

# Jesse Brown Year in Review



**BECAUSE I CARE, I WILL...**  
**COMMITMENT**

Be fully committed to serving Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest, belief in the mission. Fully my individual responsibilities, and organizational responsibilities.

**ADVOCACY**  
Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

**RESPECT**  
Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

**EXCELLENCE**  
Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive leadership, accountable for my actions, admit mistakes, and rigorous in corrections.

**SHINING STARS**

**EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR**

# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



**Dr. Clifford Smith**  
Director, Jesse Brown VA  
Medical Center

This country has a long history of showing gratitude to those who serve in our U.S. military. It may seem that a large portion of the population is serving or has served, but only .04% of Americans are serving in the military and just more than 7% of current Americans have served. Current and former service members face the same problems as those who have never served. However, service members

sometimes face issues that are quite different from others'. While we are saddened when someone passes away from suicide, our Veterans are at a higher risk of losing their lives in this manner.

According to VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018-2028, suicide is a public health challenge that causes immeasurable pain among individuals, families, and communities across the country. Suicide is also preventable. Veteran suicide is an urgent issue that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, along with its stakeholders, partners, and communities nationwide, must address. VA supports the national goal of reducing the annual suicide rate in the U.S. by 20% by the year 2025 and is implementing a public health approach to achieve this mission.

As your Acting Medical Director, I am committed connecting to our Veterans who are experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis. Last year, VA established the COMPACT Act, Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment. Under the COMPACT Act, any Veteran, whether enrolled in VA or not, can go to a VA or non

-VA emergency room for emergency suicidal care. VA will provide the treatment or cover the costs for treatment including transportation, inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days, and outpatient care for up to 90 days. For more information, visit it <https://www.va.gov/resources/getting-emergency-care-at-non-va-facilities/>.

For our employees who are not Veterans, the Employee Assistance Program is here to provide you assistance. EAPs are the first component of an Employee Wellness Program and are designed to support and uplift the 8 Dimensions of Wellness, which include emotional, physical, occupational, intellectual, financial, social, environmental, and psychological aspects.

Counseling services offer employees the opportunity to speak to a licensed clinician or counselor 24/7 regarding a variety of professional or personal topics which may impact the employee's well-being.

To speak to an EAP counselor, call (800) 222-0364 or TTY at (800) 262-7848. You can also visit <https://www.foh4you.com> for additional information.

## MISSION

The Jesse Brown Pulse seeks to celebrate all the amazing things our employees do, in and out of work, as well as highlight resources across the medical center for our Veterans.



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312-569-8387 [va.gov/Chicago-health-care](http://va.gov/Chicago-health-care)

## NEWSLETTER STAFF

### Publisher

Dr. Clifford Smith, Acting Medical Center Director

### Editor-in-Chief

Catrina Francis, Public Affairs Officer

## CONTACT

This newsletter is for you, so if you have a story you want to share, please reach out to [CHSPA0@va.gov](mailto:CHSPA0@va.gov).

## COMMUNICATIONS TASKFORCE

The Communications Taskforce is a group of your peers who volunteered to search out and tell the stories of our medical center and the Veterans we are honored to serve.

## COMMUNICATION TASKFORCE MEMBERS

Francis Agei	Christina Chiu
Jessica Gardner	Catrina Francis
Tenena Soro	Vanita Williams
Lacretia Henderson	Febin Mattahil
Kristen Lake	Cynthia Robertson
Helen Morrison	

# Honor Flight Chicago – A Welcome Home !

*Jessica Gardner, Research Health Science Specialist*

As the Veteran population ages, many are thinking about contemplating completing a task – going on an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. On Nov. 8, a Korean-War Veteran visited Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center to talk his experience with the Honor Flight.

William “Bill” Fireside, a Korean-War Veteran, experienced the Honor flight in 2022, and now volunteers with the organization by speaking at events to spread the word about this experience.

Honor Flight Chicago, established in 2008, is a Day of Honor in Washington, D.C., where Veterans visit memorials built in tribute to the service of Veterans from World War II, the Korean, and the Vietnam wars.

This trip is provided at no cost to Veterans and is intended to be a thank you for their service. To date, Honor Flight Chicago has flown over 10,000 Veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials. Veterans arrive at the Midway International Airport, are assigned a travel companion, and fly to Washington, D.C., where they receive a police escort to the memorials.

