

Veterans

The VA MidSouth Healthcare Network Wellness Journal

Health Watch

Summer 2010

**Stay healthy!
Try these
food-safety tips**

**80 years of caring
for Veterans**

**Louisville VAMC
renamed for beloved
WWI-era Veteran**





Our Veterans' Veteran

Dear Veteran:

Summer started on a high note in the MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki visited the Nashville VA Medical Center (VAMC), which is a part of VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS).

It was my pleasure to host Secretary Shinseki on our turf for the second time—the first visit was at our Louisville VA Medical Center in 2009. The Secretary is a Veterans' Veteran, and he confirmed this again during his most recent visit.

The purpose of his visit was to interact one-on-one with Veterans, to meet and greet Nashville VAMC staff members and to learn about the great works taking place there. The Secretary's visit was very encouraging and uplifting. This wasn't just a cursory V.I.P. event—the Secretary actually spent time listening to and interacting with Veterans and offering real solutions to your issues.

Secretary Shinseki explained that VA and the Department of Defense are the *only* federal agencies that don't have mandated cuts in their fiscal year 2011 budgets, which begin October 1, 2010. He stressed that "somebody is banking on [VA] to deliver" first-rate, compassionate health care and that VA has only one mission: to care for Veterans.

VA TVHS director Juan Morales pleasantly surprised the Secretary when he pointed out that Veterans constitute 50 percent of the Nashville VAMC staff (including himself). VA is 30 percent staffed by Veterans nationwide.

Secretary Shinseki also brought along a message from President Obama: His expectations of VA are high—and so is his confidence in VA.

We will keep on forging ahead ...

John Dandridge Jr.
Network Director



Secretary Shinseki (c) talks with a Veteran while others look on.

Veterans Health Watch is a wellness journal published quarterly by the VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). *Veterans Health Watch* is designed to promote healthy lifestyles and give Veterans and their personal caregivers insightful information about managing and accessing health care from VA Medical Centers within VISN 9.

This publication is not a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor.

Your feedback is welcomed. If you would like to comment on any of the articles or submit information for possible publication, please write to:

Editor, 10N9E
Veterans Health Watch
VISN 9
1801 West End Ave., Suite 600
Nashville, TN 37203

Executive Editor
Sandra L. Glover

Lead Editor
Judy Williams, Louisville, Ky.

Editorial Board
Christopher Alexander, Nashville, Tenn.
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VA Medical Center renamed

World War I-era Veteran Robley Rex was honored on April 10, during a dedication ceremony renaming the Louisville VA Medical Center to the Robley Rex VA Medical Center.

Rex was remembered as a man who dedicated his life to helping fellow Veterans, both through his work with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and through his activities as a VA Medical Center (VAMC) volunteer.

U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, U.S. Rep. John A. Yarmuth, representatives from local VSOs, local and state government, family members, friends and VA employees were among the many members of the community in attendance at this historic event.

A life well-remembered

During the program, guest speakers shared personal stories of Rex, fondly remembering his bright smile, engaging personality, zest for life and dedication to service.

Rex was born in Hopkinsville, Ky. He enlisted in the 5th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army in 1919, soon after his 18th birthday.

Rex went on to serve in the 28th Infantry Division and was deployed to Europe, where he worked in

the Intelligence Unit. He returned to Kentucky after being discharged from the Army in May 1922.

After farming for many years in Davies County and working for the U.S. Postal Service, Rex made his home in Louisville, Ky.

A lifetime of service

Before his death in 2009, Rex had accumulated more than 14,600 hours of service during his 23 years as a VA volunteer. He was a popular and vital member of the VAMC Voluntary Service team. For more than 80 years, Rex was also a member of and an active spokesperson for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). He served in many elected and appointed positions in these organizations. He also served as a Veterans Service Officer for the DAV and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Rex was honored in 2005 by the VFW as National Volunteer of the Year. On his 107th birthday, Rex was presented the Kentucky Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service.

