

## WHAT IS VFAB?

By Ron Whitcomb

Veterans and Family Advisory Board (VFAB) is a mental health consumer council made up of Veterans and family members that advocate for Veterans issues. Staff members sit in on the council as liaisons (but do not vote on items). Our mission is to lead in building a working alliance between Veterans and VA leadership to ensure the highest quality of service and care to Veterans.

VFAB needs members who want to proactively participate in the mission and the monthly meetings. Together we can enhance communication and representation of all Veterans. We strive towards a well-informed Veteran population and try to be champions in addressing stigma. Come join us and be leaders in building the working relationship between the Veterans and staff at the Providence VAMC.

If you would like to join VFAB or attend a meeting, please contact Jessica Zuehlke, PsyD, at 401-273-7100, ext. 2629 or email Ron Whitcomb, president of VFAB, at:

tawodi11@aol.com.

# VETERANS WATCH

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A Newsletter Written FOR Veterans BY Veterans

## TRIUMPHANT T-SHIRTS

By Ron Whitcomb

In honor of Sexual Assault Awareness month in April, the Providence VAMC hosted Triumphant T-Shirts, a Clothesline Project. This was a visual display of Veteran-decorated T-shirts to raise awareness about Military Sexual Trauma (MST), sexual assault, and sexual harassment that occurred while a Veteran was in the military. Males and females who experienced MST were asked to "break the silence" by designing and painting T-shirts that reflected their experiences of MST or other sexual trauma. Completed shirts were hung side-by-side in Classroom 3 to bear witness to the impact sexual violence has had on the victims' lives. This project allowed survi-

vors to share their stories about the impact of sexual trauma on their lives.

I had heard about the project and knew I had to go. What I didn't realize is how little I knew



Triumphant T-Shirt Displays

about MST and what the survivors went through, live with, and

deal with in their daily lives. There was no way to prepare for the power of seeing the T-shirts. I had no idea what I was about to be exposed to, and I offer my gratitude and appreciation to those involved. As a witness to this project, I am thankful for what was shared. I was overwhelmed by their courage. I was not three shirts into the display when my tears started to flow. Not long after, I had a wad of tissue in one hand while hugging the shirts with the other: the only way I had to bring some comfort and to alleviate some of the artists' pain. Each T-shirt hit me one after

the other. I stayed and sat with

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## PRRC BBQ/OPEN HOUSE

By Jessica Zuehlke

The Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) is a recovery-orientated, specialized mental health day program that offers daily psycho-educational groups, wellness programming, community outings, and peer support services. The goal of the program is to empower Veterans with serious mental illness (SMI) to develop their own wellness goals and to encourage them towards mean-

ingful community involvement. Participation in the program begins with an orientation to the PRRC and a PRRC Assessment followed by the develop-

ment of an individualized Recovery Plan.

On Wed July 20, the PRRC hosted an Open House and BBQ to welcome Veterans and Medical Center staff to visit the program grounds. Hamburgers, hot dogs, and watermelon were offered free-of-charge to Veterans; small donations from staff were graciously accepted. Attendees got the opportunity to tour the Horticulture Therapy program's new greenhouse and picnic area as well as the program group



Gardens managed by Veterans in the Horticulture Therapy Program at the PRRC.

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## POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Serenity is not freedom from the storm but peace within the storm.

Never look down on anybody unless you are helping them up.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

You can only go halfway into the darkest forest; then you are coming out the other side.

Never try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig.

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

## VET TECH

By Kathleen Meunier

Are you interested in learning computer skills or buying a computer for \$100? If so, visit Vet Tech in Providence! Vet Tech offers basic and more advanced computer classes to Veterans. After Veterans complete all classes Vet Tech has to offer, they can train to learn how to fix computers. The skills learned from all classes may help Veterans pursue new career goals.

Vet Tech also sells refurbished computers. Amazingly, you can purchase a rebuilt desktop computer for \$100 or a laptop for \$125. The will provide you with financing if you need it. Vet Tech is located in Providence (Olneyville) at 679 Broadway. The contact person is Eleojo Ali, who can be reached at (401) 421-1095.