While speaking to a group of Veterans at Jesse Brown VAMC, Fireside described his experience

and encouraged Veterans to go while they still can. One Veteran expressed he didn’t want to because he gets nose bleeds when he flies

children. He also showed a picture of two Veterans who went on the Honor Flight who hadn’t seen each other since being in the service.



William Fireside, a Korean-War Veteran, speaks to a group of Veterans at JBVAMC Nov. 9, about Honor Flight Chicago.

*Photo by Jessica Gardner*

on airplanes.

“So what? They have medics and you’ll never be alone,” explained Fireside. “For most of us, returning home from Korea was a nonevent. We just come home. No one was there to welcome us. Many returning from Vietnam were demeaned by those who protested the war but blamed our returning soldiers for being the cause of it, as if they had a choice. With Honor Flight Chicago we all, at last, felt welcomed home.”

Fireside had a binder with hundreds of notes written to him thanking him for his service from other Veterans, caregivers, and school

Both Veterans were on the same flight. Bill recalled witnessing that reunion as something he’ll never forget.

To be eligible to go on the Honor Flight, an individual must be a Veteran who served during the following dates:

- World War II-Dec. 7, 1941, to Dec. 31, 1946
- Korean War-June 25, 1951, to Jan. 31, 1955
- Vietnam War-Nov. 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975

If person knows a Veteran who may be interested, he or she can download the application at <https://www.honorflightchicago.org/how-to-apply/veteran/>, mail, email or fax it to:

Honor Flight Chicago  
Attn: Veteran Application  
9701 W. Higgins Rd., Suite 310  
Rosemont, IL 60018-4717  
Email the application to [applications@honorflightchicago.org](mailto:applications@honorflightchicago.org) or fax to (773) 289-0909.

# Jesse Brown VAMC | QSV

## Jesse Brown's System Redesign: Elevating quality in health through 20 years of innovation

*Christina Chiu - Health System Specialist*

Celebrating World Quality Day Nov. 9, Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center proudly acknowledged its System Redesign and Process Improvement team, an integral part of the Quality, Safety, and Value initiative.

Brian Patterson, Chief of System Redesign, emphasized the fundamental goal – making it as easy as possible for staff to consistently provide optimal care for Veterans and their families.

In its 20th anniversary, System Redesign traces its roots to 2003 when the VA embraced Lean Six Sigma methodologies. Patterson, noted that the evolving emphasis on these methodologies over the years, with a current Lean focus. The JBVAMC Executive Leadership Team has reenergized its commitment, actively supporting System Redesign in enhancing organizational processes.

In discussing System Redesign's profound influence on Jesse Brown and Veterans, Patterson highlighted the substantial impact, emphasizing tangible outcomes and the en-

hancement of service delivery. Patterson shared that System Redesign is



spearheading several projects aligning with the organization's vision. For example, the operating room scheduling project aimed to refine the process, facilitating additional surgeries in a manner that prioritized safety and patient well-being. Simultaneously, the patient transportation project is dedicated to optimizing intrahospital transfers, emphasizing safety and operational efficiency. The telephone experience project stands as a testament to the team's unwavering dedication to providing Veterans with a seamless telephone experience across various loca-

tions. Sustained efforts like staff onboarding and the operating room im-

plant projects showcase ongoing improvements and waste reduction.

Not confined to specific departments, System Redesign collaborated across services through process improvement projects. Patterson encouraged open communication and urged individuals to reach out with issues for collaborative solutions. Alignment with ELT ensured leadership is informed and engaged in addressing issues at the local and system levels.

Looking forward, Patterson expressed the goal of offering yellow belt cours-

es on-site to empower employees to make improvements in their daily work and to foster a culture of continuous improvement. The broader vision involves connecting projects to larger goals, emphasizing not just the tools but the transformative thinking required for sustained improvement.

Patterson emphasized the shared goal among team members and leadership, connecting projects to broader objectives like clinical and service quality. Beyond the tools, he encouraged a mindset shift, echoing the principles of thinking and seeing differently found in methodologies like Lean Six Sigma.

In essence, Jesse Brown's System Redesign isn't just a department; it's a catalyst for positive change, working tirelessly toward a future where health care is not only efficient, but also consistently aligned with the highest standards of quality and care.

# New JBVAMC Initiative Creates Uniformity, Reliability

*Vanita Williams - Caregiver Support Program Social Worker*

In its ongoing effort to improve customer service, the Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center has undertaken a new initiative to create a sense of uniformity and reliability.

On Nov. 6, ahead of Veterans Day, the entrance screeners and patient transport personnel, formally known as escort services began wearing uniforms: blue or green polo shirts with black slacks.

