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**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
Bay Pines VA Healthcare System

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## **Bay Pines VA Announces Peer Specialist of the Year**

BAY PINES, Fla — Today, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System announced U.S. Army Veteran and current healthcare system employee Anthony Williams was selected as the organization's Peer Specialist of the Year.

"Anthony is a leader who goes above and beyond in every aspect of his role at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center," said Bay Pines VA Chief of Mental Health and Behavioral Science Service Dr. Rod Velezmoro. "His passion for Veterans is unwavering, and our service and the Veterans we support are all better because of him."

Williams serves as part of interdisciplinary teams who work together to support Veterans who may be experiencing mental health and or substance abuse challenges.

"We've found that Veterans in the Therapeutic Residential Recovery Center often connect with and respond to Anthony and our other peer specialists more favorably than providers," added Bay Pines VA Psychologist Dr. Amy Thoreson. "Anthony has been where many of our patients are now, and I believe Veterans look to him and see what's possible through recovery."

Thoreson and Velezmoro nominated Williams for the immediate *and* lasting impact he has made over the past 14 months.

"His advocacy on the part of Veterans is unmatched," continued Thoreson. "A year ago, we did not have any on-site, facilitators who could lead 12-step meetings, but Anthony championed the importance of this initiative, and we now have those facilitators who can come on campus for Veterans to attend regular meetings."

In his role, Williams has also been successful in his support of community resources programs that are essential for Veterans upon discharge from the program.

"Anthony goes the extra mile for Veterans, literally, as he routinely introduced and accompanied Veterans to community-based recovery meetings and activities," added Velezmoro. "Additionally, his collaborations with partners such as Zero Suicide Prevention Partners of Pinellas County, Compensated Work therapy, and veteran service organizations reinforced to those we serve that when it comes to *their* recovery, we are a community of care."

Williams advances to the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8) level where he will compete against winners selected by the Tampa, Orlando, North Florida/South Georgia, West Palm Beach, Miami, and the Caribbean VA Healthcare Systems for an opportunity to compete at the national level later this year.



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**For additional information on this release:** Contact Bay Pines VA Healthcare System's Public Affairs Officer Rob Frazier at [Robert.Frazier1@va.gov](mailto:Robert.Frazier1@va.gov) or 727-317-8120. See the latest news, stories, and Veteran health care information available on our official [website](#) or official [social media accounts](#).

### **About Bay Pines VA Healthcare System**

Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, is one of the nation's largest 1a tertiary healthcare facilities, caring for more than 105,000 Veterans residing across ten counties, in the southwest region of Florida. Our healthcare system includes nine facilities: C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center, located in Bay Pines, Lee County VA Healthcare Center, located in Cape Coral, and seven VA community-based outpatient clinics located in Bradenton, Naples, North Pinellas, Port Charlotte, Sarasota, St. Petersburg, and Sebring, Florida. We employ more than 4,500 health care professionals, are accredited by The Joint Commission and more than 10 additional accreditation and certification organizations. Learn more at: [VA Bay Pines Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#).