## PRRC OPEN HOUSE (cont.)

room. The group room houses artwork from various painting classes and a new television and Wii entertainment device used for recreation and fitness classes. At the Open House/BBQ, Veterans from the music group sang karaoke and provided music for the afternoon. Jessica Zuehlke, PsyD (Program Manager for the PRRC), spoke about the PRRC and the therapeutic benefits of the program. Peter Gauthier, OT, spoke about the Horticulture Therapy program and thanked the funeral homes

who donate flowers to the group. Veterans Melissa Bassett, Norman Cabral, and Dan Rich spoke about their recovery journeys and the profound impact the horticulture program has had on them. Veteran Thel-manancy Greene talked about her recovery and her success taking multiple classes in the PRRC. Finally, Dan Greene spoke of his accomplishment of becoming a peer facilitator

and leading a class on Native American culture.



Mr. Burney addresses Veterans and staff who attended the PRRC BBQ.

The Open House/BBQ was a huge success, and we thank everyone who attended.

## OPERATION VET TO VET

By Ron Whitcomb

Don Sullivan and I are pleased to announce that we are now working with Rick Bralee who graduated from the Peer to Peer training facilitation class and has become the third man in our Operation Vet to Vet . Rick is

a combat Marine from the Vietnam War, and his coming on board is a great addition to our mission.

We have changed our groups to Thursday only, 9 to 10:30 a.m. in the Chapel Conference Room and 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Trailer 33.

Any additional groups would be added on Thursday, but there are no plans to do so at this time. Any information about what we do and who we are can be obtained by emailing me at:

ronvet2vet@aol.com.

## TRIUMPHANT T-SHIRTS (cont.)

the shirts and looked at them a second time and a third. One of the shirts that was very moving to me was a camouflage shirt with the words: "Maybe I was dressed too sexy?" written in glitter. This shirt just about dropped me to my knees. All in all, it was truly one of the most amazing displays of any kind I have ever seen.

There were about 54 shirts: just a small part of the 744 Veterans who have experienced MST and who have reached out to and connected with the Providence VAMC and the CBOCs.

To the Veterans who par-



Display of Triumphant T-shirts

icipated, a sincere thank you from my soul for all you taught me that day, for all I felt while viewing the clothesline project, and for all I will carry with me about this issue.

I would also like to thank the staff who had so much to

do with this. The project was headed by Judith Berger, LICSW, MST coordinator, Denise Fragoza, LICSW, who worked at getting the t-shirts painted, and Beth Grady, LICSW, who is the manager of the Women Veterans Program at PVAMC.

## MEET THE STAFF!

# Veterans Helping Veterans

## Spotlight on: LENNY BOURGEOIS

By Bob Goudreau

Mr. Leonard A. Bourgeois is responsible for telecommunication systems at the Providence VA Medical Center, 3 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and 3 remote Vet Centers. His duties include planning, integrating, organizing, and overseeing all telecommunication projects and contracts.

On a daily basis, he maintains our local, long distance, high capacity analog, and digital circuits. Some of these circuits control the voice mail, auto-attendant, and broadband systems for the computers. Lenny's department also handles cell phones, pagers, two-way radios, and other wireless devices; and plays a key role during emergencies. Lenny came to the Medical Center in 2007 with a long resume of telecommunications expertise.

Lenny started his military and telecommunications careers by enlisting in the U.S.

Army in March 1972, taking his basic training at Ft. Dix,



Lenny Bourgeois

New Jersey. For Advanced Individual Training, he went to Ft. Gordon, Georgia., receiving instruction as a telephone lineman. Upon graduation, he transferred to Mannheim, German—home of the 97<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion serving Multi-National forces. At the end of his enlistment in 1975, he returned to Rhode Island. The following year, he joined the Army Reserves, retiring in 1992 as a sergeant first class/E

-7. During his time in service, Lenny was awarded 3 Army Achievement medals, a Good Conduct medal, a Drill Sergeant ID Badge, an Army Reserves Achievement Medal, an Overseas Ribbon, and an M-16 Expert Marksman Badge.

Lenny continued his civilian education by using his G.I. Bill to attend the University of Massachusetts at North Dartmouth, where he achieved a Bachelors of Science degree in Business Management. He furthered his education at UMASS in the Physics Advance Studies Program.

In 2000, he attended Roger Williams University's extension program in Fall River, Massachusetts, where he was certified as an A+/Desktop Technician.

We thank Lenny for his service.

## VETERANS WATCH IS ONLINE!

By Ron Whitcomb

The Veterans Watch is now available on-line. Find the latest editions at [www.providence.va.gov/Newsletters.asp](http://www.providence.va.gov/Newsletters.asp).

Issues come out quarterly in January, April, July, and October. Watch for our next issue due out the middle of April 2011. Thanks to all our readers and the positive response



# PLANTING AT WARREN MANOR

By Jeff Sullivan

My name is Jeff Sullivan, and I live at Warren Manor where sixteen other guys live- eight of whom are also Veterans. Last year, I planted a few varieties of tall sunflowers, many of which sprouted multiple flowers. At one point, there were over 100 flowers following the sun in the garden behind the building.

