

Vital•SIGNS

News, Information and Stories for Employees, Volunteers and Friends of VITAS Innovative Hospice Care®



Recognize Anyone?

45 VITAS Employees Receive National Awards

It always gives me great pride and joy to feature the winners of our annual recognition program for their outstanding work in our clinical and volunteer operations as well as in the sales and market development efforts.

I receive many letters of thanks and appreciation from families that have received care for their loved ones by our VITAS Caregivers, and every time I read and hear the stories, I feel proud that it is because of your dedication, compassion and commitment that we are considered the premier end-of-life care provider in the world.

The National Recognition program is our opportunity to recognize and honor our employees that have been selected for their outstanding contributions at VITAS.

VITAS streamlined its awards programs for 2008 by combining what were previously known as the National Employee Recognition Awards (ERA), which recognized excellence in clinical and volunteer performance, with the Leadership Council, which recognizes excellence in sales and marketing performance. Together they are known as the National Leadership Council Awards.

As in previous years, the winners of the clinical and volunteer awards were selected by a panel of judges who reviewed hundreds of nomination forms submitted by all of you. And, as always, the winners in the sales and marketing areas were selected based on their measurable achievements in meeting sales and marketing goals.

Pages 6 and 7 of this newsletter feature the names of the winners in the sales and marketing segment of the National Leadership Council. We hope you spot some familiar faces in there, as well as in the preceding pages.

Thank you to all of you for your dedication and commitment to the important work you do at VITAS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim O'Toole".

Tim O'Toole
CEO



Muhammad Longi, MD
Chicagoland South

VITAS Award for Outstanding Service—Team Physician

Dr. Longi is an Artist at Patient Care

Rakesh Chugh, MD, medical director at VITAS' Chicagoland South program, has a story that he likes to tell about Muhammad Longi, MD.

"I once walked into the room of an elderly mentally challenged patient at a long term care facility and found Dr. Longi coloring with her in a coloring book," explains Dr. Chugh. "He smiled somewhat sheepishly and said, 'We always color first.'"

Dr. Longi, a VITAS physician for six years, currently covers two teams and performs a rotation at a program inpatient unit. He says he never just walks into a patient's room and starts an examination. "I do whatever the patient is doing and go from there," he says—even if that means picking up a crayon and coloring.

In fact, Dr. Longi could be called an "artist" in his bedside manner. This is especially true when he works with children, who he has treated for many years as a pediatric physician. He also practices internal medicine.

Using a pen and notepad, Dr. Longi starts to draw as he describes his approach with his younger patients. "Children often are distraught when they come to me, and that makes it hard to examine them. So I often sit on the exam table and start to draw."

Within minutes, four popular TV and cartoon characters appear on the notepad—Elmo, Dora the Explorer, Mickey Mouse and SpongeBob SquarePants. "When I draw these characters, the children calm down," notes Dr. Longi. "It takes an extra five minutes, but it helps."

Whether with a crayon or his gentle demeanor, Dr. Longi puts his patients and their families at ease so he, in turn, can attend to their needs.

"When I'm able to relieve my patients' symptoms and make them feel at peace, I get great satisfaction," he says. "And it's excellent motivation when the families tell me how grateful they are that their loved ones died in peace."

Dr. Longi's cartoon drawings.





Elijah Ellison, RN
Coastal Cities

*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—RN*

Elijah is a Legend in His Own Time

“The only kind of care and service that Elijah knows how to deliver is outstanding.” That’s what one Elijah Ellison admirer wrote in her nomination letter for his award.

Even before Licensed Vocational Nurse Joan Corpus met Elijah, she’d heard stories about “the VITAS myth and legend.” “I only knew him by name,” she wrote, “but I knew he was well-respected by his team, and that the field staff relied on his adept nursing skills.