The uniform initiative is expected to heighten the visibility of employees around the center and enable them to better help patients who require

assistance. This enterprise was borne from a Tour of Duty training completed by the Veteran Experience Officer and the Customer Service Manager in fiscal year 2023.

According to an article on VA News, "Tour of Duty course: Understanding, appreciating Veterans' service," the purpose of the Tour of Duty course is



Employees attend training which focuses on the new uniform initiative at Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

*Photos by Kenny Jones*

to orient federal civilian employees to have a better understanding of the Veterans they serve, emphasizing the link between the oath federal employees and military members take to "protect and defend the Constitution."

Entrance screeners and patient transport personnel also completed the Tour of Duty training before they were issued their uniforms.

expected to be permanent and said Rayvon Bufkin, the Veteran Experience Officer.

"The facility spent \$9,000 for the uniforms, many hours of planning, sorting, and tracking uniforms," said Bufkin.

He added that he met with the staff and union to vote on uniform colors.

When asked about obtaining feedback on the efficacy of this initiative to improving customer service, Bufkin said, "Their only measure at this time is patient satisfaction data."



(Left) Debra Martinez, a customer service manager, and Rayvon Bufkin, the Veteran Experience Officer, listen during the uniform initiative training.

The uniform initiative is

# Jesse Brown 2023 Year in Review

*Compiled by Catrina Francis – Public Affairs Officer*

There were several changes and reasons to celebrate at Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center in 2023.

Shortly into the new year, a JBVAMC staff member decided to do something that was completely selfless when Dr. Aleksandra Gmurczyk, the Medical Director of the Dialysis Program at JBVAMC and an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, donated her kidney to a stranger on the transplant list.

This might seem odd to some, but she said, “I work with patients every day on dialysis, and I see how many of them need a transplant. I am healthy, and I want to help another person, so I decided to donate.”

The nation marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War March 29, 2023. Jesse Brown recognized the sacrifices made by Vietnam Veterans. The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center’s Executive Leadership Team took time to honor inpatient Vietnam Veterans receiving treatment at the medical facility.

According to the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center Chief of Staff, Dr.



Dr. Aleksandra Gmurczyk donated her kidney to a stranger on the transplant list.

*Jesse Brown VAMC photo*

Sarah Unterman, “It’s our duty as a society to recognize and honor the sacrifices made by these brave men and women.”

The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is one of the largest VA hospitals in the country, serving more than 62,000 Veterans annually. The hospital has a long history of providing care and support to Vietnam Veterans. In addition to providing medical care, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center provides a range of programs and services designated specifically for Vietnam Veterans, including peer support groups, counseling, and job training.

also continue to commit ourselves to ensuring that all Veterans receive the care and support they deserve,” said Dr. Unterman.



The MMU will provide health care to homeless Veterans.

*Photo by Kenny Jones*

During the spring, the medical center partnered with 15th Ward Alderman Raymond Lopez during Veteran Information Week. The week was aimed at providing Veterans

“We work hard to ensure our Veterans are safe and receive the services they deserve. We must

with a range of resources and information surrounding the PACT Act and to help them navigate the complex web of benefits and services available to them. The week featured a range of activities and events designed to educate and inform Veterans. Lopez said Jesse Brown VA will bring services that are provided at the hospital with a high Veteran population and need.

Jesse Brown is always looking at ways to improve patient care. One way that was done was making a significant investment in the comfort and safety of their Veteran patients by purchasing new wheelchairs. These new wheelchairs are designed to better meet the needs of Veterans with mobility issues and will have a positive impact on their overall medical care experience. The decision to purchase new wheelchairs came after careful consideration of the needs of the Veteran patient population at Jesse Brown VAMC. Many veterans who receive care at the medical center have mobility issues due to injuries sustained during their service and require the use of a wheelchair to navigate the hospital's facilities. The new wheelchairs are designed to provide greater comfort and support for these patients, which in turn will improve their overall health outcomes.

In September, the medical center celebrated 70 decades of assisting Veterans. The hospital admitted its



JBVAMC partnered with 15th Ward Aldeman Raymond Lopez during Veteran Information Week.

*Photo by Kenny Jones*

first patient on Sept. 1, 1953, and was officially dedicated on Sept. 27, 1953. In 2004 the facility was renamed for the Honorable Jesse Brown who served as Secretary for Veteran Affairs from 1993 to 1997.

