



Carl Vinson VA Medical Center, 1826 Veterans Blvd., Dublin, GA 31021



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dublin VA veterans get annual visit from Bleckley County Middle School Girls Softball team

Dublin, Ga. – For the second year, members of the Bleckley County Middle School Girls Softball team recently visited veterans at the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin. While at the VA, the team toured the facility to see how VA operates and met resident veterans in the facility's Community Living Center (CLC).

Head Coach Chance Pittman was joined by assistant coaches Caroline Chappelle and Kaylee Barrs.

Coach Chance Pittman sees it as a chance to build his players' character.

"It's good for them to meet veterans and see what it takes to keep our country free. It's heartwarming because they were so eager to come. We want to do more than just coach a game, we want to teach our girls life lessons that go well beyond sports. Some of the girls have been corresponding with the veterans through cards and letters so they feel like they already know them," Pittman said.

Pittman said the team will return next year and that he sees the visits as an extension of Bleckley County's patriotic sense.

"Folks in Bleckley are very dedicated to veterans, so the team is being exposed to a long-held tradition," Pittman said.

On Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Veteran's Day, Highway 26 entering Cochran, Georgia is lined with American Flags with the names of its sons and daughters attached to U.S. flags. The Bleckley County courthouse lawn has crosses with the names and wars of those from Bleckley County who died serving their country.

Melanie Fish, mother of one of the players, likes knowing that her daughter, Addison, is learning good citizenship lessons while playing on the team.

"As a softball parent and VA employee for the past five years, I truly value the team's visits with our veterans. It's a joy to watch the girls listen to veterans' stories, share laughs, and receive their encouragement and prayers. The girls especially love seeing the softballs they handed out last year still proudly displayed in the veterans' rooms—it shows how lasting those moments are," Fish said.

She noted that connections made are often ongoing.

What makes it even more meaningful is that the connection continues after the visits. The players often ask how the veterans are doing, and many veterans check in on how the team is playing out

on the field. These visits bless both groups and teach the girls powerful lessons about respect, kindness, and gratitude.

In addition to meeting veterans and hearing their stories, the students visited a variety of areas of the medical center with many of them expressing an interest in pursuing medical careers. A veteran who met with the girls likened the visit to receiving one from his granddaughters.

The team met with interim medical center director Lenearo Ashford, presenting him with a team t-shirt.

“We love having the team here. It brightens our veterans’ day and ours,” Ashford said.

Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) chief Keith Griffin encouraged others to visit the medical center.

“These visits make our veterans happy and give members of our Middle Georgia community a chance to see how we are caring for America’s heroes. I hope these groups will reach out to make a visit,” Griffin said.

VA social worker Greg Senters, who has coordinated the visits each year, said the plan is to make the visits an annual event.

“I’d like to see this become part of the team’s traditions,” Senters said.

Many of the veterans living at Dublin VA have limited mobility, and others do not have much family remaining, so visits from others can contribute directly to better healthcare outcomes.

“We know that social supports are a key indicator for positive healthcare outcomes and for quality of life. Receiving visitors has a very positive result,” Senters said.

Visiting Dublin veterans may be bringing the team luck as in Thursday’s game with Dublin Middle School Irish Bleckley won 15-0.

Those interested in arranging a visit to the Dublin VA can contact Keith Griffin at Keith.Griffin@va.gov or 478-272-1210 ext. 72439. Information about events at the VA are also available on their Facebook page at “Dublin VA Medical Center.”

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Photo credits:

- 1) Bleckley Middle School Girls Softball team visits Dublin VA veterans
- 2) VA director Ashford presented with Bleckley Middle School Girls Softball team t-shirt
- 3) Bleckley County Schools regularly honor Middle Georgia veterans

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