

# FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR

June 15, 2010

## VA Martinsburg Wins Sustainability Award

MARTINSBURG, W.Va.—The 577-bed Martinsburg VA Medical Center was awarded the 2009 VA Sustainability Achievement Award from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Food and Nutrition staff was given the award for its Waste Watchers program, which reduces the department's waste. The Waste Watchers program focuses waste reduction efforts in three areas: source reduction, food donation and composting.

The first step in the program was to track how much waste was created. The staff manually weighed and tracked pre-consumer waste in April 2008. They found that about 1,500 pounds of pre-consumer food waste was created each week. In December 2009, an electronic tracking system was implemented to help track waste. Then the department started reducing waste at the source. "We started looking at better forecasting," said Annemarie Price, operations manager. "Unfortunately, there is going to be food waste. We have a patient cafeteria and we strive to offer options. We want the very last veteran to get the same selection as everybody else. This program has helped us look at food waste and reduce it."



The next step was composting pre-consumer waste, which began in May 2009. "After every meal in the cafeteria, we put any waste in biodegradable bags," Price said. "We store these bags in our freezers so that the local farmer who takes our compost only has to come twice a month for pick ups."

The third part of the program is donating leftover food to a local non-profit, Potomac Highlands Support Services, which has veteran housing on the hospital's campus. Leftover meals from the cafeteria are donated to the organization.

Since starting the Waste Watchers program, food waste has decreased by 80% to 300 pounds per week.