Only a few staff members remain who remember the Westside VA Hospital days. In 1993 Norma Dorsey, a Nurse Manager, said she started here at the facility after working in the private sector, which she said was quite a transition.

“The first charge was responsible for taking all doctor’s orders,” she explained. “Each registered nurse was responsible for taking off their own orders, so that was a shock to me because I was used to taking off my own orders.”

Each November, the world works together to recognize and bring awareness about lung cancer. The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is a Center of Excellence for lung cancer and has participated in lung cancer screening since 2016.

Lung cancer screening involves identifying high-risk patients, such as tobacco users, and having them obtain a CT scan of their chest to potentially identify spots (called nodules) that could potentially be cancerous.

To improve veteran care, the JBVAMC has obtained approval to advance our diagnostic technology by acquiring a robotic bronchoscopy platform. If a suspicious lung nodule or abnormality is found on the screening CT, a patient may require sampling of the nodule. These lung nodules can be small and difficult to diagnose with current conventional sampling methods.

Another improvement made at the medical center happened Oct. 16 when the medical center received a medical mobile unit, which will be used to support at-risk homeless Veterans. The deployed MMU will provide health care to homeless Veterans, which includes mental health clinicians, social workers, and other staff.

While JBVAMC celebrated many significant events and recognized staff who went above and beyond while treating patients, the medical center will continue to provide quality and comparable health care for Veterans.



Jesse Brown’s Executive Leadership Team took time to honor inpatient Vietnam Veterans receiving treatment at the medical facility.

# Enhancing support for student Veterans: The impact of VITAL program at Jesse Brown VA

Christina Chiu - Health System Specialist

The Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program, a nationwide initiative falling under the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, plays a crucial role in supporting student Veterans. With approximately 33 VITAL programs across 171 medical centers, the one at Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center stands out for its commitment to providing comprehensive assistance.

Originally established in 2015, the Jesse Brown VITAL program took a significant leap forward in 2020 by expanding its team to include not only a psychologist but also two social workers and a peer specialist. This multidisciplinary approach ensured a holistic support system for student Veterans.

A distinctive feature of Jesse Brown's VITAL program is its exclusive VITAL peer specialist, making it a trailblazer in the national VITAL network. The team focuses on collaborating with colleges and universities in the Chicagoland area, aiming to enhance access to VA services for student Veterans.

Dr. Donna Crossman, a JBVAMC Licensed Clinical Psychologist and the

Program Coordinator for the VITAL program, highlighted partnerships with various educational institutions, including DePaul University, University of Chicago, National Louis University, and oth-



(Left) Jorge Grango and (Right) Dr. Donna Crossman attend the City College of Chicago Open House at Malcolm X College in July.

*Photo by Angela St. Paul*

ers. The team's commitment extended beyond medical services at JBVAMC, as they also connected student Veterans with on-campus resources such as accessibility services, counseling, and additional support.

A noteworthy collaboration occurred in November 2023, when the Jesse Brown VITAL team joined forces with Jesse Brown's Human Resources and Roosevelt

University to host a Student Veteran Job Fair. Crossman emphasized the goal of bridging the gap between student Veterans and employment opportunities within VA.

The event saw participation from JBVAMC, Iron Mountain, and Hines VAMC HR, which provided valuable insights into employment-related queries and explained Veteran hiring Preferences. Hiring managers from various departments, including Nursing, Mental Health, Pharmacy, Environmental Management Service, and Health Administration Services offered a glimpse into potential career paths for

aspiring Veterans.

Beyond employment opportunities, the fair also showcased an array of VA resources through groups like Caregiver Support, Women's Health, Intimate

Partner Violence, Compact Act, Veteran Readiness and Employment, and the Veteran's Center. This comprehensive approach ensured student Veterans not only find employment opportunities, but also access the support and resources necessary for their overall well-being.

