

Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS)
VAVS MEETING NOTES

The NWIHC staff and affiliated volunteer organizations held a VAVS quarterly meeting on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. at the S. 96th St. Elks Lodge, Omaha, Nebraska. After opening greetings by CDCE Chief Michael Ingram, the group made the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance.

Executive Office Staff Updates:

Mr. Robert Hailey, Chief of Architecture/Engineering, has been in that position for three years at the Omaha VA Medical Center (OVAMC). His video covers VA property and services and was shown to attendees. The main Omaha campus has 13 Operating Rooms, 64 Med/Surg patient rooms, 10 Mental Health beds, 16 ROTP rooms, 10 ER rooms, 16 ICU beds. A Homeless Program (CCRC) is operated out of Victory Apartments. Fisher House serves families coming from over 50 miles away.

FACILITIES: The VA Community Living Centers (CBOCs) are in Papillion (33) beds, and Grand Island (42) beds and provide skilled rehab, wound and geriatric extended care (e.g. hospice). Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (8) are in Sarpy County, Norfolk, Holdrege, North Platte, Lincoln, Shenandoah, and Grand Island. New CBOCs are planned in Fremont and Council Bluffs. Bellevue's previous CBOC is being used for Whole Health to save on rent from being in the West Center Mall.

GARDENS: Staff is working on long-term support for the current campus healing garden with donors. The first female killed in Post 9/11 wars has a new monument dedicated that is at the main entrance. Near the memory garden is a Flag and Eagle monument that was dedicated by the group who donated for the Ambulatory Care Center (ACC). The North Platte Healing Garden is totally donated and supported by volunteers. Donors are needed for the OVAMC healing gardens; improvements may include capabilities for water features.

BUILDING ACCOMPLISHMENTS: building projects completed include a Physical Therapy (in the former Education Room) and skilled recovery rooms. Electronic records Management has new construction. Mechanical chillers being updated.

The 4-year old ACC is 1-of-3 in the nation facilities built with private/VA partnerships, which dramatically cuts approval time and costs. OVAMC uses their ORs, a Pack Model with This packs includes Medical Instruments, equipment, tables and computers. The project won a national hospital architecture award. The hall was glass has meaning; the colors represent achievement medals of all services. Local donors provided \$70 million.

ACC HALLWAY: It currently has displayed service plaques (space force plaque is coming). They would like to have 2 tv/video displays; 1 for medal of honor winners, the other honoring outstanding employees' stories.

UPDATING PROJECTS: They had a Prosthetic lab dedication and next week are dedicating a room in honor of Brad Ashford. Mr. Haley shared there is a Master Plan for the campus. Currently at the original 1951 building there are 100 people working on its maintenance and operations. He noted they are stalled a little while on some new developments, such as renovation of the existing building for community care (e.g. obstetricians). That is projected to cost \$240 million.

As part of this updating, Congressman Bacon has submitted a federal bill to fund a new VA Patient Tower in Omaha. They are looking for more private partnerships. Above the new PT building will be an education center or it may be part of the new tower.

They are looking to provide sheltered corridors from the pain clinic to the main hospital. A Shuttle currently goes from the parking areas; volunteer staff at the desks assist patients with getting a shuttle back to their cars.

Veterans Advisory Group: Chairman Dick Harrington reiterated the ACC display project's importance and shared that 60% of employees are vets. They have contacted a designer who could build and manage the display content; the donation project goal is \$50,000-\$100,000.

VAVS 2024 Game Changing Accomplishments:

- CRRC Laundry Center machine replacements (\$5K) donors were thanked.
- VA Omaha Stand Down served 86 Veterans. There has been ~52% drop since 2010 of Unsheltered/Homeless Vets. There was \$10,000 of donated goods and many helping agencies with 100 volunteers.
- Omaha VA Giving Tree for outpatients had ~\$10K in donations, providing 500+ gifts, and served 200 Veterans/family. There were 124 tags - (70 last year).
- 5 Ford Explorers were provided mainly by the DAV (\$300K)
- Popcorn. a couple shipments were valued at \$600K. They have some reserved for events and some for sales to employees at \$1 per bag.
- 2024 Veteran's Day events included a treat table, Guitars 4 Vets performance, and a Wreath Laying Ceremony.
- PCLC Events. Cati DeMoss reported a great Christmas at the PCLC and Hospital.
- Veterans Creative Arts Competition. New rule books are coming out in March. They need more advertising for the 2025 Ceremony. She also defined services being provided at the Community Living Center, which include short term palliative care and hospice; intensive wound care or extensive rehab like Madonna. She sought help with educating the public about services, and that they need activity volunteers.