“His plans of care were meticulous,” continued Joan, noting she saw the plans when several of Elijah’s patients were placed on continuous care. “And his patients and families spoke of him as if he walked on water”—to which, she learned, many of Elijah’s co-workers agreed.

There was the time that, while off the clock, Elijah assisted an after-hours nurse who was having difficulties with a patient’s distressed family. And there was the time he gave money to a family that had lost a loved one in a random shooting; tragically, Elijah lost his own son the same way.

“Elijah is a key team player,” says Team Manager Marsha Lee. “Before joining us in 2004 he was a med/surg nurse, so he’s a great coach for the other nurses—as well as patients and their families—in such skills as drawing blood or inserting IV tubes.” He also always ensures that patients and their families are comfortable with the hospice approach to care.

“Families often fear, for example, that patients will become addicted to their pain medication, so I assure them that only a small percentage of people actually become addicted,” he says, adding that he often shares articles from his many nursing magazines to support his claims.

“Elijah is soft-spoken but emanates strength and proficiency,” concludes Joan. “After meeting him, I realized that the myths about him were true accounts of Elijah simply being himself.” Legendary.

*“Elijah’s patients
and families spoke
of him as if he
walked on water.”*

—Joan Corpus
LVN, Coastal Cities



Mark Douraghy
San Diego

*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—LVN*

By Car or Motor Home, Mark ‘Goes the Extra Mile’

The phrase “going the extra mile” could be considered cliché, but not when referring to Licensed Vocational Nurse Mark Douraghy. In his case, it’s true.

The patient lived in a motor home that was parked in a hospital lot. “He was dying and wanted to move to a campground where he had once lived,” says Tami Cooper, supervisor of the San Diego program’s pool staff. She sent Mark.

“Mark followed the patient, whose friend was driving for him, to the campground, but there was no space,” explains Tami. On top of that, the patient needed cleaning and had no running water.

Forming a caravan, Mark searched for a bathroom located near a lot where they could park. They finally found one at a gas station. Throughout the ordeal, Mark stopped several times to check on the patient.

By midnight, the caravan parked at a church where the patient had sometimes showered and eaten. But the patient had already died. Mark informed the church pastor of the man’s passing, and—unbeknownst to Mark—the pastor called the police.

“As Mark came out of the motor home after doing the patient’s post-mortem care, there were cops surrounding him, ordering him to drop what he had in his hands!” exclaims Tami. “He did. It was the patient’s soiled briefs.” All was explained, and the mortuary picked up the patient’s body.

While such an incident might rattle some, Mark just “rolled” with it. As an LVN since 1982 and a VITAS employee since 2000, he’s experienced every manner in which patients live and die.

“Everyone dies differently,” says Mark. “That’s why I like the interdisciplinary approach to hospice care. Some people respond more to spiritual care, others respond more to medication. To find out what my patients want, I ask them ... and try to provide.”

Tami can’t resist adding that Mark truly “goes the extra mile” for VITAS patients and families. And it’s not cliché.



Francisco Araujo
Waterbury

*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—
Hospice Aide*

A Former Cardiologist, Francisco Gets to the Heart of Hospice

As he was tending to one of his nursing home patients, VITAS Hospice Aide Francisco Araujo (Ah-rah-OO-zho) noticed that another resident—not a VITAS patient—appeared to be having a heart attack.

“She was pale and sweating, and her nails and lips were blue,” describes Francisco. “I checked her heart rate, and I was certain she was having a heart attack. I told the facility staff and they got her to the hospital.”

The 92-year-old woman survived. When the woman’s niece later learned it was Francisco who had so skillfully detected her aunt’s heart attack, she requested that her aunt be referred to VITAS when she was ready for hospice care.

“Every patient in the facilities where I work is a potential VITAS patient, so I do my best to help everyone,” says Francisco.

But how did Francisco know that the woman was having a heart attack? In his native Brazil, Francisco was a cardiologist. Since moving to the United States 22 years ago, he’s worked mostly as a hospital aide; he never pursued a license to practice medicine because of the cost and time it required. He joined VITAS two years ago.

