



Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home building on track

By Elena Cabatu, Carswell Ross, and Jennifer Aina

Planning for the Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home began three years ago. The Hawaii Health System Corporation (HHSC) in cooperation with the State Office of Veterans Services made applications to the State Legislature and Department of Veterans Affairs for funding. With the support of the Advisory Board on Veterans Services and veterans groups and organizations within the state, funding for the project was approved. With this funding the parties began and completed project plans relying on input from various veterans organizations. Finally, in December 2005 construction of the Okutsu Veterans Home began, with scheduled completion for the summer of 2007.

The Veterans Home will be a 95-bed skilled and extended care veteran nursing home. The veteran home's name was selected after input was obtained from veterans statewide. These recommendations were reviewed by the Advisory Board on Veterans Services and recommended to Thomas Driskell, president and chief executive officer of HHSC who approved the final selection.

A Legacy of Valor

Yukio Okutsu of Hilo is a recipient of the

Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award for valor; his citation reads:

Technical Sergeant Yukio Okutsu distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action on 7 Apr. 1945, on Mount Belvedere, Italy.

While his platoon was halted by the crossfire of three machine guns, Tech. Sgt. Okutsu boldly crawled to within 30 yards of the nearest enemy emplacement through heavy fire. He destroyed the position with two accurately placed hand grenades, killing three machine gunners. Crawling and dashing from cover to cover, he threw another grenade, silencing a second machine gun, wounding two enemy soldiers, and forcing two others to surrender. Seeing a third machine gun, which obstructed his platoon's advance, he moved forward through heavy small arms



Elena Cabatu photo

Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home as of Oct. 5, 2006 (more on page 4).

fire and was stunned momentarily by rifle fire, which glanced off his helmet. Recovering, he bravely charged several enemy riflemen with his submachine gun, forcing them to withdraw from their positions. Then, rushing the machine

Continued on page 4

Veterans' Affairs' valuable volunteers recognized

By Patricia Wieland, VA Voluntary Service Program Manager

Let's get ready to RUMBLE ...

And that's just what the Veterans' Affairs volunteers and staff did last week in celebration of the many hours of dedicated service Hawaii's VA volunteers have contributed toward the VA's mission of providing the best health care possible for our veterans. The number of combined hours for those who were in attendance at this Recognition and Award Ceremony exceeded 54,000 hours.

In the State Office of Veterans Services (OVS) volunteers staff the reception desk, assist with filing and other clerical duties. Today there are a total of five volunteers who puts in at least four hours each of service in helping OVS to assist our veterans.

Our volunteers are also located in our VA Honolulu Benefits and Medical Offices assisting in every area to include driving Disabled American Veterans vans to pick-up veterans and chauffeur them to

their medical appointments and back to their homes.

We couldn't do this without the unselfish and unconditional dedication of thousands of volunteers throughout the country who recognize the sacrifice and challenges our veterans face in today's world. Many of these volunteers are veterans themselves and know how it feels to have a stranger say thank you...either through acts of kindness or thoughtful words...the feeling is always the same....appreciated!

Should you be interested in volunteering, you may contact me, Patricia Wieland at 433-0109

and I'll be happy to fit you in your area of interest or where help is



Courtesy photo

VA Volunteers at the Recognition and Award Ceremony.

really needed to support our Veterans.

VA volunteers value

Do you know how valuable VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) is nationally and the impact VAVS has on VA's mission? Here are some of the 2005-2006 VA Voluntary Service "National" statistics changing hours into dollar values (based on Independent Sector 2005 Volunteer hour value of \$18.04):

Total value of VA volunteer hours in dollars = \$285,265,805

Monetary and Non-Monetary Donations = \$50,447,280
TOTAL Contribution = \$335,713,085

Minus VA Staff Costs, including salaries + 25% Benefits, Supplies, Travel + Volunteer meals = \$45,505,795

Bottom line: it costs VA \$45.5 million dollars to bring in \$335.7 million in resources.