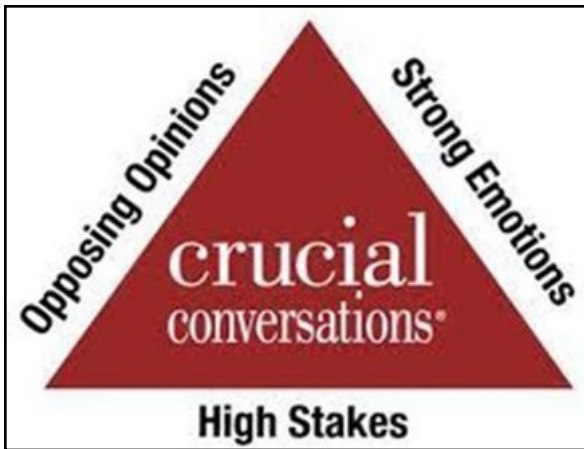
Crossman pointed out that the VITAL program primarily focused on external referrals and support for individuals outside

the VA system. For internal referrals, a direct link to the Veteran Health Administration Vocational Rehabilitation Team is available through email to Tara White, the VHA/VR Program Manager at [Tara.White2@va.gov](mailto:Tara.White2@va.gov). The VITAL program at Jesse Brown VAMC stands as a beacon of support, seamlessly integrating with academic institutions to empower student Veterans with the resources and opportunities they need for a successful transition into civilian life.



# JBVAMC Education Department Offering Opportunities for Employees

Cynthia Robertson – Administrative Officer



## Crucial Conversations:

The Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Education Department is offering various opportunities for JBVAMC employees in January. Crucial Conversations teaches nine powerful skill sets that will enable individuals to step into disagreement – rather than over or around it — and turn disagreement into dialogue for improved relationships and results.

For more information, email Rome Frazier at [rome.frazier@va.gov](mailto:rome.frazier@va.gov).



## Unconscious Bias Workshops:

This interactive training seeks to raise awareness of the mental shortcuts that lead to snap judgments – often based on race and gender – about other people's talent and

character. The Unconscious Bias workshop's goal is to reduce the bias in attitudes and behaviors at work. Register for the seven-hour training session in the Talent Management System at #4626737. For more information, email Rome Frazier at [rome.frazier@va.gov](mailto:rome.frazier@va.gov).

## Beginner Excel Course – (VA – 4648587) – Sign up now in TMS - Uros Cemerikic

The purpose of the Beginner Excel course is to empower participants with fundamental skills in using Microsoft Excel effectively. The program is designed to provide beginners with a solid foundation in spreadsheet management, data entry, basic calculations, and visualization. By the end of the course participants will be equipped with the confidence and practical know-how to navigate Excel's interface, organize data, perform calculations, and format worksheets. The program's aim is to enable individuals, regardless of their experience, to harness the power of Excel for everyday tasks such as managing budgets, creating basic reports, and presenting information visually. Participants will be able to apply their knowledge to effectively manage data by sorting, filtering, and using functions to perform calculations within Excel worksheets.

**Disc Training (TMS VA 4637644) – Sign up now in TMS – Antwaun Paige (Discover a New**

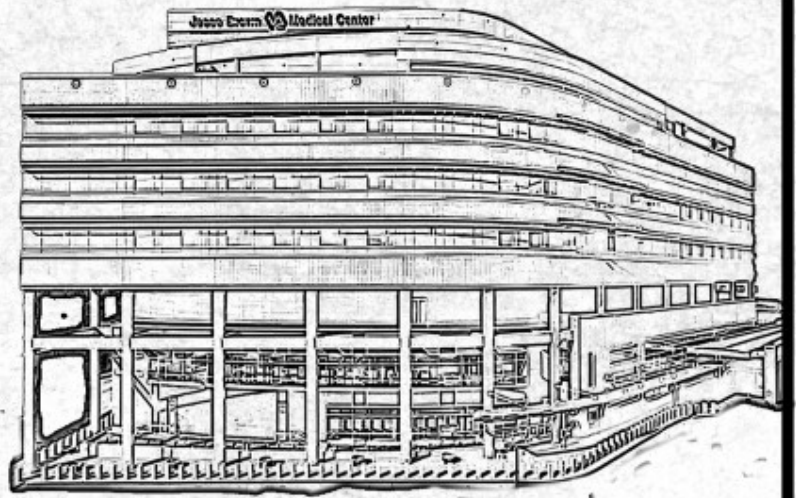
## Way to Engage and Connect with People)

With a DISC Assessment, individuals can uncover their personal strengths and challenges, and learn how to work more effectively with their colleagues. Everything DISC offers a highly adaptive, human-centered solution that results in a more engaged, collaborative workforce that has an immediate and lasting impact on the organization's performance and culture. For more information, please contact Antwaun Paige at (312) 569-5413 or Devan Knox at (312) 569-6501.)