“It’s been an adjustment, but I have enjoyed working as an aide,” says Francisco, noting that he particularly likes hospice care. “I like being with people who are at the end of life. I hold their hands, talk to them, comfort them. I like easing their pain.”

Among his VITAS colleagues, Francisco is known as the one who puts everyone at ease—with a smile, a hug, or food and flowers that he brings to team meetings for birthdays and other celebrations.

“No matter where he goes, Francisco brightens the room,” remarks General Manager Theresa Bachhuber. “And when patients pass, he dresses in a suit and attends their funerals. He says, ‘I am representing VITAS and want to look nice for you and the family.’” Always the professional—that’s Francisco.



Jacqueline Ann
Adams-Hove, LCSW
Broward

*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—
Social Worker*

Hospice Care Comes Naturally to Ann

Though she had some reservations about working in hospice care when she was completing her social work degree, Jacqueline Ann Adams-Hove, LCSW, soon realized it was a perfect fit for her.

“I volunteered for a year at VITAS while I was still a student, and I saw that hospice was very natural for me,” says Ann, who has worked for VITAS for 10 years. “I like being supportive and empathetic.”

“I help my patients and their families by meeting them where they are,” continues Ann. “I try to help them fulfill last wishes or make final contacts, whatever they want or need to complete.”

Ann takes a personal approach in helping her patients and their families. She has frequently met family members after hours or on holidays, for example, to discuss patients’ needs if those were the only times the family was available. “And she

once assisted the parents of a small child by going to the funeral home with them to pick out a coffin,” explains Patient Care Administrator Jeff Mack.

“The mother did not think she could go (alone), so Ann drove her to the funeral home and supported her throughout the entire process,” says Jeff.

A certified thanatologist (grief counselor), Ann facilitates a Broward bereavement support group, and she co-facilitates an ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) support group.

She also was co-leader of her program’s team in a recent ALS Walk.

As a social worker who once thought she might not like hospice care, “Ann is a mentor to many new VITAS social workers, and she helps local schools train students who are earning their social work degrees,” concludes Jeff. All of that seems only natural for Ann.

*“I try to help my
patients fulfill last
wishes or make final
contacts, whatever
they want or need
to complete.”*

—Ann Adams-Hove
LCSW, Broward



Carol Foerstel, RN
Los Angeles/Ventura County
*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—
Admissions Nurse*

Once Retired, Carol Finds
'A Better Way' to Nurse at VITAS

After working for almost 30 years as a nurse, including more than 10 years as an intensive care unit supervisor at a Santa Monica hospital, Carol Foerstel had retired. But she grew bored.

"So I decided to go back to work," says Carol. She tried hospice care because "after so many years in ICUs where I saw people suffer at the end, I thought there must be a better way."

Carol thought she would work part-time, but VITAS Admissions Manager Jack Guinn was so impressed with her in her interview, "I persuaded her to join us full-time," he says. And he's glad he did.

In just a year and a half—in fact, immediately upon joining VITAS—Carol has earned praise from her program's referral sources, sales representatives and patients and their families for "her positive attitude, her compassion and her patient advocacy," says Jack.

Carol is also resourceful and quick on her feet, which has helped VITAS regain the trust of a "premier referral source that we had lost because of service failures," explains Jack.

The referral source, a hospital, had a homeless, out-of-state patient who had been hospitalized for two months. When she was ready for hospice care, the hospital called 10 providers. None of them could determine the patient's benefits or place her for hospice care.

"The hospital only reluctantly called us," admits Jack, "but Carol quickly determined that the patient's plan would cover an inpatient level of care, and she convinced the facility to allow the patient's spouse to stay with her at a low rate. So impressed was the case manager, she appealed to the physician in charge of the palliative care unit to reinstate VITAS as a provider of choice."