Old Business:

Heather shared new volunteers will need to have updates of their PIV cards every 180 days due to new regulations. Others are grandfathered in for every 3 years. This does not include a background check. All volunteers' vaccines must be done annually before November. Annual training forms are 75% submitted. They are going to have a more robust job shadowing program with the UNO Med Center and high school students as volunteers.

The need 5-6 occasional volunteers every Friday for the popcorn give-aways; Tracy or Heather scheduling.

Also needed are Monday and Friday morning volunteers for coffee service. the Popcorn Friday over Volunteer Operations.

During October volunteers helped CDECE with new patient welcome folders, the food pantry, and a Trunk or Treat for staff families. A reminder was made that service or pet animals are not allowed in Acute Care rooms.

New Business: Mr. Ingram shared that above all...never give up on a great patient experience; be thankful. Volunteer hours increased by 7,000 hours, a 14% bump over 2024. New volunteers are onboarded by Tracy. PCLC volunteers processed through the Main office. They can also use volunteers at the CBOC on Giles Road. Please use Comment Cards to show appreciate of employees. For Volunteer hours: #2 in the Nation. Minneapolis is #1. The facility is obtaining a new VA PR director.

We were #6 in the Nation for total donations (excluding new Fisher House donations).

For 2025 the CDCE Sponsorship Drive filled several projects:

- Veteran Coffee Service. Served daily by cart or in lobbies and is funded at \$6000 by Kiewit Construction. Cookies run \$4,000 per year.
- Newspapers. An anonymous donor provided \$500 for one subscription. They need more for the Mental Health / RRTP Units (a patient donor provided \$1,000 for TV).
- Food Pantry Sponsorship: \$5,000 through 20 donors; main donor is 42 Degrees.
- Food Drives for the pantry. For food- insecure veterans they want to find ways to fund \$25,000 for needs. They will have 4 Drives; they want to have 100 jars of Peanut Butter on their first drive. Needs List: Gift Cards for Hy-Vee. Staff cannot use their department cards to buy gift cards. Suggestion: have an organization fund specific gas cards (\$25 or \$50).

Yet-open Sponsorships include:

- Food Drives and/or Sponsorships; Goal \$20K
- Gift Cards (for Gas & Groceries); Goal \$15K
- Inpatient Cookie Program (2x week); Goal \$4000
- Regular Popcorn (3x Month) with their popcorn machine and volunteers; Goal \$1500
- Newspapers: ten subscriptions for floors total; goal at \$500 each, PCLC needs 2 subscriptions at \$500 each.
- Hosted Golf Tournament Sponsorship.

Cost	Description	Source
\$50,000 – \$100,000	Average cost for a small tournament	Golf.com
\$100,000 – \$250,000	Average cost for a medium tournament	Golf.com
\$250,000 – \$500,000	Average cost for a large tournament	Golf.com

Note:

Upcoming Events:

National Salute to Veteran Patients’ Week: Please have organization sponsor a day for volunteering / treats; schedule with Cynthia Pommels.

- o 10 Feb: 11:00am Kick-Off Event: Dr. Kingston / AF Band Ensemble
 - o 11 Feb: 10-12pm- Steve and Gina from Kat 103.7, POPCORN Handout
 - o 12 Feb: 8-2pm- Sweet Treat Day; Guitar for Vets Performance
 - o 13 Feb: 55 MDG; Little Caesars (CraZy BrEaD!)
 - o 14 Feb: Inpatient Focused Events, visits, and giveaways
- *Grand Island and Lincoln will also have on-site events TBD.

Other Upcoming Events:

- 7 Feb, Volunteers Wear Red (POCs: Juliette Reynolds/Aubriana Crain)
- TBD March Vietnam War Commemoration
- TBD April Volunteer Appreciation Week
- TBD April Patient Experience Appreciation Week
- TBD May Memorial Day, Police Week, VA 2K Walk Roll
- TBD June Caregiver Support Summit
- TBD June Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon
- TBD July Korean War Commemoration

Future VAVS Meetings (4th Wednesday of the Month):

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 23rd 2025 – VAVS Committee Members

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 23rd 2025 – VAVS Committee Members

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 22 nd 2025 – VAVS Committee Members

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 28th 2026 – VAVS Committee Members