

# LIVING Better

A Butler VA Quarterly Magazine

summer 2020



## what's inside?

heroes work here

6

butler va receives  
national recognition for  
patient experience

8

happy birthday veterans!

12

vet chat

14

health tech, tips & tastes



# BUTLER VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM'S SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS



**1** A special thank you to Veteran Ben Knight for volunteering his time to provide a yoga class via Facebook Live for the Butler VA. If you missed it, you can watch Ben's video and others at [www.facebook.com/VAButlerPA/videos/](https://www.facebook.com/VAButlerPA/videos/).

**4** The Butler VA began expanding some in-person services mid-June, following all the COVID-19 shutdowns. A few of the safety measures added include required screening for everyone entering the facility (temperature check and questions), and masks or approved face coverings.

**7** Sean Spielvogel, pro sales specialist (pictured here with Andrew Gryskewicz, voluntary services specialist), delivered a donation of 2000 N95 masks to the Butler VA Health Care System this summer. Thank you Lowes!

**2** Thank you to Girl Scout Luci Hurne, her father, Christopher Woods, and the Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania for donating 600 boxes of Girl Scout cookies to the Butler VA. Andrew Gryskewicz, voluntary services specialist, and Bradley Meredith, RN, Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) Manager, accepted the donation.

**5** Many in-person events were cancelled or postponed this summer, but the Butler VA hosted a blood drive in June. Thank you to everyone that "rolled up their sleeves" and donated blood to the American Red Cross.

**8** Elvis was in the VA building for the monthly "Music is Medicine" hour this summer...virtually! Missed the performance? Check it out at [www.facebook.com/VAButlerPA/videos/](https://www.facebook.com/VAButlerPA/videos/).

**3** The Butler VA took part in the nationwide celebration of LGBT Pride Month to honor VA's commitment to serve all who served. The Butler's VA LGBT Veteran Care coordinator, Krystal Anspach, provided information in-person and virtually throughout the month.

**6** The Butler VA's Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program hosted a summer farmers market, with another planned for September. Brenckle's Farms and Greenhouses provided locally grown, farm fresh produce.

**9** The Butler VA's Women Veterans Program Manager, Summer Drummond, presented a Facebook Live Event on women's health this summer.



## cover photo

Christina Eid, a sophomore at North Catholic High School, came up with the idea to utilize her school's 3D printers to make face shields, and then donated some to the Butler VA!



*Dear Veterans, family members, employees, volunteers and friends of the Butler VA,*

*I hope everyone has been enjoying their summer as best as possible given the current situation. I'd like to remind everyone that the Butler VA is open, and we are here to serve you. You are our priority, as is your safety. I'd also like to give a shout-out to all the staff at the Butler VA who are here working hard to serve you and keep you safe.*

*Great job team!*

*I know we're not "back to normal" right now, and times are still incredibly stressful, frustrating, and hard for most. But, the Butler VA is here for you. Here to provide you with the exceptional care you have earned...even in a pandemic!*

*Stay safe and healthy,*

Kevin Amick, Director

# C O N T E N T S

Summer 2020



pages 4-5

## Heroes Work Here

Butler VA staff have been doing their part to help Veteran and civilian patients fighting novel coronavirus by serving on the frontlines of care in several hard-hit sites. Read about their experiences.



pages 6-7

## Butler VA Receives National Recognition for Patient Experience

The Butler VA was among eight finalists across the country to exemplify exceptional Patient Experience and Employee Experience...recently winning for Overall Patient Experience!



pages 8-9

## Happy Birthday Veterans!

The Butler VA has celebrated our veterans' birthdays throughout the years in special ways. New for this summer – calling all our Veterans on their birthdays!



pages 14-15

## Health Tech, Tips & Tastes

What's new and interesting in VA's health technology? Find out! Also, enjoy a health tip and tasty recipe.