"I love working in hospice admissions," says Carol. "Working with patients and families to see what best fits their needs can be challenging but rewarding." Hopefully Carol won't retire again any time soon.



Donetta Anfield
Patient Care Secretary,
Midwest Telecare Call Center
*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Customer Service*

A Former Banker, Donetta
Finds Her 'Calling' at Telecare

Before she joined VITAS four years ago, Donetta Anfield was a bank manager in Chicago. But then her uncle went on hospice care with VITAS.

"His VITAS team was very good, very compassionate," recalls Donetta. "Their level of care really impressed me. In fact, they inspired me to change my career and get a job with VITAS."

Though she left banking behind, Donetta took her well-honed customer service skills with her, developing a reputation at the Midwest Telecare Call Center in Matteson, Illinois, for going above and beyond the "call" of duty in serving VITAS patients and their families. Her reputation followed her to Lombard, where she is now helping Telecare set up a pilot office.

Customer service is so important to Donetta, she took on a heady, company-wide After-Hours Satisfaction Survey project, explains Julie Dayiantis, General Manager of Telecare Services.

"She took the project to the next level," says Julie. "In addition to calling the teams for assistance when a patient or family member called with a concern, Donetta called the callers back to make sure their needs were met. This was not required, but Donetta is committed to making sure our patients and their families receive the care they deserve."

Donetta also has assumed responsibility for all of the regional Telecare offices' monthly reports. Though this has meant learning new computer skills and software applications, it has not daunted Donetta, says Julie.

Also important to Donetta is the VITAS Value of "taking care of each other." She once stayed on the line with a nurse who was dizzy with fatigue to make sure the nurse made it home safely, and she sent another nurse a card to lift her spirits after a difficult shift.

Like any good customer service expert, "Donetta is always willing to do whatever she can to help," says Julie.

*"After so many
years in ICUs
where I saw people
suffer at the end, I
thought there must
be a better way."*

—Carol Foerstel
RN, LA/Ventura County



Brad Devor
Inland Empire

*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—
Chaplain*

As a Hospice Chaplain, Brad is a "Minister of Hospitality"

As a hospice chaplain, Brad Devor sees himself as a "minister of hospitality"—to VITAS patients and their families, and to his colleagues.

"I meet our patients and their families—and my co-workers—where they are and bring them what they need, whether it's an ear in the midst of a crisis, or spiritual or emotional counseling," says Brad.

Sometimes they need a bear hug and Brad provides that too, adds Lorraine Hedtke, bereavement services manager at VITAS' Inland Empire program.

"Brad is a champion of our Memory Bear program, speaking about its merits with patients' families and the community," says Lorraine. Brad once even gave away his sample bear to a patient's young daughter who was struggling with her mother's death.

"Brad was showing the bear to the girl to explain how it's made," explains Lorraine. "She wanted a bear for herself and her siblings, so Brad helped her select shirts and blankets for the bears.

"The girl was so heartbroken, Brad gave her his sample bear, and she carried it with her everywhere," says Lorraine.

"When we delivered the family's bears two months later, the girl asked us to return Brad's bear with her thanks. That was the first time any of us at VITAS had heard about Brad's kind gesture," says Lorraine.

In his five years at VITAS, Brad has been known to take out for coffee a colleague who's had a bad day. And to foster support among his fellow program chaplains, he organized an informal monthly breakfast meeting.

"Brad acts with compassion and protection," concludes Lorraine, "and he ministers in a way that's not about religion but about looking after one another." What's more hospitable than that?



Norma Sanchez
Southeast Admissions Call
Center, Miramar, Florida

*VITAS Award for
Outstanding Service—
Admissions Coordinator*

Norma is a Skilled Navigator in Emotional Seas

"I'm emotional, but I think that's an asset," remarks Norma. "I can sense people's anger and hear the fear in their voices over the telephone, and I know how it feels to be in that kind of pain. So I use my own emotions to offer comfort and assurance to people when they or their loved ones are referred to us."