Director's Message

Col. Edward R. Cruickshank, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Director, State Office of Veterans Services

The last fiscal year and into this year has been a very busy one for us. Between July 2005 and September 2006 we've had over 350 outreach activities and reached over 8,400 attendees. This involved speaking to our troops upon their return from Iraq, but speaking to their families throughout their deployment, to keep them abreast of things, and ensuring they knew where to go for help, and what benefits they were entitled to upon their loved ones return from Iraq and Afghanistan. We also attended retirement seminars for all the branches of service to inform them what our role is, and how we could support them upon their separation from the military service.

During this time, we had a total of 1,300 new clients alone, which was mostly attributed to the 29th Brigade Combat Team returning from their deployment the beginning of 2006.

Oahu: The final selection for the consultant to do the repairs at our Kaneohe Cemetery is

age at our cemetery, and also fix the slope behind of the columbarium, and repair the minor cracks in columbarium itself.

Kauai: The columbarium for the Kauai Veterans Cemetery has been purchased, but we are awaiting final approval from the Department of Veterans Affairs for the foundation plans, and walkway improvements prior to the project beginning.

Big Island: Hilo II Veterans Cemetery has finally been completed. It was about 98 percent complete for over a year, and the contractor finally completed the project.

West Hawaii: Design Partners Incorporated was selected to design the improvements for our West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery. Duane Hamada, consultant for Design Partners Inc., along with representatives from the Department of General Services, Department of Defense and the Office of Veteran Services, will be traveling to the Big Island on Oct. 30th to present draft plans for the upgrade of the cemetery, and also details on how we plan to spend the \$1.5 million to complete the project.

now being finalized. We will spend over \$564,000 to repair the roadway, improve the drain-

\$1.2 million is from federal funds; and the remainder of \$300,000, are state funds, which was provided by our state legislature, and released by Gov. Linda Lingle.

I must sincerely thank the Advisory Board on Veteran Services headed by Frank Cruz (from Kauai) for a wonderful job in naming the Veterans Home on the Big Island. The "Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home," was selected from a very distinguished list of applicants that were submitted from veterans' organizations statewide. Also, under Franks' leadership, the board worked closely with Thomas Driskell, president and chief executive officer of Hawaii Health Systems Corporation to help establish the entrance criteria for the Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home in Hilo.

My office is finalizing the plans for Veterans Day on Nov. 11, at our State Cemetery in Kaneohe. Veterans Day is always so special to us, because we are not only honoring those veterans that have passed before us, but also honoring those Veterans that are continuing to fight the present war on terrorism.

We are also confirming our budget requests for the upcoming legislative session, but will certainly keep you informed of this as we go forward. God bless all of you and we, in the office, hope you and yours have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Veterans Affairs news updates

Benefits News

General eligibility requirements for VA benefits

Eligibility for most VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Active service means full-time service, other than active duty for training, as a member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or as a commissioned officer of the Public Health Service, Environmental Science Services Administration or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey. Generally, men and women veterans with similar service may be entitled to the same VA benefits.

A veteran is one who has served in the armed forces and has an honorable discharge; a common misconception is that one has either been in combat and/or is retired from active duty to be called a veteran.

Dishonorable and bad conduct discharges issued by general courts-martial may bar VA benefits. Veterans in prison and parolees must contact a VA regional office to determine eligibility. VA benefits will not be provided to any veteran or dependent wanted for an outstanding felony warrant. For additional information on eligibility for VA benefits, contact the Honolulu VA Regional Office 1-800-827-1000

How to obtaining VA health benefits, medical services

When you enroll for the VA Health Benefits Package, you will be asked if you are interested in receiving care through the VA Primary Care Program. The full range of the VA Health Benefits Package is delivered through our comprehensive Primary Care Program. If you are interested in receiving Primary Care, bring a copy of your honorable discharge (DD 214) to the Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical Clinic located on the Tripler Army Medical Center campus. Due to a large number of requests for our health care services and a high volume of enrollment applications, it is possible that the facility has reached full patient capacity and is in the difficult position of having to identify and first schedule those veterans who are most medically in need of VA Primary Care. It might take some time to schedule your first appointment, but please be assured this will be done as soon as possible.

In the meantime, if you are currently under the care of a non-VA health care provider, please continue until you receive an appointment from VA. If you do not have a physician and/or require urgent medical care, please contact the Medical Center.

