



Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs



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First Veteran Vaccinated for COVID at State Veterans Center

FRANKFORT, Ky (December 22, 2020) Army Private First Class Norris Hardison had her sights on the COVID-19 vaccine from the start.

When news broke of the first local COVID-19 vaccine trials a few months ago, PFC Hardison requested help signing up to be a participant in a COVID-19 vaccine trial she had seen on the news. “I am not afraid,” she told THVC staff. “I want to be a part of this trial to help make sure it is safe for my family and my grandchildren, as well as for the staff who take care of me here at Thomson-Hood.” Unfortunately, PFC Hardison was not selected as a participant in the vaccine clinical trials. But throughout quarantine, she has continued to follow news stories about vaccine development and was overjoyed to hear of its recent approval. “I want to be first in line!” she shouted. “I want everyone to see me take it and know that is safe. Every single person should get this vaccine. I have been talking to my family, and even my daughter, who is afraid of needles, is going to take it. It’s the best way to protect us all from this COVID virus and I am just so happy that it’s finally here. ”

“We cannot overlook how fortunate we are to have a vaccine against this virus, and so soon after it was identified.” said Governor Andy Beshear. “Science, technology, human ingenuity and personal dedication got us within sight of the end, and they will get us home safely.”

For more than seven months, the staff and families of veterans at Thomson-Hood Veterans Center in Wilmore seemed to be holding their breath. Every day, more cases of COVID-19 in nursing homes and more deaths of nursing home residents in Kentucky filled the news. Yet somehow, THVC had been spared.

Until September 12. One veteran tested positive. But the invisible and insidious nature of this new virus turned one case to a dozen before you could hardly blink. Then 50, then 80. And then the veterans started dying.

“In 30 years of working in long-term care facilities, I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Mark Bowman, executive director of the Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers.

As the virus escalated, so did the battle against it. For staff, it was personal. These veterans were family. Everybody from Dr. Scott and her nursing staff working through heavy PPE in the COVID unit, to housekeeping staff cleaning and disinfecting nonstop, to food service providing in-room meals, to maintenance transforming double rooms to singles to keep veterans well separated – all were fighting. They took on double shifts as fellow staffers fell into quarantine. They held themselves together to comfort in their last moments veterans they had cared for and laughed with for years.

And though the casualties were almost more than they could bear, they won. They beat the virus back just in time for vaccines to arrive. Today, PFC Hardison became the first veteran in a state veterans center to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Ninety veterans and more than 100 staff are being vaccinated at THVC today. Vaccinations are tentatively scheduled for January 9 at Western Kentucky Veterans Center in Hanson and vaccinations at Eastern Kentucky Veterans Center in Hazard and Radcliff Veterans Center will follow soon after.

“I cannot say enough about the staff at all four of our State Veterans Centers,” said Keith Jackson, commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. “Their fearless dedication to our veterans throughout this ordeal is no less than we expect of them, but it still leaves me in awe.”

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