## and more...

Summer Highlights

page **2**

Hot Topics

page **10**

Vet Chat

page **12**

Stigma Free  
Health Quiz

page **13**

Who's Who –  
Kelly Lyle

page **13**



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# Heroes Work Here

## Butler VA Staff Support VA's Fourth Mission



**4 Butler VA staff** have been doing their part to help Veteran and civilian patients fighting novel coronavirus by serving on the frontlines of care in several hard-hit areas. To date, 56 Butler VA staff members have stepped up to deploy through VA's Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) in areas throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Arizona.

Their efforts are part of VA's national initiative to exercise its Fourth Mission of aiding local communities and health care facilities when called upon in times of a national emergency. Where VA has the capacity and the resources, it will provide beds at VA medical centers and staff for community hospitals and nursing homes. VA's decisions in supporting community health care are made after determining the actions would not negatively impact Veteran care.

Following are some of the stories of those who deployed, and have since returned to the Butler VA.

### **Sheila Whitesides, LPN at the Domiciliary**

There was an e-mail asking for volunteers interested in deployment to assist with the COVID-19 pandemic. Not knowing what to expect, I responded "Interested" thinking that I would just be put on a list to receive information. The next thing that happened was I received a notice stating, "you are to report to Menlo Park, New Jersey." At this point, I was anxious and excited

all at the same time. My goals were always to be the best nurse/caregiver I could be, relieve the staff who were tired and overwhelmed, assist members of the National Guard that were deployed, and to make a positive impact on as many lives as I could. I am very thankful for the experience and would do it all over again. I came out of all of this with great respect for all of the front line staff. I became a family with the people that were deployed along side me, and know in my heart I did all that I could to assist in a time of need.

### **Sarah Pfabe, Kitchen Supervisor**

It was as always, a very rewarding opportunity for me. I went to the Lyons VA Medical Center in Lyons, New Jersey. I was deployed there for two weeks as a supervisor. Their CLC was across campus from their kitchen, so we would have to drive there every mealtime. Everyone was pleasant, and there was a lot of COVID there. We were to push the sterilized cart onto the floor to the nurses' station. That was on a floor that was completely COVID, and then another wing half would be COVID, but the other half was not. I worked 8-hour shifts, and 12-hour shifts, and had one day off each week. But when you are busy, your adrenaline keeps you going. It is just so rewarding to be able to help out in a time of need. Before I left, I was asked if I would like a job there. Of course, I am here in Butler!



### **Sonya Hauck, RN, Case Manager at the Mercer County VA Clinic**

I feel my deployment to the Menlo Park State Veteran's Home in New Jersey will forever be an experience I will remember and cherish. I formed many positive relationships with the staff members I worked alongside. I shared my knowledge and skills with them, and created many cherished memories with the residents. Several of the residents shed tears when I left. It was such an honor to be able to care for the residents during their time of such loss, uncertainty and change. I am forever grateful to my fellow co-workers from the Butler VA, and to my new friends from other VA's. Working together made the tough times bearable, and the good times even more rewarding. A special shout out to my co-worker, Jessica Moore, who took this journey with me. I am very grateful I had her by my side for the four weeks we were deployed.

### **Karen Dunn, MSN, RN, Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Program Manager**

When I first saw the email looking for volunteers to help take care of Veterans in areas hard hit with COVID, I didn't really even think about it twice. I am a nurse, so of course I should help. My entire life I have been either helping others or taking care of patients/Veterans. It is who I am. I love taking care of Veterans. I consider it an honor and privilege. Going to New Jersey was one of the most rewarding and heartbreaking things I have ever done—and I would do it all over again. I am so proud of the VA employees that were deployed. I know we made a difference in the lives of the Veterans in New Jersey. I will continue to pray for the Veterans daily.