At your first appointment, your Primary Care provider will conduct a thorough physical examination, obtain a complete medical

history, review your current medications, and arrange for any laboratory or diagnostic tests required. This appointment is important. To make the most of it, it is requested that the veteran bring copies of medical records from his or her private provider. For more information on the VA Health Benefits Package, contact the Spark Matsunaga VA Medical Center at 433-0600. You can also review what is available through the VA's website www.va.gov.

Important documents if seeking VA benefits

Those seeking a VA benefit for the first time must submit a copy of their service discharge (DD-214, DD-215, or for WWII veterans, a WD form), which documents service dates and type of discharge, or give their full name, military service number, and branch and dates of service.

The veteran's service discharge form should be kept in a safe location accessible to the veteran and next of kin or des-

ignated representative. Additionally, the following documents will be needed for claims processing related to a veteran's death: (1) Veteran's marriage certificate for claims of a surviving spouse or children; (2) Veteran's death certificate if the veteran did not die in a VA health care facility; (3) Children's birth certificates or adoption papers to determine children's benefits; and (4) Veteran's birth certificate to determine parents' benefits.

Contact the VA Honolulu Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000 for more information.



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More VA news updates

Specially adapted housing grant available through VA

Veterans that have specific service-connected disabilities may be entitled to a grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of constructing an adapted dwelling or modifying an existing home to meet the veteran's needs. These are severe disabilities such as the loss or loss of use of both lower and upper extremities.

The goal of the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Program is to provide a barrier-free living environment which affords the veterans a level of independent living he or she may not normally enjoy.

For more information on the SAH grant, please visit: <http://www.homeloans.va.gov/sah.htm>. You may also contact the VA Regional Office, Loan Guaranty department at 1-800-827-1000 option 2.

New employment training, job placement program for disabled veterans

The Purple Heart Service Foundation administers this new program for America's veterans. Since its training program began last year, the Foundation has trained nearly 100 disabled and combat wounded veterans over the Internet, for jobs in the information industry. Veterans who qualify for the training receive \$11 an hour during the 600-hour educational process.

Qualifications are simple: A veteran must have a VA assigned disability rating, and a copy of his or her DD-214. A Purple Heart award is not required. After 15 weeks of training, veterans are able to work

at home via the Internet and earn from \$15 to \$22 an hour.

Major companies have been hiring veterans who have completed the program, including HomeDepot, FedEx, JetBlue and Dell Computer. The program is accredited by Northern Virginia Community College and has the support of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

If interested, call the Purple Heart Service Foundation at 1-800-720-9596 or go online at http://www.purpleheartfoundation.org/job_training.asp.

President signs housing, benefits bill

Legislation to help service members and veterans with their housing and other benefit needs was signed into law June 15th by President Bush. Among its many provisions is one which authorizes VA to make grants available to assist with housing adaptations at a family member's home in which a severely disabled servicemember is temporarily residing. The grants range from between \$2,000 and \$14,000. Previously, severely disabled veterans had to own their homes to qualify for adapted housing grant assistance from VA. Many may live with their parents after sustaining life-altering injuries. The legislation also allows servicemembers, those who have been legally determined to be totally disabled at the time of their separation from the military, to have up to two years from their separation date to apply for premium-free Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance coverage. Even more importantly, the legislation will enable them to convert their coverage to Veterans' Group Life Insurance, or an individual plan or policy, dur-

ing the same two-year period. Taking advantage of the conversion option is especially critical for totally disabled servicemembers who, because of their disabilities, may not be insurable at competitive commercial rates after military service. For more information on the new housing benefit, contact the VA Honolulu Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000.

GI Bill rates up Oct. 1

The GI Bill fulltime student payment rate will increase by four percent to \$1,075 a month, Oct. 1. This benefit will soon be worth \$38,700 – a total increase of nearly \$1,500 over last year's rate. This total is based on the new monthly full-time student payment rate of \$1,075 multiplied by the 36-month limit. If you are GI Bill eligible you get the increase no matter when you become eligible or begin using it. The actual benefit may be much higher if the eligible student signed up for the Army, Navy or Marine Corps College Funds or elected to participate in the GI Bill Buy-Up program.

