and goals
- Collaborate and work together for positive change
- Develop and support great employees and leaders
- Improve Veteran outcomes
- Achieve consistent and great customer service
- Respond to feedback from Veterans, staff, and other data sources
- Build trust within and across the organization and community

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**Dr. Robert Jesse | 1952-2017**

Dr. Jesse's contributions to VA are immeasurable. He saved countless lives by modernizing VA emergency department care, successfully expediting cardiac catheterization for Veteran patients with acute heart attacks. His impact as a leader in VHA and the improvements he made in healthcare are profound. What is even more impressive is that he did all this while still caring for his own patients at McGuire.
Making Spiritual Connections Through Purification and Prayer

The sweat lodge at McGuire VA Medical Center serves as a location where Native Americans and others can search their souls. According to Chaplain O. Dewane Stone, Chief of Chaplain Services, the sweat lodge cleanses the evils and toxins of life.

The establishment of the sweat lodge on VA grounds in 1995, by Veteran Bobby Bartlett, provided Native American Veterans with a place where they can commune with their deity, called the Great Creator.

A dome made from freshly-cut saplings is covered by canvas tarps, then gradually heated to heal the body, mind and spirit. A fire pit full of rocks maintain the heat during the ceremonies, or sweats as they are called. The entire structure is surrounded by a cedar privacy fence.

The Medicine Man, also referred to as a Native American Spiritualist, helps maintain a peaceful environment while participants engage in deep meditation meant to cleanse their bodies.

Before ceremonies in the sweat lodge begin, certain steps must be taken. A fire must be prepared, stones placed upon the fire, then carried into the lodge by a fire-tender. Smoke from sage and grasses are burned to cleanse the lodge. As heat gradually builds, participants sweat for up to several hours in sauna-like conditions.

Typically, sweat lodge ceremonies are conducted in silence with drums and other music before or after the ceremony.

The sweat lodge is similar to religious fasting traditions, said Stone, both actions encourage the cleansing of the body to strengthen a person's connection with the Creator.

“It was important to bring a sweat lodge here because it is sacred to Native Americans, and they need a place to commune with the Great Creator,” said Stone. “The sweat lodge provides a place where Native Americans heading to combat can cleanse and prepare for deployment.”

If you are interested in participating in a sweat or learning more about Native American Sweat Lodge events, contact Native American Spiritualist Jimmy Thunder at 804-774-0457.

Story by special contributor Sydney Dudley
Early detection of movement disorders like Parkinson’s Disease has been a challenge for many years, but a joint research effort by doctors from McGuire VA Medical Center and Virginia Commonwealth University is changing that.

Dr. George Gitchel, Director of Clinical Research for McGuire’s Parkinson’s Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center (PADRECC), led the development of a system that is helpful with diagnosing movement disorders such as Parkinson’s disease, tremors, stroke, and many more, based on a five-minute, non-invasive recording of eye movement patterns.

Gitchel said this is the largest and most comprehensive research project that has taken place in the Richmond PADRECC. He conducted the research in coordination with Dr. Mark Baron, McGuire PADRECC and VCU Neurology, and Dr. Paul Wetzel, VCU Biomedical Engineering.

“Data has shown that if it were to be used for differential diagnoses, the research is correct in predicting the diagnoses in about 98 percent of cases,” said Gitchel. “Whereas a movement disorder specialist is correct 80 percent of the time, and a general neurologist is correct only around 50 percent.”

This revolutionary breakthrough is focused on assisting with diagnosis of all movement disorders much sooner than traditional methods, and with greater accuracy by using quantifiable and objective information from the patient, as opposed to the traditional purely subjective clinical exam. Results of the study also suggest the ability to detect preclinical stages of Parkinson’s disease, potentially 15 years before outwardly visible symptoms emerge.

Gitchel said his group has received a $1 million grant from the Michael J. Fox Foundation. This will allow for continued research, both within the VA and at other sites.

“The implications are staggering for how significantly this will impact the field of neurology, health care costs, misdiagnosis rate, patient and caregiver burden, medication response, quality of life, and more,” Gitchel said.

Thanks to the overwhelmingly compelling nature of this research, Gitchel and his team have licensed the technology to a company named RightEye LLC, who will soon make it available to the public. RightEye acquired the technology in an exclusive license through a VCU technology transfer program, in equal partnership with the VA. Royalties will be split equally between VCU and the VA. The product is being rapidly developed and should be available for sale to clinicians nationwide soon, but a firm release date has not been set.
The McGuire VA Medical Center partnered with Richmond’s local Public Broadcasting Station, WCVE, to film a documentary about the care Veterans receive within VA’s Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers. On Sept. 6, approximately 140 people from both organizations and the community viewed an early screening of the documentary titled “Polytrauma Rehab in the VA: Compassionate Care.” The film is available for viewing at [www.ideastations.org](http://www.ideastations.org).

Top photo: People involved in the PBS documentary “Polytrauma Rehab in the VA: Compassionate Care” stand for a picture following an early screening of the hour-long documentary filmed at the McGuire VA Medical Center in 2017. Pictured from left: John Felton, Vice President of Television Programming at WCVE; Dr. David Cifu, Principal Investigator, Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium for VA; Mason Mills, WCVE Producer of the documentary; Dr. Ajit Pai, Chief of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at McGuire; and John A. Brandecker, Director of McGuire VAMC. Bottom photo: Mr. Brandecker addresses audience members at preview screening.

#BeThere

The VA’s annual suicide prevention theme this year is #BeThere. It’s a noble mission that asks everyone to take part in suicide prevention. Simple actions like sending a message, having a conversation or meeting for coffee could mean the world of difference for someone in crisis. If you or someone you know is in a crisis, contact Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 or text 838255.