News

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Making Memories Program Comforts Veteran and Family

Above: On Dec. 11, 2009, staff fulfilled the wish of World War II Navy Veteran James Taylor of spending an enchanting evening with this wife Shirley of 43 years. ***Photos: VA/*** Jim Robertson

Enriching the lives of Veterans with life-limiting illnesses is the goal of a special program at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center.

"The Making Memories Program was developed at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center (MVAMC) under the Hospice/Palliative Care program," said Hospice/Palliative Care Case Manager Carmen Rodriguez-Munyan. "It is the same concept as the community "Make-A-Wish" program, in that a Veteran diagnosed with a serious life-limiting illness shares with us what they would like to do before they become too sick to be able to do the activity. As a team, we then make it happen."

On Dec. 11, 2009, staff fulfilled the last of Navy World War II Veteran James Taylor of spending more time with his wife, Shirley.

According to Rodriguez-Munyan, Taylor wished to go home and be with his wife but circumstances prevented this from happening.

"So we 'brought home' to him," said Rodriguez-Munyan. "Mr. Taylor's interests centered on astronomy, classical music, Italian food—and the love for his wife—so that became the theme for their event together."

Using his hospital room and some good planning, the Hospice/Palliative Care staff made the event memorable.

"We found out their favorite foods, decorated the room, and arranged transportation for Mrs. Taylor to come to the Medical Center," said Rodriguez-Munyan. "All of this would not have been possible if not for the support of staff, our Hospice/Palliative Care volunteer, Cathy Bowden, and the La Trattoria Restaurant in Martinsburg that donated the meals."

Married for 43 years, the Taylor's raised two sons, Steve and Kenneth, and had two grandchildren. During his lifetime, James Taylor spent four years working with the airlines, served as a teacher for special education for three years, and worked with the U.S. Postal Service as a rural carrier in Falling Waters, W.Va. "He was very proud that he designed and built his solar home using self-taught construction knowledge and skills," said Rodriguez-Munyan.

Mr. Taylor passed away on Jan. 3, 2010, while Shirley sang to him and held his hand. "We are proud to have been able to care for Mr. Taylor," said Rodriguez-Munyan, "and that we could have provided a last wish for this American Hero."

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The Martinsburg VA Medical Center mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. Located in West Virginia, the Medical Center offers a comprehensive range of services, including internal medicine, ambulatory surgery, audiology and speech pathology, dental, nursing home, nutrition, podiatry, prosthetics, women's health, mental health, hospice/palliative care, and rehabilitation medicine. With a service area of nearly 130,000 veterans in West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, the Medical Center operates three VA-staffed Outpatient Clinics in Cumberland and Hagerstown, Md., and Stephens City, Va., and three contract clinics in Franklin and Petersburg, W.Va. and Harrisonburg, Va. Construction for a new clinic in Fort Detrick, Md. has started with an opening tentatively scheduled in Fall 2010.