Other GI Bill programs will also see an increase. For example the GI Bill for Selected Reserve will be worth \$309 a month, the Reserve Education Assistance Program (REAP) will be up to a maximum of \$806 a month and the GI Bill Apprenticeship and On The Job Training program will pay as much as \$913 a month. The GI Bill is good for only 10 years after the date of your last discharge from active duty service. The Montgomery GI Bill was created to help veterans of active duty military service pay for their education and training. It can be used to pay for many different programs including the following: College, Business Technical or Vocational Courses; Distance Learning including Correspondence Courses; Licensing and Certification Tests; Apprenticeship/Job Training (Veter-

ans and Reserve Only); and Flight Training.

For more information check out the website <http://education.military.com/money-for-school/gi-bill/va-increases-gi-bill-rates>.

New service to help veterans get answers to questions on VA billing statements

On March 8th, the Department of Veterans Affairs started providing a new service to veterans. You can now call a centralized call center with any questions you have about your VA Billing Statement. To call the center, dial the toll free number of 1-866-347-2353. The center is open Monday – Friday, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

The call center is staffed by specially-trained VA employees at the VA Health Revenue Center in Topeka, Kan. The change was made to improve the services veterans receive and have their calls answered as quickly as possible. VA employees will use a computer system to view information about a veteran's bill. All of their medical records and billing information will remain at the VA facility where they are receiving care. Your personal information remains secure and private. Only VA employees will have access to this information.

Because of this change, veterans may receive their VA Billing Statement in the mail at a different time of the month then when they had normally received it in the past. The change in when they receive their bill will be permanent, and is part of the process to centralize the billing call center. These changes will help VA continue to improve the services it provides to America's veterans. Again, that number is 1-866-347-2353.

Health News/ Miscellaneous

VA combats obesity, diabetes

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs recently announced the launch of a national registration campaign to let veterans and their families tailor their diets and exercise programs into a healthful lifestyle. The new health care assessment is part of a campaign called MOVE – Managing Obesity/Overweight for Veterans Everywhere – which is part of the Healthier US Veterans program sponsored by the VA's Health and Human Services to reduce obesity and diabetes, a disease often associated with being overweight. Patients enrolled in VA's health care program can complete an interactive on-line questionnaire about their health status, nutrition and exercise. Based on their information, veterans and family members receive a custom report with health information and instructions for follow up with our medical center staff. People not enrolled in VA's health care program can log into www.move.va.gov/more23 and answer 23 questions. They will receive an individualized

report giving them suggestions about making changes in their eating and physical activity and referring them to materials on the Web site. VA estimates that 70 percent of its patients are overweight, compared to 64 percent of the U.S. population. Diabetes also affects a greater percentage of veterans in VA's health care than the general U.S. population. For more information on how MOVE can help you at the Spark Matsunaga VA Medical Center, call 433-7676.

Ordering medicine online

The VA website is www.myhealth.va.gov. The latest changes to the site, effective Nov. 2005, include the ability for a veteran to record and track food intake by meal and day in a personal Food Journal; record and track daily activity or exercise regimen in a personal Activity Journal; and record and track Pulse Oximetry readings.

The improved website offers the ability to order prescription refills online, and check on the status of refills. Refills are delivered

through the Consolidated Mail Out Pharmacy (CPOP).

Other features include the ability to access three trusted sources of health information available in the Health Info section; and record personal demographic information, military health history, treatment locations, over-the-counter medications, herbals and supplements, medical events, tests, immunizations, and allergies as part of your Personal Health Journal.

To utilize the website, use the Registration Wizard to set up a new account. If you registered before Nov. 11, 2004, you will need to re-register. If you're a current user all you need to enter is your user ID and your personal password.