Although I had no plans for planting this

year, soon I found myself planting for others. Members from the Providence VAMC PRRC made a couple of trips to Warren Manor, and I found myself planting corn, carrots, sunflowers, and more. Another Veteran resident had some wildflower seeds he asked me to plant.

I enjoyed all the work, especially for the biggest project. Barbara, the administrator at Warren Manor, had me planting shrubs and perennials,

which included St. John's Wort and even a china-boy holly. Now all we need is a china-girl holly to get things going.

It seems the garden inspires activity. While watering, I notice a passer-by may comment, or residents sitting nearby will talk. Maybe they're wondering about the St. John's Wort or how the red cedar mulch improves things. Everyone, it seems, participates in their own way.



Jeff Sullivan and the vegetable garden he helped make at Warren Manor.

# DID YOU KNOW?

By Ron Whitcomb

- On Father's Day, there are more collect calls than any other day of the year.
- Every day, more money is printed for Monopoly than the US Treasury.
- Coca-Cola was originally green.
- The cost of raising a medium-size dog to the age of eleven is \$16,400.
- The average number of people airborne over the U.S. in any given hour is 61,000.
- Intelligent people have more zinc and copper in their hair.
- If a statue in the park of a person on a horse has both front legs in the air, the person died in battle. If the horse has one front leg in the air, the person died because of wounds received in battle. If the horse has all four legs on the ground, the person died of natural causes.
- Men can read smaller print than women can; women can hear better.
- In older times, mattresses were secured on bed frames by ropes. When you pulled on the ropes, the mattress tightened, making the bed firmer and giving us the phrase: "goodnight, sleep tight."
- If you were to spell out numbers you would have to go to the number one thousand to find the letter A.

## MEET THE STAFF!

# Veterans Helping Veterans

Spotlight on:  
**RICHARD CABRAL**

By Bob Goodreau

Richard Cabral is a Software Engineer/Program Analyst working in Primary Care. Richard commenced his employment with the Providence VA Medical Center in November 2001. It is his function to investigate and answer all technical problems from staff related to computer applications in Primary Care. He trains staff on software operations and other computer-related functions. In addition, he creates Clinical Reminder Reports to evaluate the quality of medical care and analyzes team outcome/productivity



Richard Cabral

data.

Mr. Cabral enlisted in the US Air Force in 1966, taking his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Moving on to Lowery Air

Force Base in Denver, Colorado, he attended Missile Guidance & Control Specialist School for the next 8 months. His first permanent duty station took him to Itazuke Air Force Base, Japan for two years, and he finished his

enlistment at McDill Air Force Base in Florida. During his time in service he was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, a Good Conduct Medal, an Overseas Ribbon, and the distinction of being Service Man of the Month.

Richard has a well-rounded educational background in Computer Science, beginning with an Associate Degree in Applied Science from CCRI. He studied at the New England Institute of Technology for an Associate Degree in Computer Programming Technology and went on to Roger Williams University, earning a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering Technology.

We thank Richard for his service and his support for Veterans throughout the VA healthcare system.

## VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH COUNCIL CONFERENCE

By Ron Whitcomb

In June 2011, I had the privilege of attending a Veterans Health Administration conference in New Orleans with 41 other Veterans from all points in the United States (the VA Veterans Mental Health Council Conference).

The VHA is transforming its mental health services to improve access to evidence-based and recovery-oriented care. The VA says Veteran-input into VA mental health programs and operations is a necessary and vital component to recovery transformation. That is why we have our VFAB) Council—to address

the unique challenges we face today. The purpose of this conference was to provide information on creating new, and improving existing, councils.

Over the course of two days, we learned how to establish a dynamic and effective council, to demonstrate an awareness of strategies, to develop a positive partnership between VA staff and Veterans, and to create a strategy to recruit, train, and retain council members. We also learned to identify empowerment techniques/skills that liaisons may use to improve their councils and to recognize the value of tech-

nology and social media resources within councils. We had many invited guest speakers—some even coming from VA Central Office.

The conference was a great opportunity to hear about the successes of other councils across the country. After talking to many other Veterans and council members, I believe that the Providence VAMC is clearly ahead in many ways. The staff is more than accommodating to VFAB and is always a willing partner in our endeavors. Our paper, *Veterans Watch*, was a big hit with everyone who attended!