### **Jessica Moore, LPN at the Mercer County VA Clinic**

There were so many unknowns on my drive to Edison, New Jersey. What would this horrible virus be like once I came face to face with it? What was the facility like that I would be

spending 12 hours a day in? I was quickly relieved, once I got to the hotel and saw so many familiar faces I had worked alongside throughout my time at the VA. The team that leadership had sent to Menlo Park was top notch, not only from our home VA, but from throughout the VISN. Because of this, I chose to extend my tour. The staff from the Veterans' home were very grateful for our help since many themselves were sick, or had sick family members at home. The Veterans that we cared for were very grateful to have us "badass

government nurses" come care for them in their time of need. They and their loved ones were extremely grateful that assistance had arrived. I quickly decided that alongside my general nursing duties, I had a duty to uplift these Veterans. I tried to get as many smiles as I could in that 12-hour day. By the time the first week was over, I had accomplished this every day for the remainder of my deployment. Many of my fellow VA employees felt the same way. Because of this, I feel we definitely made an impact at Menlo Park. I learned a lot over those 30 days. Teamwork and a positive attitude can beat any nasty virus any day. I am grateful for the new friendships I found while in Edison. I look forward to working with any of those "badass government nurses" again through DEMPS.

### **Megan Tritt, Justin Cooper, and Thomas Sousa, Butler VA Social Workers**

It was an honor to serve at Paramus

Veterans Memorial Home. This is more than a job, it's a calling. As social workers, we were committed to do everything in our ability to help ease the suffering that our Veterans, their families, and the staff were facing in New Jersey. In the face of trauma and uncertainty, sometimes all we need to do is show up, encourage resilience, and lend a helping hand in a meaningful way. Cultivating a connection with empathetic and understanding people reminds you that you are not alone in the midst of this traumatic event. It was an honor and a privilege to serve those who have served, their families, and the staff at Paramus Veterans Memorial Home.



# Butler VA Receives National Recognition for Patient Experience



**The Butler VA** was among eight finalists across the country who exemplified exceptional Patient Experience and Employee Experience scores in patient satisfaction, trust, and VA's All Employee Survey (AES) Best Places To Work. Programs such as the Veterans Input Pool and the New Veteran Orientation Tour were just two of the programs that contributed to the overall patient and employee experience.

- **Veterans Input Pool:** The Veterans Input Pool (VIP) Committee has existed since 2015 and partners with this pool of identified Veterans who have volunteered to participate, with ongoing feedback to VA projects and policies. This feedback is used to better understand the needs and sensitivities of the Veteran when making decisions on improvements to processes and customer services within Butler VA. These Veterans are our eyes and ears. They ensure that we don't lose touch with our most vital resource.
- **New Veteran Orientation Tour:** The New Veteran Orientation Tour (NVOT) was designed in direct response to what Veterans were asking for from their local VA. Each Veteran is offered a personalized NVOT experience. Family members and caregivers are included in the process, and can receive a NVOT with or without the Veteran present. Those that participate in the tour are first asked what matters to them so that the tour guides can make sure to address those areas. The NVOT Includes a tour of the facility, an overview of services offered, a welcome bag with a packet that contains fact sheets on services such as MISSION Act, VBA, and other trending items to date.



[www.va.gov/ve/](http://www.va.gov/ve/)



### Veteran Feedback from the NVOT

“Tell the people in charge to never stop improving because the people I met today never stopped improving my first impression.”

“It has been an amazing first impression.”

“Keep doing what you are doing.”

“I don’t know anywhere else that you would get this treatment.”

“It put a smile on my face when everyone I came in contact with greeted me and said ‘hi’ instead of looking at their phone.”

“If the Butler VA is anything like this tour, then I made the right choice.”

“The tour was very helpful. Summer was very pleasant and explained all services very well.”

“Every employee, from the front desk when I walked in, to every office we stopped in, was great. Tara was the perfect tour guide. Couldn’t ask for a better person.”

### Additionally, the Butler VA implemented many other VA Patient Experience initiatives, some of which include:

- “I Choose VA Employee” badges
- The Standard Phone Greeting
- The “10-4” Initiative
- Red Coat Ambassadors and Master Ambassadors

“As the new director for the Butler VA Health Care System, I am blessed to work with such an awesome and dedicated team. Each day I am amazed at what they accomplish,” said Kevin Amick, director. “We really are a family here, partners in the delivery of health care for our Veterans. I am so pleased that staff were recognized for their dedication, advocacy, and customer service to our Veterans. Thank you team Butler!”