## Resume Writing and Interview Techniques – (VA 4645794) – Sign up now in TMS – Starts Feb. 27 – Cynthia Robertson and Alice Watkins

Resume Writing and Interview Techniques is a three-week lunch and learn series that will show employees how to navigate resume builder through USA Jobs, how to format and design a resume, and go over interview techniques for performance-based interviews. Resume writing can be beneficial in learning how to create a resume that displays a person's value and meets the job requirements. The individuals to grab the attention of employers and recruiters, sell their strongest skills and accomplishments, and most importantly get an individual a job interview. The Interview Techniques helps a person prepare for a PBI (Performance Based Interview) by showing him or her how to project a positive impression and demonstrate that an individual is the best candidate for the job.

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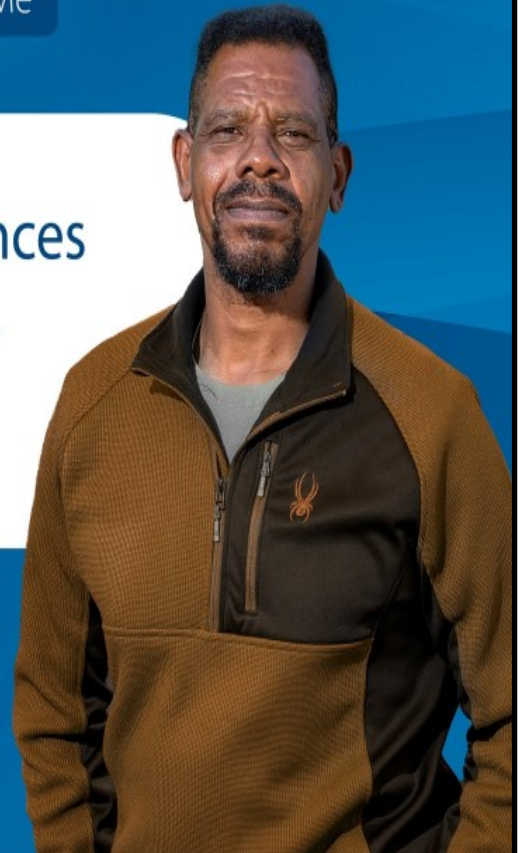
# Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

SCAN  
ME



#SuicidePreventionStartsWithMe

Everyone's situation and experiences  
are different, and you never have  
to face your battles alone.



 **Veterans  
Crisis Line**  
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

# Jesse Brown Celebrates Winter Holiday



(Above photo) Employees participate in the snowflake game during the Winter Holiday celebration in December.

(Left photo) During the Winter Holiday celebration, employees had an opportunity to take photos, have a chance to win a prize in one of the 15 raffles, and enjoy a holiday meal.



American Federation of Government Employees Local 789 represents professionals at Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Box No. 37 on an employee's SF50 indicates his or her union - "1276" means he or she is represented by AFGE. Union tip: If an employee works overtime, he or she has the option of overtime pay or compensatory time. That includes work over lunch breaks that is permitted and known by a supervisor. If an employee has been offered only comp time for overtime work, please contact AFGE at [afge0789@gmail.com](mailto:afge0789@gmail.com) for assistance.

# Gill revives DAISY Foundation program

*Lacretia Henderson – Administrative Officer*

Donnece Gill, an esteemed figure at Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center, has made significant contributions by reviving the Daisy Foundation's program, recognizing outstanding health care professionals bimonthly.

This program, initiated in 2015 but halted during COVID-19, honors individuals with a unique trophy, professional pictures, and the coveted Daisy Pin. Gill's dedication to restarting the Daisy Program and implementing the BEE Awards showcases her commitment to acknowledging the unsung heroes in the health care profession.

With five and a half years of service at Jesse Brown and more than 18 years as a nursing assistant, Gill's expertise shines. Having personally experienced the importance of quality care as she served her Veteran husband, she emphasized the

significance of compassion, love, honor, and exceptional care for Veterans and their families.

The Daisy Foundation, founded by the family of Patrick Barnes, recognizes nurses as unsung heroes deserving of more recognition. Gill aligns with this sentiment, extending the program's success to include nursing assistants, health techs, and medical instrument techs through the BEE Awards. She believes these professionals, working closely with patients, form the backbone of the health care profession by ensuring comfort and



Donnece Gill has made significant contributions by reviving the Daisy Foundation's program.

*Photo by Lacretia Henderson*

support on emotional and spiritual levels.

In essence, Gill's impactful work not only reinstated recognition for exceptional health care professionals at Jesse Brown, but also expanded the scope to include vital roles often overlooked. Her commitment reflects a deep understanding of the crucial role these individuals play in providing holistic care to patients and their families.