Before joining VITAS six years ago, Norma worked in home healthcare in New York City. There she developed an understanding of patients, illness and family dynamics—all of which generate "emotions," which can be tricky to navigate when coordinating hospice admissions.

But Norma is a skilled navigator—and communicator—who thoroughly covers all her bases before she leaves for the day.

"Norma gives us admissions nurses a good picture of any family dynamics that might present a problem, so we can be prepared to diffuse them," says VITAS Admissions Nurse Christine Ramos of the Broward program. "She gives us detailed reports via text or pager, or she leaves us voice mails, giving us all the information we need."

Norma also has built good relationships with her programs' facilities, having impressed the facilities' case managers with her detailed patient follow-ups, notes Bonnie Bomarito, the call center's customer service supervisor. And when she's finished with her work, Norma always offers to assist her co-workers, thus helping to make the admissions process as smooth and efficient as possible.

"Norma is a wonderful example of what VITAS is all about," says Bonnie. "Since she is often the first person a potential patient might speak with, her kind and caring manner makes them comfortable enough to set an appointment." Let those emotions flow, Norma!

*"I can sense people's
anger and hear the fear
in their voices over the
telephone, and I know
how it feels to be in
that kind of pain."
—Norma Sanchez
Admissions Coordinator,
SE Admissions Call Center*



Cecile Tremblay
 Central Florida
*VITAS Award for
 Volunteer Achievement*

Cecile Brings Friendship and Furniture to VITAS Patients

Cecile Tremblay had just retired from 25 years as a financial manager for AI&T when she was perusing her church bulletin one Sunday morning.

“There I was, wondering what I was going to do with my life, and there was a notice in the bulletin about volunteering at VITAS,” says Cecile, who had already been volunteering at a local hospital and school but wanted to do more.

Cecile thought VITAS could use her office skills, but then-Volunteer Services Manager Linn Wheeler had a different idea. “She encouraged me to try a patient visit,” recalls Cecile. “She said, ‘Just one visit, just to see if you like it.’ So I nervously agreed, and after my first visit, I was hooked.”

Cecile’s first patient was a lonely, 96-year-old nursing home resident. “She seemed so grateful to have a friend at the end of her journey ... I was convinced I had chosen the right thing.

“You get an overwhelming feeling of love in your heart when you know you’re bringing peace to someone who is frightened and vulnerable,” says Cecile, a VITAS volunteer for six years.

Cecile has also brought food, clothing, and furniture to her patients, as she did for a destitute, terminally ill mother of five, whose grown children were mentally or physically challenged and could not help her with her care or the upkeep of her home.

As a specialty volunteer, Cecile has held long vigils with dying patients so they were not alone, and she has even gone to prison for VITAS—to help arrange for a patient’s incarcerated daughter to see her mother before she died. As a Paw Pals® volunteer, she has brought her Pomeranian, Ziggy, on patient visits, and she and has taken patients’ animals to the vet.

“I have gained friendships, confidence and a profound trust in God through this work,” says Cecile. “I’m so glad I read that message in my church bulletin that morning.”

They’re the Tops

VITAS Recognizes Top Performers in Sales & Marketing

The VITAS Leadership Council recognized 35 employees for top performance in 2008 in their roles as general manager, director of market development, patient care administrator, medical director, VITAS representative, team manager and admissions manager.

“The recipients of Leadership Council status in those categories met specific key performance indicators that contribute to the success of

VITAS and embody our VITAS Values,” explains VITAS Vice President of Market Development and Sales Donald Gaddy. The VITAS executive team also approved their selection.

The Leadership Council National Winners represent the top 5 percent of performers in sales and marketing. They are pictured here and on page 7.