The award was announced during a national virtual VA Patient Experience Awards event, which replaced this year’s VA Patient Experience Symposium. It was attended by more than 400 VA health care leaders in 2019 for the sole purpose of sharing best practices and improving customer experience at VA health care facilities across the nation.

Learning from best practices in both VA and private sector, VA has created and implemented several VA patient experience tools to ensure every employee is trained and focused on providing Veterans not only with the care they need, but also with care that is delivered in an exceptional and consistent manner.

Trust in VA health care has increased 5%, and trust in all of VA benefits and services has increased 19% since 2017. Butler VA enjoys a current trust score of 94.7%.

While the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to address the critical care needs of Veterans and their families during the pandemic – VA employees are constantly innovating to provide the best possible patient experience.

For more information on VA Patient Experience or the VA Veterans Experience Office, visit: <https://www.va.gov/ve/>.



# Happy Birthday Veterans!



**From our Veteran** residents in the Sergeant Joseph George Kusick Community Living Center to many 100th birthday milestones, the Butler VA has celebrated our Veterans' birthdays throughout the years in special ways. New for this summer – calling all our Veterans on their birthdays!

“The Butler VA partnered with several devoted volunteers to make birthday calls to our Veterans. The project started on June 1, 2020,” said Louella McKee, the Butler VA’s Veteran Experience Officer. “Volunteers call the Veterans to ensure they know that Butler VA is here for them during these uncertain times, and to ensure they have no immediate needs.”

The Butler VA adopted this best practice after learning about its success at other VA facilities. In June, when the project first began, volunteers called 1,173 Veterans. In July, 1,049 Veterans. In August, 1,309 Veterans.

“We really just want our Veterans to know that we care, we are here for them, and despite these challenging times, we are still working hard **for them**,” added McKee.

The Butler VA has six volunteers who make birthday calls - Donna Craft, Deborah Souzer, Rhonda Hockenberry, Barb Rearic, Betty Baldo, and Teirrah Hayes.

“I have discovered that I underestimated a small act of kindness calling these Veterans and wishing them a happy birthday. Many times, over the past several months, I was told that it was the only recognition they received, and they were so appreciative and grateful. Warms the heart when you brighten someone’s day!” shared Hockenberry.

Birthday call volunteer Barb Rearic added: “I’ve had lots of great responses from my calls. Most people are surprised. Get lots of laughs! They think this is a great idea. For most people, it’s the first time the VA ever called them with a birthday wish. Some just enjoy the birthday wishes and others like to stay on the line and talk. That’s always fun. I’ve met some of the nicest Vets doing these calls. My day is always blessed by these wonderful men and women.”

And, the volunteers have shared just some of great feedback they receive from Veterans and their family members during and after the calls:

- *Bless your heart. You don't know how much this call means to me. I really appreciate this. Was not expecting a call; thank you, it was special.*
- *Thank you, very nice thing you do. The VA is great, I have always been very satisfied.*
- *Isn't that a surprise! Thank you very much.*
- *Thank you, that was very nice of you. We think the VA is wonderful.*

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the normal activities of Butler VA’s volunteers were paused in early spring to protect patients, health care providers, and volunteers. As the Butler VA safely expands some services, we’re also looking for additional ways to welcome our volunteers back, even if virtually for now – like through the birthday calls!

For more information about volunteering or making a donation to the Butler VA, please contact Andy Pepe, Voluntary Services Coordinator, at 878-271-6960.





## New COVID Tools at Butler to Keep Veterans Safe

### COVID-19 Entry Screening Tool

COVID-19 screening is required at all Butler VA facilities. To get started quickly, Veterans and staff may use the COVID-19 screening tool on their phone. The digital pre-entry screener tool helps reduce wait times, ease stress, and lowers exposure risk.

