



Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK
Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23
Network Update
December 2011
www.visn23.va.gov



Whatever your tradition, however you choose to celebrate, we extend warm greetings for the holidays and best wishes for a healthy and prosperous New Year.



[Make the Connection](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net), a new website launched by VA on November 14 helps Veterans recognize they are not alone in their experience. Learn how other Vets have overcome challenges, reached positive outcomes for treatment and recovery, and found paths to fulfilling lives.

www.MakeTheConnection.net

Veterans can select stories by sex, branch of service, era of service, and combat. *Make the Connection* features numerous Veterans who have shared their experiences, challenges, and triumphs. It offers a place where Veterans and their families can view the candid, personal testimonials of other Veterans who have dealt with and are working through a variety of common life experiences, day-to-day symptoms, and mental health conditions. The Web site also connects Veterans and their family members with services and resources that may help them live more fulfilling lives.

Learn more at <http://maketheconnection.net/>

VISN 23 Homeless Program Team Recognized for Outstanding Achievement

The best facilities, employees and civilian providers working to eliminate homelessness among Veterans were recently honored by the Department of Veterans Affairs. VISN 23 Regional taskforce in Iowa City, Iowa was named one of the top achievers. "VA's commitment to end homelessness among America's Veterans is being fulfilled by the hard work, innovation and dedication of thousands of VA employees and civilian partners," said Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould. Gould's remarks came at the annual Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Service to Homeless Veterans ceremony. Read more at <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2224>

NATIONAL CALL CENTER for Homeless Veterans



1-877-4AID-VET
1-877-424-3838

Do you know a homeless Veteran?

Help spread the word - VA has founded a National Call Center for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, that provides free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. Call 1-877-4AID VET (1-877-424-3838) or Chat Live 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

New Vocational Resources Laboratory to Open in St. Cloud



The St. Cloud VA Health Care System recently hosted a Ribbon Cutting and Open House for the newly renovated Vocational Resources Laboratory in Building 57 at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center. The Vocational Resources Laboratory will house an Incentive Therapy (IT) and Transitional Work Experience (TWE) production area and a Workforce Placement Center featuring an expanded computer lab for Veterans use. Originally built as a cannery, the renovated building supports the overall goal of improving the Veteran's quality of life through a vocational

rehabilitation experience in which the Veteran learns new job skills, strengthens successful work habits, and regains a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Read more at www.stcloud.va.gov

Badges for Vets Contest – Goal: Help Vets Get Jobs

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced the 'Badges for Vets' contest for creating digital "badge" systems to help Veterans translate their military skills into civilian jobs. A "digital badge" recognizes skills obtained through non-traditional learning, such as work-related training, online courses, and experience. Learners display their badges across the Web, resulting in jobs or formal credit. Many recently discharged Veterans earned employable skills during their time in uniform. They represent high-quality training and real-life experience. VA is looking for new ways for employers to easily identify Veterans who have this training and this experience to fill good jobs in the private sector. VA is joined by the Departments of Education, Energy, and Labor to sponsor the "Badges for Vets" contest as part of the Badges for Lifelong Learning Competition administered by a consortium supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Mozilla Foundation. VA Innovations Initiative (VAi2) will award up to three \$25,000 prizes in five categories to teams that demonstrate they can develop and deliver digital badges representing skills learned in the military that are desired by civilian employers. Entries in the contest are due by Jan. 12, 2012, and winners will be announced at the Digital Media and Learning Conference in San Francisco Feb. 28-March 3. Learn more at <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2221>



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Get Schooled Up on the GI Bill



Veterans looking to head back to school can visit VA's new [GI Bill page](#) to apply for benefits online. At this new site, Veterans can browse frequently asked questions, and [read a guide for choosing the right school for you](#). Learn more at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>

Calendar of Events – January and February 2010

December 2: Veteran Wellness Fair - [Minneapolis VA Health Care System](#), From 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the Brooklyn Park Vet Center, 7001 78th Ave N., Brooklyn Park, Minn. The services being offered to Veterans include:

- Flu Shots
- Blood Pressure Checks
- Dietary Counseling
- Health Care Screening
- MyHealtheVet sign up for VA Prescription Drugs
- Mental Health Screening / Counseling Services
- MN DVA / County CVSOS Services (DD214 Requests, Disability Claims, and Minnesota Soldier Assistance Fund Claims)

Refreshments will be available to Veterans. For more information call: 763-503-2220 or 1-877-WAR-VETS.

December 8: Annual Holiday Party for Veterans - [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#), The American Legion Dept. of South Dakota will sponsor the Annual Holiday Party for Veterans starting at 2 p.m. (CST) in the fourth floor auditorium of the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System, 2501 W. 22nd St., Sioux Falls, S.D.

December 10: Wreaths Across America - [VA Black Hills Health Care System](#), From 10 - 11 a.m. (MST) Black Hills and Hot Springs National Cemeteries:

Black Hills National Cemetery, 20901 Pleasant Valley Dr., Sturgis, S.D.

Hot Springs National Cemetery, 500 North 5th St., Hot Springs, S.D.

Black Hills National Cemetery and Hot Springs National Cemetery will host Wreaths Across America, a holiday wreath-laying ceremony to honor and remember our nation's Veterans. The Civil Air Patrol, Veterans service organizations and citizens are coordinating the event to honor Veterans of each branch of the military, the Merchant Marine as well as Prisoners of War and those still Missing in Action (POW/MIA). [Learn more here.](#)

December 15: Voluntary Service Holiday Luncheon - [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#), Sioux Falls VA Health Care System will host their Voluntary Service Holiday Luncheon for all regularly scheduled volunteers from 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. (CST) in the fourth floor auditorium of the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System, 2501 W. 22nd St., Sioux Falls, S.D.

December 15: Annual Holiday Party for Patients - [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#), Sioux Falls VA Health Care System will host their Annual Holiday Party for Patients starting at 1 p.m. (CST) in the fourth floor auditorium of the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System, 2501 W. 22nd St., Sioux Falls, S.D.

VA Websites Offer Calendar of Events, Weather Alerts, and Much More

For information on special events, or weather related alerts, log on to your local VA facility's homepage.

VA Black Hills HCS	www.blackhills.va.gov
VA Central Iowa HCS	www.centraliowa.va.gov
Fargo, ND VA HCS	www.fargo.va.gov
Iowa City VA HCS	www.iowacity.va.gov
Minneapolis VA HCS	www.minneapolis.va.gov
VA Nebraska Western Iowa HCS	www.nebraska.va.gov
Sioux Falls VA HCS	www.siouxfalls.va.gov
St. Cloud VA HCS	www.stcloud.va.gov
VISN 23	www.visn23.va.gov

For More information, call the Network Office at (612) 725-1968 or
Log on at www.visn23.va.gov or email sharyl.schaepe@va.gov