

## **Navy Begins Construction of First-Ever Joint Health Care Facility**

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GREAT LAKES (NNS) -- Officials from the Navy, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and federal and local government joined a ceremonial groundbreaking here July 2 for the first-ever joint Navy/VA Federal Health Care Facility (FHCF).

Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Midwest is working with Joseph J. Henderson & Son, Inc., of Gurnee, Ill., on the first phase of construction. The facility will be the first to use a completely integrated Navy/VA staff to treat recruits, active-duty service members, retirees, family members and veterans.

"Today we mark the beginning of construction that will eventually produce a first-of-its-kind facility," said Capt. Bob Gibbs, commanding officer of NAVFAC Midwest. "In building the new parking and utilities infrastructure for this facility, we set the stage for the physical merger of two very capable medical centers into one comprehensive, efficient, state-of-the-art hospital. We are laying the groundwork, literally, for the best medical care our nation can provide to our service members, retirees, veterans, and their family members.

"This effort underlines the fact that the Navy considers its people—past and present—to be its most valuable resource," said Gibbs.

Naval Health Clinic (NHC) Great Lakes is gradually merging operations with the existing VA staff and facilities. This will provide a full range of modernized medical and support resources for patients while at the same time eliminating costly duplications that currently exist between the two nearby medical facilities. The overall FHCF is planned for completion in 2010, and is expected to save approximately \$160 million over the projected 40-year life span of the facility.

"This truly is a unique endeavor," said Capt. Thomas McGue, commanding officer of NHC Great Lakes.

"When you look at where we were and where we have gone, this is definitely not your father's VA," said Patrick Sullivan, director of the North Chicago VA Medical Center. "Who would have thought that in our operating rooms today we would have Navy surgeons working alongside VA nurses and other support staff, and that we would also have kids being treated here?"

"And let's not forget about the young men and women who are fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan and so many other places around the world to ensure we are safe at home," added Sullivan. "As they are answering the call, so must we ensure they receive the best possible care when they return home."

Construction under the \$16 million contract, awarded May 25, includes a staff parking area, four-story parking garage for patients, new site entryway, traffic light on Green Bay Road and utility work to prepare for the eventual addition of a new wing to the current North Chicago VA Medical Center. Completion of the parking and infrastructure project is expected in June 2008.

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