Scan this code or go to  
[va.gov/covid19screen](https://va.gov/covid19screen)



To get started:

- **Scan** the code or go to [va.gov/covid19screen](https://va.gov/covid19screen)
- **Answer** the questions
- **Show your phone** at the door

*Message rates may apply depending on plan and utilization.*

### VEText Patient Tracking Program

The Butler VA is now using the VEText Patient Tracking program that allows Veterans to notify their team when they are here for a scheduled appointment and that they are waiting from the safety of their vehicle to enter the facility.

**How does it work?** Veterans who have a cellphone (that is on file in their electronic health record) can send a text message to 53079 stating “here” once they have arrived in the parking lot of the Abie Abraham VA Health Care Center (HCC) where they have a scheduled appointment. The text notifies the care team that the Veteran is at the facility waiting to come into the building. VEText auto-responds with a message acknowledging the text message and sends a text response back instructing the Veteran to await further instructions.

It is recommended that Veterans speak with their primary care team prior to using the VEText Patient Tracking program. Veterans that experience problems with VEText or who have additional questions, may call (878)-271-6360 to speak with a scheduler.

*Message rates may apply depending on plan and utilization. At this time, the service is only available for scheduled appointments at the HCC.*

## VA Publishes Final Regulation for its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

### The U.S. Department

of Veterans Affairs (VA) has published its final regulation to improve and expand the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) with the final regulation going into effect on October 1. Under the final regulation, PCAFC will include eligible Veterans that have a single or combined service-connected disability rating by VA of 70% or higher, regardless of whether it resulted from an injury, illness or disease.

This is a notable change to the definition of serious injury from the current regulations, among other improvements aimed at standardizing the PCAFC and improving transparency in the program.

For more information, please see our four new Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at this web link: <https://www.caregiver.va.gov>. More information will be forthcoming.



## Vaccination is *Still* the Best Flu Prevention

**During the month** of August, the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention monthly topic is *Get Recommended Immunizations: "Preventing the Flu Begins with You!"* – with the goal to highlight the importance of getting a flu shot.

Due to the challenges of COVID-19, it is more important than ever for our Veterans and employees to get a flu shot in the coming months. The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated every year. Get your flu shot to protect yourself and help keep the flu from spreading to others.

**All Veterans are eligible to receive a free flu shot from the Butler VA Health Care System.**

Flu shots provided at the Abie Abraham VA Clinic (located at 353 N. Duffy Rd. Butler, PA. 16001) will be administered in the parking lot at a designated "drive-thru" point. Flu shots provided at the Armstrong, Clarion, Cranberry Township, Lawrence, and Mercer County VA Clinic locations will be administered inside the clinics. As a reminder, please wear a mask and observe proper physical distancing. Please also have your cell phone on you for check-in purposes.

The Butler VA's 2020 Flu Shot Schedule is available on the Butler VA web calendar, Butler VA Facebook page, and at this link: [www.butler.va.gov/pdf/2020FluShotSchedule\\_ButlerVA.pdf](http://www.butler.va.gov/pdf/2020FluShotSchedule_ButlerVA.pdf)

## Suicide Prevention – VA Partners with OnStar

**In August, VA** announced it is partnering with OnStar's emergency services to improve access to suicide prevention resources for Veterans. This partnership will offer Veterans in crisis the opportunity to be transferred to around-the-clock, confidential support via VA's Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) when they use the emergency services button in an OnStar-equipped vehicle or OnStar Guardian smartphone app.

An average of 20 Veterans die by suicide each day. Through this partnership, VA and OnStar, a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors, will collaborate to provide education and training to VA clinicians and OnStar call center staff to facilitate suicide prevention efforts for Veterans. Additionally, VA will provide resources and education to OnStar about military culture and how to determine if a caller is a Veteran.

Whether you're a Veteran yourself or a Veteran's spouse, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, friend, or caregiver, the Veterans Crisis Line is here for you. If you are concerned about the safety and well-being of a Veteran, call toll-free 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at [www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat), or send a text message to 838255 to receive free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The Crisis Line is free, even if you or your loved one are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care.