Rex was truly an example of what it means to have a sense of duty in serving others. His kindness, generosity and selfless acts of service will be remembered by Veterans, VA employees, VSOs and his community for many years to come. ■



Members of Robley Rex's family at the renaming ceremony.



Attendees recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

→ Share in the joy!

Follow in the footsteps of Robley Rex and become a VA volunteer. To learn more, visit www.volunteer.va.gov or contact your local VA Voluntary Service at the telephone numbers listed below.

→ **VAMC Huntington:** (304) 429-6741, ext. 2952

→ **VAMC Lexington:** (859) 281-4930

→ **VAMC Robley Rex (Louisville):** (502) 287-6221

→ **VAMC Memphis:** (901) 523-8990, ext. 7248

→ **VAMC Mountain Home:** (423) 979-2891

→ **Tennessee Valley Healthcare System
Nashville Campus:** (615) 873-6978

→ **Alvin C. York Campus:** (615) 225-6940

Guess what's coming to dinner...

Safety tips that help you avoid foodborne illness

Don't look now, but you could have uninvited guests at your kitchen table—bacteria, parasites, viruses and even traces of certain chemicals that have found their way into your family's favorite meal.

Think it can't happen in your home? Think again. Each year, 76 million of us come down with food poisoning. More than 300,000 people require hospitalization, and millions more wind up in emergency rooms or their doctors' offices. And, unfortunately, 5,000 food-poisoning cases each year are fatal.

Food for thought

The sickness—known as foodborne illness—has four basic causes:

- **bacteria**, primarily *Salmonella* and staph germs that cause bacterial gastroenteritis (bowel and stomach illness)
- **botulism**, a rare but life-threatening bacterial toxin found in dirt (it can grow in home-canned vegetables that aren't cooked enough before being stored)
- **viruses** from food contaminated by human viral illnesses—these germs cause viral gastroenteritis, which strikes some 180,000 Americans each year
- **chemical toxins** from eating certain mushrooms, moldy peanuts or potato “eyes”—the greenish-white

sprouts that bud on old potatoes

Though most cases wind down after a day or two, some may linger for several weeks and cause serious complications. Persons at high risk of complications include senior citizens, pregnant women, children ages 5 and younger and people who take antacids or have a weakened immune system.

Bacterial baddies

Bacterial contamination is by far the most common cause of food poisoning. Many different microbes ruin our food, especially these three:

- ***Salmonella***. This germ passes from infected hens into their eggs. If tainted eggs aren't completely cooked, food poisoning can occur from 12 to 72 hours after ingestion. The sickness usually lasts four to seven days and causes fever and diarrhea before resolving, usually without medication.
- ***Staphylococcus aureus***. Staph erupts in unrefrigerated meat, milk, salads made with mayonnaise or cream-filled pastries. Symptoms—mild fever, cramps, nausea and diarrhea—appear within four to six hours. Recovery normally occurs within 48 to 72 hours as bodily fluids are replenished.
- ***E. coli***. Notorious for contaminating ground



→ Mobile meals

Outdoor dining can cause foodborne illness.

Here are some safeguards for better barbecues:

- Wash your hands. Use disposable wipes if soap or hot water isn't available.
- Keep meats away from all other foods.
- Keep raw food apart from cooked food.
- Cover your food. Insects can spread salmonella.
- Cook meat, poultry and fish completely.
- Keep hot food hot and eat it at once. Keep cold food cold. Return it to the ice chest after serving.
- Use the two-hour rule: Discard food that's been left out longer (one hour in heat above 90° F).
- Another food rule: When in doubt, throw it out.
- Make sure food is served on clean plates and eaten with clean flatware.



beef, *E. coli* can also infest produce, water, nonpasteurized milk and cider. The tiniest dose of this intestinal bacteria can cause bloody diarrhea within nine days of exposure. The illness usually resolves on its own within 10 days, but your doctor should be alerted to its presence.

