

GCVHCS Employees Participate in 'I Am Not Invisible' Virtual Photo Campaign

BILOXI, Miss. – More than 90 Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System (GCVHCS) women Veteran employees participated in a Veterans Health Administration (VHA)-sponsored virtual photo exhibit Aug. 6-7 at the Biloxi VA Medical Center in Biloxi, Mississippi, and the Joint Ambulatory Care Center (JACC) in Pensacola, Florida.

The 'I Am Not Invisible' virtual photo exhibit, designed to increase awareness and dialogue about women veterans as well as open viewers' eyes to the contributions, needs and experiences of women who have served during all eras of the U.S. Armed Forces, is spearheaded by the VA's Center for Women Veterans (CWV).

Gene Russell, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs photographer and 'I Am Not Invisible' campaign photographer, has travelled to more than 40 states in an effort to complete the three-year project.

The day-long photo shoots at the Biloxi VA Medical Center and JACC provided GCVHCS women employees the opportunity to participate in something GCVHCS Women Veterans Program Manager Donna Maxwell said is important to the changing perception of women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

"Women Veterans have served since the Revolutionary War," she said. "Most people don't realize that there two million women Veterans today, and that number increases daily. Projects such as this highlight the fact that women are daughters, mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends and Veterans, and we are not invisible."

Participants in the photo shoot were staggered in an effort to observe Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, observing physical distancing guidelines during the ongoing global health crisis. Some women Veterans participating in the campaign brought mementos, including uniform items, photographs and other memorabilia of their time in the U.S. Armed Forces, for inclusion in individual 'I Am Not Invisible' campaign photographs.

Event participant Yolonda Robert, an Oncology Licensed Practical Nurse at the JACC, said the project could serve two purposes.

"I think it's very important for women to have acknowledgment for their service," she said. "Projects such as this help highlight the role women Veterans have played throughout our history, and also bring to light the fact that the VA has services available for women."

Russell said that each photograph included in the project features a brief biography of the Veteran, as well as their thoughts on their service and the importance of both the project and the changing perception of women Veterans.

“We’ve photographed 2,600 women Veterans who served America,” he said. “And one of the most amazing things about this project is that we take their information and put it on the poster and we share that through the Center for Women Veterans Facebook page. I think we need to teach America how these women served their country and the various ways they served their country.”

He added that completed photographs of GCVHCS women Veterans – as well as other ‘I Am Not Invisible’ campaign participants – are available on the [Center for Women Veterans website](#). A video of the [GCVHCS photo shoot](#) is also available on the GCVHCS Facebook page.

The Center for Women Veterans, established by the U.S. Congress in 1994, is designed to monitor and coordinate the VA’s administration of health care and benefits services and programs for women Veterans; to serve as an advocate for a cultural transformation (both within VA and in the general public) in recognizing the service and contributions of women Veterans and women in the military; and to raise awareness of the responsibility to treat women Veterans with dignity and respect.

The Biloxi Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, along with the Mobile, Pensacola, Eglin and Panama City VA Clinics are all part of the GCVHCS, which is headquartered in Biloxi, Mississippi, and provides a variety of medical outpatient services to more than 70,000 Veterans.

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Gene Russell, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs photographer and 'I Am Not Invisible' campaign photographer, takes a portrait of a GCVHCS woman Veteran employee Aug. 5 at the Biloxi VA Medical Center. The 'I Am Not Invisible' virtual photo exhibit, designed to increase awareness and dialogue about women veterans as well as open viewers' eyes to the contributions, needs and experiences of women who have served during all eras of the U.S. Armed Forces, is spearheaded by the VA's Center for Women Veterans (CWV).

(Official GCVHCS photo by Wayne Alley, GCVHCS Medical Media)