### New Rx App

**With the upcoming** flu season, and the current COVID-19 pandemic, VA's Pharmacy makes it simple for Veterans to stay home and stay safe while receiving their needed medications on time.

In addition to refilling prescriptions online with My HealtheVet, over the phone, or by mail, Veterans can now use the Rx App! The Rx App allows you to request refills of your refillable VA-issued prescriptions, track VA

prescription deliveries, and view VA prescription history from the convenience of your mobile device. Learn more and download today: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill>

The Butler VA processes thousands of prescriptions daily for enrolled Veterans! VA wants you to know we're working hard to make sure you get your prescriptions on time, and when you need them. Learn more: [www.butler.va.gov/services/Pharmacy.asp](http://www.butler.va.gov/services/Pharmacy.asp)

<https://mobile.va.gov/>

SHARING  
STORIES  
AND NEWS  
FROM  
VETERANS  
TO  
VETERANS

## My Extra Time

*Submitted by Doug Dobransky, Vietnam Veteran*

A gift handed to me was that long ago walk we took... our boots so close to that perilous edge. The look down was endless with no bottom and our soles knocked off some of the rocks, which sadly took that long black drop for us, so far from home. I have loved those young black and brown and white faces, flashing in the sun, seeing home in their eyes, and hoping.

The why I came back is no longer a question for me, but what I did with my extra time. That has been my question now. All the turmoil that poked its firm finger in my breastbone has not been near the loss the others never got to feel. All my years and tears were just life letting me live.

We all touched down and went our ways. All directions back into life. Back to what we left, but forevermore changed. We were not who we were and started again. I wonder what happened. The stories of us. Now, today, many are gone. Off that edge and some still remember. The gift handed to me was my long ago walk home and what I have done with my extra time. I hope I did OK. For them.



## Veterans Serving Veterans

During this pandemic, Butler VA employees are volunteering to assist Veterans in other parts of the country more significantly impacted by COVID-19. Many of these volunteer employees are Veterans themselves.

“I chose to deploy during COVID because I believe in helping other people in need, as well as our country. We are all brothers and sisters in arms.”

**Butler VA Kitchen Supervisor and  
U.S. Air Force Veteran Sarah Pfabe**

Hey Veterans! Share your stories with us in Vet Chat. Contact the Butler VA Public Affairs Office today at 878-271-6492.

12  
Vet Chat



# Stigma Free Quick Quiz

**Let's end stigma** and create hope for those affected by mental illness. Through powerful words and actions, we can shift the social and systemic barriers for those living with mental health conditions. Record your answers from the questions and learn about the results to see if you are affected by stigma.

1. I think people with mental illness...
  - a. Need to snap out of it
  - b. Did something wrong to cause it
  - c. Need our love and support
  - d. Are sometimes faking it
2. Which one of the following is not true about stigma?
  - a. It makes people feel alienated or feel "less than"
  - b. It's not really a big problem for people with mental health conditions
  - c. It prevents people from seeking help for symptoms
  - d. It makes people fear judgement if they share their story
3. If someone in your family is diagnosed with a mental illness, you should:
  - a. Treat them differently than you used to
  - b. Distance yourself from them
  - c. Feel sorry for them
  - d. Listen to them and show support

## Resources for Mental Health During a Pandemic

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can take an emotional, as well as a physical toll. There are strategies that can help with the stress, grief, and anxiety that many people are feeling. Visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/resources.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/resources.asp) for more information and resources that may be helpful in coping with the COVID-19 outbreak.

[www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/resources.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/resources.asp)

## Correct Answers:

1) C 2) B 3) D

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

## Who's Who?

**KELLY LYLE, RN**  
Call Center Nurse



## VISN 4 Centralized RN Triage Call Center

Kelly Lyle started her career in the VA in 2016 when she was hired as a nurse for the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 4 Call Center. She has worked in many different areas as a nurse, but never thought she would be working in a call center!