Court of Veterans Appeals rules in favor of Navy veterans exposed to Agent Orange

The Court of Veterans Appeals ruled Aug. 16th in the case of a Navy veteran appealing an earlier decision by the Board of Veterans' Appeals on his Agent Orange disability claim. The veteran had claimed service connection for dia-

betes due to exposure to Agent Orange while serving aboard a Navy vessel during the Vietnam War. The claim was denied because VA regulations limited potential service connection to veterans who set foot in Vietnam. The court reversed the Board's ruling. The implication of the court ruling is that all who received a Vietnam Service Medal and who contacted one of the diseased linked to Agent Orange could expect the VA to rule that disease as service-connected.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office is reviewing the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals decision. It is expected to issue procedural guidelines on both past and present offshore Agent Orange exposure claims sometime in the near future. A press release will be put out once those procedural guidelines have been established. For further clarification, contact the VA Honolulu Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000.

Okutsu

- Continued from page 2

gun nest, he captured the weapon and its entire crew of four. By these single-handed actions he enabled his platoon to resume its assault on a vital objective.

The courageous performance of Tech. Sgt. Okutsu against formidable odds was an inspiration to all. Tech. Sgt. Okutsu's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.

A Legacy of Commitment

The next step in the planning for operation of this facility, was to select a management organization to administer and staff the facility. After a nationwide search and competitive bidding process, which included companies in Hawaii, Avalon Health Care, Inc. of Salt Lake City, Utah, was awarded the consultant contract.

Admission Requirements

The final administrative task is to develop and disseminate an Admission Criteria for the Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home.

Below are the criteria that were reviewed, evaluated and recommended by the Advisory Board on Veterans Services to the HHSC and Avalon Health Care, Inc.:

Admission of all persons will be made on an individual basis by the admission team with consideration given to the ability of the

Home to meet the medical needs of the Veteran;

The applicant must be recognized as an eligible Veteran by the Department of Veterans Affairs and meet the following criteria:

- Must require skilled or long term nursing home care as defined by the VA, Medicaid, or Medicare as certified by a physician;
- Must be Honorably discharged; Resided in Hawaii prior to induction in the military and those with one year residency;
- Must be able to pay the resident's portion of the cost of care (if not covered by other payer sources such as Medicare, Medicaid, pensions, etc.);
- On a space available basis, the Home may accept spouses, widows and widowers, and Gold Star parents up to a maximum of 10 percent of total bed capacity; and

In case of a waiting list, the admissions team will utilize the following priority order for admission:

- Severity of disability
- Capacity to earn a living
- Length of military service
- Amount of combat experience
- Circumstances of immediate family

We have embarked upon a worthy adventure, to provide long-term care to Hawaii's veterans and selected family members. With the support of the veteran's community we hope to make this endeavor a grand success. We welcome your comments on the above criteria.



Aug. 31, 2006



Sept. 15, 2006



Sept. 28, 2006

Elena Cabatu photos

Veterans' home takes shape as seen from the rooftop of the Hilo Medical Center.

Veterans' Day 2006 Calendar

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Nov. 4 | Veterans' Day Parade in Lihue, Kauai |
| Nov.11, Saturday, 10 a.m. | Veterans' Day Ceremony on Saturday, at the Hilo Veterans' Cemetery |
| Nov. 11, Saturday | Veterans' Day Ceremony on Saturday, at the Kauai Veterans Cemetery |
| Nov. 11, Saturday, 10 a.m. | Veterans' Day Ceremony on Saturday, at the National Cemetery of the Pacific, Punchbowl Cemetery |
| Nov.11, Saturday, 1 p.m. | Governor's Veterans' Day Ceremony at the Hawaii State Veterans' Cemetery |
| Nov.11, Saturday | Veterans' Day Ceremony at the Makawao Veterans Cemetery |



Shelly Ichishita photo

Mist envelops the Koolaus as Col. (ret) Edward Cruickshank, director of the Office of Veterans' Services and Gov. Linda Lingle make their way to the last year's Veterans' Day event sponsored by the Governor at the Hawaii State Veterans' Cemetery in Kaneohe.

Korea revisit program

Korean War Veterans who served in Korea and adjacent waters between Jun. 25, 1950, and Oct. 15, 1954, who have not previously participated in this program and wish to do so for the calendar year 2007, please contact Harrison Lee at (808) 235-5713; (808) 247-2101FAX; Email: magnum44@hawaii.rr.com.

This program is sponsored by The Korean Veterans Association (KVA) and the Republic of Korea Government.

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