

Lake Nona picked for new VA Hospital

Lake Nona will be the site of a new medical center the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to build near Orlando, the VA announced today.

Orlando, the largest metropolitan area in the country not serviced by a VA medical center, will finally have a facility at Lake Nona. Our growing Veterans' population will at last have appropriate access to vital health care services.

The Lake Nona site is destined to make Orlando a world-class medical center of the future. The VA hospital, Burnham Institute, and UCF Medical School create a stunning tri-fecta that will be valuable to everyone involved in this spectacular research environment." said Feeney.

The House Veterans Affairs Committee approved legislation authorizing \$377.7 million for the proposed 134-bed medical center that would serve Veterans in a 10-county area, including Brevard.

Barry Stanley, a spokesman for Veterans Affairs in the Orange and Brevard County regions, said construction of the Veterans hospital would alleviate the burden for Veterans and their families of having to travel to Tampa for surgery or inpatient medical procedures.

This is a victory for Veterans and the community. This new facility will provide Veterans with a better quality of life and cut down on the cost to service organizations that transport needy Veterans without funding from the VA.

The new VA facility also would include a 120-bed nursing home and an outpatient clinic.

Within a year, ground will be broken and construction is expected to start. The hospital could be open by 2012, according to the VA.

About 20,000 Brevard County Veterans are treated annually at the Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Viera. If the Orlando hospital opens, many of these patients will be able to seek more advanced medical care closer to home, officials said.

An estimated 400,000 Veterans live in Central Florida -- the largest concentration of Vets without a major VA hospital in the country, according to lawmakers.

Airmen Grant Boy's Wish To Be 'Pilot For A Day'

Airmen from Peterson AFB, Colo., helped bring an ailing child's dream to life in January.

Born with a genetic disorder that causes tumors to grow on his nerves, 14-year-old Zachery Olsen dreamed of becoming a pilot. Zachery was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis four years ago, he became eligible for a wish through the Make-A-Wish Foundation, but it wasn't until about six months ago that his family decided to nominate him for a wish.

"He really likes planes and just loves to go fast," said Michele Olsen, Zachery's mother. "It was really no surprise his wish was to be a pilot."

After 6 months of waiting and working with a wish granter, a date was set -- Jan. 19. Members of the 311th Airlift Squadron worked to make sure the day would be memorable for the young man.

"We really wanted to make this a great day for Zachery," said Capt. Sean Howlett, a 311th AS pilot and event organizer. "So we set up a day he will remember for the rest of his life."

Putting the day together for Zachery was no easy task, but with eager support of other agencies on base, it became that much easier to bring this wish to life.

"It takes a lot of work to put on one of these events," he said. "Everyone I called, from the 302nd (Airlift Wing) to the (21st Space) Wing, and everyone else just jumped on board to help us out."

The day began when Zachery and his family arrived at the 311th AS. There, Zachery learned what kinds of things pilots have to take into account when planning a mission. Once he knew how to do that, he went to the air traffic control tower to see how a pilot works together with the controllers in the tower to successfully complete a flight.

Then Zachery got a tour of a 302nd Airlift Wing C-130 Hercules, learning about the aircraft's controls and cargo capability.

Members of the 731st Airlift Squadron presented Zachery with a variety of patches and other gifts including a photo signed by members of the squadron.

After the C-130 tour it was off to aerospace physiology, where Zachery learned about common problems pilots may face when flying and how to recognize them. In the altitude chamber he got to try out a pilot's helmet and oxygen mask.

Following lunch he learned about the 311th Airlift Squadron' C-21 and took a flight in a Civil Air Patrol plane, earning him

his wings and a certificate from the 311th AS making him an honorary pilot.

"He was so excited for this," Mrs. Olsen said. "He didn't sleep at all last night. We're so grateful for everything we got. It's really made Zachery happy."

"It gives us a great sense of pride to be able to give something back," Capt. Howlett said. "I've wanted to be a pilot since I was probably in the fifth grade and I got to live my dream. To be able to let someone like Zachery have the opportunity, just for a day, to see what I get to do for a living is just a great opportunity. It's a great joy to see him happy."

When the day was over, Zachery headed home with his wish fulfilled and an armful of memorabilia from his day as a pilot.

Marine charged in Iraqi deaths to be deputy in NC

A former Marine Corps officer once charged with murder in the deaths of two Iraqis has become a deputy sheriff in North Carolina.

Ilario Pantano, a former second lieutenant who was cleared of wrongdoing in 2005, will finish police training in three weeks and will be assigned to work at the New Hanover County jail, Sheriff Sid Causey said.

"You don't become a sheriff's deputy for the paycheck. You do it because you want to serve the community," Pantano said. "People seek to politicize my story and I'm dedicated to public service."

Pantano, 35, was charged with murder after shooting two Iraqis in Mahmudiyah, Iraq, and hanging a warning sign on their corpses in April 2004. Pantano said he acted in self-defense.

A Marine Corps general decided in 2005 not to bring Pantano to trial, following the advice of an officer who presided over the military equivalent of a grand jury hearing. Pantano has since released a book, *Warlord: No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy*, a title that mimics a Marine motto and the sign he hung on the Iraqis.

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