"I feel call centers and virtual care is the way of the future. I am excited to be a part of it."

Since October 2016, all VA health care facilities in VISN 4 have been utilizing a centralized nurse triage call center based at the Butler VA. Veterans (or family members) can speak to a registered nurse at any time regarding health care concerns, or to report a symptom they are having. The call center has improved access to timely and even same-day services for Veterans. It is a great resource for Veterans to receive symptom management and medical advice anytime.

During the current pandemic, Lyle was one of many Butler VA staff who volunteered to serve as COVID-screeners. Since the screening process started mid-March, Lyle has volunteered to assist almost every morning and at other times when needed and able.

Living Better Summer 2020

# MORE SUPPLIES AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES DURING COVID-19

**In recent months**, the coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, have touched nearly every industry in the United States. Many government agencies and private businesses have pivoted—that has included changing their production models to help meet the demand for medical supplies triggered by the health crisis.

The Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL) has made that transition, too. HERL, a large VA facility that does research, development, and testing on an assortment of technologies, has been producing nasal testing swabs, face shields, and desk shields, and has worked with the VA NY Harbor Healthcare System in Brooklyn to develop an enclosure-like structure on wheels that can be rolled from one hospital bed to another to protect health care workers caring for patients.

HERL's director, Dr. Rory Cooper, says the center has been investing about 30% of its engineering work hours into developing products that are related to the pandemic. The production of these items has been compatible with the facility's existing equipment.

HERL started making COVID-19 items in early April, and as of mid-June, the technology center had produced about 250 face masks, 50 face shields, 10,000 testing swabs, and five desk shields, plus a prototype of the bedside device.

The swabs are printed on HERL's laser-powered 3D printing machine. For the desk shields, the face shields, and the bed shield, HERL is using its computer numerical control (CNC) router table, its CNC laser cutter, and a host of other machines.

A portable, aerosol-protective device for use next to hospital beds is the most complex item that HERL has designed and fabricated during the pandemic. It was created by Sam Fares, an engineer at the Brooklyn Campus of the VA NY Harbor Healthcare System. HERL collaborated with Fares to build the device, which shields clinicians from the coronavirus and other infectious diseases while they tend to patients. The plexiglass frame gets positioned at the head of the bed and a protective sheet blocks airborne droplets from the patient. The device contains arm holes for clinicians and access ports for ventilator hoses and other medical equipment used during intubation and other procedures. Staff can easily roll the protective device from one bed to another.

VA's Technology Transfer Program has filed a patent application to protect the invention. The program works to commercialize VA inventions to benefit Veterans and the American public.

*HERL, a collaborative effort between the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and the University of Pittsburgh, has a strong team of engineers and perhaps the best fabrication and standards testing facilities in VA. HERL's projects include wheelchair technologies, advanced prostheses, robots, and other innovative systems that improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, such as lost limbs and spinal injuries. The facility is home to the VA Center for Wheelchairs and Robotics Engineering and is based in a state-of-the-art research and development park that includes government, academic, and private industry innovators.*



*Source: VA Acting Deputy Secretary Pamela Powers peers through the view port to watch the fabrication of COVID-19 testing swabs. HERL may ramp up its production to as many as 100,000 swabs per week.*

Photo by Bill George



*Cleaned, sterilized, and bagged testing swabs ready for use in the VA health care system.*

Photo by Bill George



## Health Tastes - Cantaloupe Crush



### Ingredients

½ cup cantaloupe

1 C fat-free (skim) milk

1½ cup ice

Sweetener as needed (about 1 to 2 tsp sugar or equivalent of other sweetener)

### Directions

Cut cantaloupe into small cubes or thin strips. Mix cantaloupe, milk, and ice in a blender until smooth.

Sweeten to taste. Serve.

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute - Recipe Database

Fat: 0g ★ Calories: 50 ★ Protein: 3g ★ Sodium: 40mg

# HEALTH tip



## Crossword

### Stay Home & Puzzle!

Need something to do while staying home? Puzzles are the perfect social distancing activity, AND they may even benefit your mental health. Enjoy!