Good meals gone bad

Why does food spoil or become contaminated? Experts say the three biggest reasons are:

- **Improper storage.** Bacteria breed when food, especially home-canned items, are stored at the wrong temperature or in a defective container.
- **Undercooking.** Germs can survive and cause illness when meat and fish aren't heated thoroughly for enough time.
- **Poor personal hygiene.** Experts say dirty, germ-y hands and ill food handlers are the chief culprits.

Germ warfare

These tips can help ensure that your food and water will stay healthy and safe:

At the supermarket:

- Be especially careful when buying fresh seafood, dairy products and eggs.
- Inspect deli salads carefully, especially those with mayonnaise.

→ How bad is it?

Most cases of foodborne illness are mild and nonthreatening. To overcome an episode, rest while slowly restoring fluids with water, decaf tea, sports drinks, ginger ale or cola. Try crackers, toast, rice, applesauce, gelatin or broth until the bout has passed. If symptoms get worse, however, get prompt medical attention. You could have a life-threatening condition like botulism, listeriosis (a dangerous blood disease from infected meat or dairy items) or critically low fluid levels. Watch for:

- headache, stiff neck and fever
- difficulty swallowing or breathing
- blurry vision or drooping eyelids
- crying without tears
- fever lasting more than a day
- diarrhea lasting more than three days
- weakness, numbness or tingling in your limbs or mouth
- fainting, dizziness or rapid heart rate
- extreme stomach pain

- Examine what you're buying. Check expiration dates. Look for tight, unbroken seals. Don't buy dented or bulging canned goods.
- Make the supermarket your last stop. Food left in the car while you run other errands could spoil.
In the kitchen:
 - Keep your refrigerator set at 40° F and your freezer set at 0° F.
 - Immediately refrigerate perishables after shopping.
 - Thaw or marinate meat in your refrigerator, not on your countertop.
 - Keep meat and produce apart. Use one cutting board for meat and poultry and another for produce.
 - Wash your hands before and after handling uncooked produce and meats.
 - Wash produce under your tap as you need it, not all at once. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.
 - Wash counters and utensils in hot sudsy water after meal preparation.
 - Use a meat thermometer. Cook ground meats to 160° F, poultry to 165° F and steaks and roasts to at least 145° F.
 - Only drink and use chlorinated or purified water. To purify water, bring it to a rolling boil for at least one minute. ■

Celebrating 80 years of service to our nation's heroes

The establishment of the Veterans Administration came in 1930 when Congress authorized the President to “consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war Veterans.” The three component agencies became bureaus within the Veterans Administration. Brigadier General Frank T. Hines was named as the first Administrator of Veterans Affairs, a job he held until 1945.

The responsibilities and benefits programs of the Veterans Administration grew over the decades.

World War II saw an increase in the Veteran population, which led Congress to enact several new laws benefiting Veterans. The GI Bill was signed into law on June 22, 1944 and is thought to have impacted the American way of life more than any law since the Homestead Act.

Additional educational assistance acts were created over the years to benefit Veterans of the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Era, the Persian Gulf War and the All-Volunteer Force.

In 1973, the Veterans Administration assumed responsibility for operating the National Cemetery System, when this honor was transferred from the Department of the Army to the Veterans Administration.

The agency marks the graves of all those who are buried in national and state cemeteries (as well as the grave sites of Veterans in private cemeteries, upon request). It is also charged with

administering the State Cemetery Grants Program.

On March 15, 1989, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was established as a Cabinet-level position by President George H. W. Bush. He hailed the creation of the new department, saying, “There is only one place for the Veterans of America, in the Cabinet Room, at the table with the President of the United States of America.”

The VA health care system has grown along with the department. In 1930, 54 hospitals were in operation. Today, 171 medical centers; more than 350 outpatient, community and outreach clinics; 126 nursing home care units; and 35 domiciliaries care for our nation's heroes. These facilities provide a broad spectrum of medical, surgical and rehabilitative care. ■



Summer safety guide

The promise of summer includes sunny days, lazy evenings, getaways and good times. To make sure those times really are good, heed these safety tips.