2008 National Leadership Council Winners in Sales & Marketing

Edith Beroldi



*Patient Care
 Administrator*
Broward

Linda Brown



*Physician/
 Geographic Rep*
**Los Angeles/
 Ventura County**

Suzanne Burgos



*Patient Care
 Administrator*
Philadelphia

Victoria Chrysokos



Nursing Home Rep
Chicagoland NW

Rakesh Chugh, MD



Medical Director
Chicagoland South

Shelia Clark



General Manager
Sacramento

Brian Davis



General Manager
San Francisco Bay

Kris DeVitto



Director of
Market Dev
Brevard

Melissa Erben



Assisted Living
Facility Rep
Dade-Monroe

Urban
Freudenberg, Jr.



Home Care/Nursing
Home Rep
Cincinnati

Barbara Garwood



Home Care Rep
Los Angeles/
Ventura County

Jennifer Gibson



Patient Care
Administrator
San Francisco Bay

Bernadette Giesler



Physician/
Geographic Rep
Houston

Amy Gladney



Nursing Home Rep
Philadelphia

Hyacinth Hamilton



Nursing Home Rep
Broward

June Hunt



Physician/
Geographic Rep
Orange County

Kimberly Jackson



Physician/
Geographic Rep
Los Angeles/
Ventura County

Sveta Khamishon



Physician/
Geographic Rep
Sacramento

Denise Kline



Director of
Market Dev
San Francisco Bay

Patricia Kneifl



Home Care Rep
Inland-Empire

Maureen Knips



General Manager
Dade-Monroe

Nancy Lane



Long Term Care Rep
Inland-Empire

Donetta Lanier



Nursing Home Rep
Chicagoland South

Kathleen Macaluso



Continuous Care Rep
Palm Beach

William McMurray



Physician/
Geographic Rep
Dallas

Jane Merritt



Director of
Market Dev
Palm Beach

Patrice Morse



Home Care Rep
Brevard

Jennifer Nygaard



General Manager
Volusia/Flagler

Wanda Poston



Physician/
Geographic Rep
San Gabriel Cities

Karen Preston



Home Care Rep
San Gabriel Cities

Sally Sample, MD



Home Care Rep
San Gabriel Cities

Diana Smith



Patient Care
Administrator
Palm Beach

Eric Stewart



Director of
Market Dev
Atlanta

Allison Tillem



Long Term Care Rep
New Jersey North

Kerri Wheeler



Physician/
Geographic Rep
San Francisco Bay

Mixing & Mingling

Leadership Council National Winners Honored in Miami

The Leadership Council National Winners for 2008 came together in March at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Miami Beach for a few days of sun, sand and camaraderie (although it was unseasonably chilly those few days in Miami).

Here are some photos from the main awards event, where 148 people, including the winners, their guests and senior VITAS executives, ate and danced together well into the night.

1. From left: Keith Anfield, husband of Leadership Council National Winner Donetta Anfield (sitting across from Keith); Kevin Lanier, husband of Leadership Council National Winner Donetta Lanier (sitting next to Kevin); and Leadership Council National Winner Elijah Ellison relax in the art deco-style lounge at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. **2.** Broward Patient Care Administrator Jeff Mack and Broward Business Manager Barbara Slowik were on hand to cheer on their Broward co-workers who placed as Leadership Council National Winners. (Continued below)



Editor: Christine Lyall Graphic Design: Beatrice McClelland

Send stories or ideas to VitalSigns@vitas.com

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It is not intended for general distribution outside of VITAS.

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3. Leadership Council National Winner Dr. Sally Sample, medical director in Sacramento, and her guest, Michael Paddy, indulge in desserts from the dessert buffet at the awards event. **4.** From left: Emily Devor, wife of Leadership Council National Winner Brad Devor, chats with Leadership Council National Winner Barbara Garwood at the cocktail reception that preceded the awards dinner. **5.** From left: Kaitlin DeVitto, sister to Leadership Council National Winner Kris DeVitto (right), sample the desserts at the awards events.