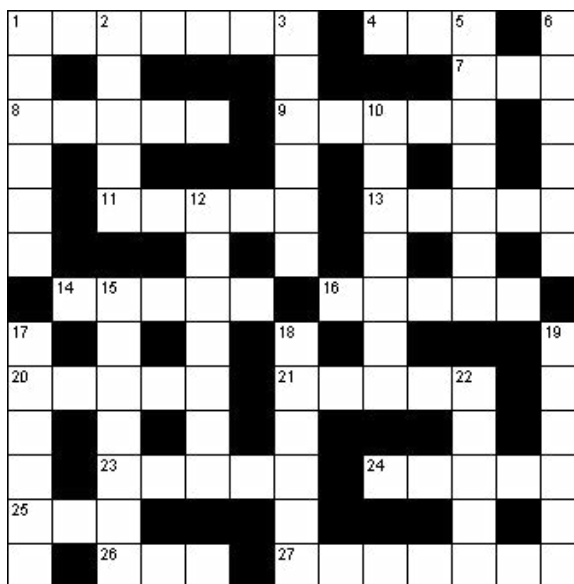


### ACROSS

1. Vegetable (7)
4. Distilled from fermented molasses (3)
7. Alcoholic beverage (3)
8. Soft part of a fruit (5)
9. Luke warm (5)
11. Type of syrup (5)
13. High quality beef (5)
14. Russian pancake (5)
16. Type of rice (5)
20. Shaped and dried dough (5)
21. Cooking juices (5)
23. Type of tea (5)
24. Joint of cooked meat (5)
25. Drink made with juniper berries (3)
26. Fowl food product (3)
27. Edible jelly (7)

### DOWN

1. Beverage made from beans (6)
2. Edible fish (5)
3. Main course (6)
5. Fortified wine (7)
6. Obtained from the capsicum plant (6)
10. Mild powdered seasoning (7)
12. Flapjack (7)
15. Baked layers of pasta (7)
17. Type of cake (6)
18. Fruit punch (6)
19. Meat from sheep (6)
22. Used to raise dough (5)



## HEALTH TIP— CHECK THE LABEL

The CDC recommends the use of hand sanitizer composed of at least 60% alcohol. Check the label. When soap and water aren't "handy," keeping sanitizer nearby is the next best thing.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

Butler VA Health Care System

353 North Duffy Road  
Butler, PA 16001  
800.362.8262  
724.287.4781



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### ARMSTRONG COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

11 Hilltop Plaza  
Kittanning, PA 16201  
724.545.8420

### CLARION COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

56 Clarion Plaza, Suite 115  
Monroe Township, PA 16214  
814.226.3900

### CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

900 Commonwealth Drive, Suite 100  
Cranberry Township, PA 16066  
724.742.3500 or 724.741.3131

### LAWRENCE COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Ridgewood Professional Centre  
1750 New Butler Road  
New Castle, PA 16101  
724.598.6080

### MICHAEL A. MARZANO VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

295 North Kerrwood Drive, Suite 110  
Hermitage, PA 16148  
724.346.1569

The Butler VA Health Care System, located in Butler County, Pennsylvania has been attending to Veteran's total care since 1947. We are the health care choice for over 25,000 Veterans throughout Western Pennsylvania and parts of Ohio and are a member of VA Healthcare VISN 4 under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Butler VA provides comprehensive Veteran care including primary, specialty and mental health care – as well as management of chronic conditions and social support services for our nation's finest, America's Veterans.

## Refer a Buddy

Know a fellow Veteran **not** enrolled in VA health care? Tell them about the Butler VA! Now is the time to enroll. Call us at 800-362-8262 to get started today.



**ChooseVA**

The Butler VA wants to bring attention to all Veterans what choices they have, and the full range of health care services and programs they have access to when they ChooseVA.

[www.choose.va.gov](http://www.choose.va.gov)

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the Flu  
Begins with  
**YOU!**