Sun smarts

Your best defense against sunburn is to avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Be sure to apply plenty of sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 at least one hour before going outside. Keep your head and body covered in light, loose layers. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.

If you do get a sunburn, apply aloe vera gel right away, drink lots of water and take acetaminophen to ease minor discomfort. Cool showers, baths or compresses can soothe the burn. Call your health care provider if your skin blisters or if you develop chills, fever or nausea.

Sting savvy

If a bee, wasp or hornet stings you or your child, remove the stinger and venom sac by scraping it with your fingernail or a credit card. Wash the site with soap and water and apply an ice pack to stop the swelling. Watch for wheezing, labored breathing, nausea or vomiting. Go to an emergency room if any of these symptoms develop. Wear white or khaki-colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants and avoid scented products.

Water wisdom

Make sure a lifeguard is always present and keep a close eye on children in the water. Everyone should be wearing life jackets when riding in a boat.

Plant patrol

The best way to avoid contact with poison ivy, poison sumac or poison oak is to know what they look like. Poison ivy has smooth, shiny leaves that occur in groups of three. Poison oak is similar;

however, it grows in shrubs and its leaves more closely resemble oak leaves. Poison sumac resembles a shrub or a small tree. Its leaves are arranged in groups of seven to 13 pointed leaflets. If you come into contact with any of these plants, wash immediately with soap and water. Over-the-counter preparations and an oral antihistamine may bring relief.

Lyme elimination

Before hiking, find out if the area you'll be in is Lyme disease country. Deer ticks carrying the virus live on plants and leaves close to the ground, so it's easy to pick one up without realizing it. Wear long-sleeved shirts and tuck pants legs into knee socks. If you develop a red, bull's-eye rash or flulike symptoms, see your doctor immediately. A course of antibiotics within the first 72 hours will stop the disease's progression. If left untreated, it can cause heart, joint or nervous system problems. ■





**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

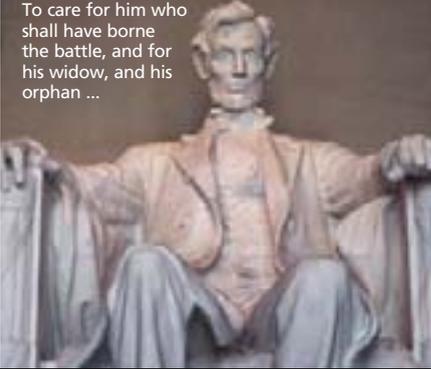
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US Department of Veterans Affairs 1801
West End Avenue, Suite 600 Nashville, TN
37203

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Keeping the promise

To care for him who
shall have borne
the battle, and for
his widow, and his
orphan ...



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TENNESSEE

**James H. Quillen
VA Medical Center**

PO Box 4000
Corner of Veterans Way and Lamont
Mountain Home, TN 37684
(423) 926-1171
Toll free: 1-877-573-3529
www.mountainhome.va.gov/

VA Medical Center

1030 Jefferson Avenue
Memphis, TN 38104
(901) 523-8990
Toll free: 1-800-636-8262
www.memphis.va.gov/

**VA Tennessee Valley
Healthcare System**

Alvin C. York Campus
3400 Lebanon Pike
Murfreesboro, TN 37129
(615) 867-6000
Toll free: 1-800-876-7093
www.tennesseevalley.va.gov/

Nashville Campus

1310 24th Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37212
(615) 327-4751
Toll free: 1-800-228-4973

KENTUCKY

VA Medical Center

1101 Veterans Drive
Lexington, KY 40502
(859) 233-4511
Toll free: 1-888-824-3577
www.lexington.va.gov/

Robley Rex

VA Medical Center

800 Zorn Avenue
Louisville, KY 40206
(502) 287-4000
Toll free: 1-800-376-8387
www.louisville.va.gov/

WEST VIRGINIA

VA Medical Center

1540 Spring Valley Drive
Huntington, WV 25704
(304) 429-6741
(304) 429-6755
Toll free: 1-800-827-8244
www.huntington.va.gov/

