

## **The VA To Go Smoke Free**

The Department of Veterans Affairs will implement a new smoking policy effective October 2019. As stated in their news release of 10 June, all VA facilities will be smoke-free. The policy applies to all patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors at all health care facilities. As stated in their news release “Although VA has historically permitted smoking in designated areas, there is growing evidence that smoking and exposure to secondhand and thirdhand smoke creates significant medical risks, and risks to safety and direct patient care that are inconsistent with medical requirements and limitations. Accordingly, VA’s Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has collaborated with key stakeholders to update and recertify the policy to be consistent with the department’s commitment to Veterans and the community.” Notices have been or soon will be mailed to all Veterans who receive care from the VA, a few of us have already received the notice. I’ve been contacted by a couple Veterans who are upset by the change in policy. The most prevailing argument I’ve heard is that our Veterans served out country and should be allowed the privilege of smoking, if they want. Although I understand this argument, the argument the VA is making is very strong, secondhand and thirdhand smoking does create health risks for others. The smoking ban applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco and applies to electronic nicotine delivery systems such as e-cigarettes, vape pens and e-cigars.

In June, the VA began implementing the VA Mission Act of 2018 that will offer an urgent care benefit providing eligible Veterans with greater choice and access to medical care. It is called urgent care where Veterans can go without an appointment for treatment of minor injuries and illnesses such as colds, sore throats and minor infections. This will reduce the number of Veterans going to the emergency room for minor health issues. It is similar to what hospitals in our area are already doing. Dental care is excluded from this program, you still have to schedule with a dentist. According to the VA’s website, both Sanford and Essentia are approved health care providers, including the Sanford Clinic and Essentia Clinic in Moorhead. You will need your VA card when checking in.

The Moorhead American Legion Post 21 will be holding three-days of events to celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, 21, 22 and 23 June at the Legion Post, 303 30 St N. Friday events include a meat raffle, bingo, music on the patio and bean bag and horseshoe completion. Saturday is the big day with kids’ activities, burgers, a dunk tank, a bean bag tournament, and music throughout the afternoon and evening. A legion baseball alumni game will be held at Concordia at 1:00 pm. The celebration finishes on Sunday with a pancake breakfast, silent auction and bake sale and a special raffle. Everyone is welcome.