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The Corps and the Department of Veterans Affairs are partners in delivering the Canandaigua VA Medical Center project, which will provide a new facility and upgraded health care infrastructure to approximately 65,000 veterans living in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York.

Modern Medicine

Corps partners with VA on
state-of-the-art facility

By Robin Roenker

VETERANS IN THE FINGER Lakes region of New York will soon have access to a fully modernized VA Medical Center in Canandaigua.

The goal of the two-phase, \$346 million project — underway as a partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Veterans Affairs — is to re-envision the 1930s-era, 150-acre VA Canandaigua campus to meet 21st-century patient care needs.

“When this project is done, pretty much everything that will touch the veterans will be new,” says David Price with the Department of Veterans Affairs in New York, who is serving as the VA’s major project manager, facility planner and chief supply chain officer for the medical center.

Ongoing or planned renovations include upgrades to existing building infrastructure and utilities systems, a new chiller plant and electrical substation, modernization of the campus’ administration building and

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Construction work continues on the 84,000-square-foot outpatient clinic at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center. Preserving and incorporating the original building's 1930s-era facade required significant engineering workarounds.

construction of an 84,000-square-foot, three-story outpatient clinic, which will house primary care as well as a range of VA specialty services, including dental care, dermatology and orthopedics as well as a radiology lab and pharmacy.

Campus improvements, started in early 2018 and set to be completed by late 2023, will also include a new community center and eight long-term care cottages that will provide modern, private living spaces to 96 veterans.

While some older buildings are being demolished to make way for new construction, as much of the historic nature of the Canandaigua campus as possible is being retained. Most notably, an original 1930s-era building facade was incorporated into the design of the new outpatient clinic — a preservation goal that required significant engineering workarounds.

“Tying in those existing walls led to a number of design challenges,” says David Gerland with the Louisville District, who worked as the Corps’ senior resident engineer on the Canandaigua project until his retirement in March. “We had to work to fit mechanical systems and modern utilities systems — communication, fiber, internet, all those things that of course were nonexistent 80 years ago — into spaces that weren’t originally designed to fit them.”

Particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, services to veterans have not been significantly disrupted during the project, thanks to a seamless partnership between the VA Office of Construction and Facilities Management (CFM), the Canandaigua VA Medical Center and the Corps’ Buffalo District, which is overseeing the project with assistance from Gerland and others

at the Louisville District, which has construction expertise.

“It was very much a partnering effort between the three agencies,” says Gerald DiPaola of the Buffalo District, who is serving as overall project manager for the Corps. “We are all committed to working together to find solutions to any challenges that pop up, so that we can keep the campus up and running to serve veterans of the Finger Lakes area, basically 24/7.”

Drew Downen, senior resident engineer with CFM, even shared office space with the Corps team overseeing the project, helping facilitate easy communication between the two agencies.

“I think that’s why the partnership has been so successful,” Downen says. “We didn’t think of ourselves as two separate entities. We worked directly with each other. We could walk across the office

and say, ‘Hey, I’ve got this problem to solve. Do you know anything about it?’”

Once complete, the Canandaigua campus will directly benefit the estimated 65,000 veterans living in the region. But its enhancements will also allow the VA to better serve veterans across the country, since the campus houses one of three Veterans Crisis Line call centers that assists vets dealing with post-traumatic stress, thoughts of suicide and other mental health issues.

The fact that this project directly benefits veterans has made it all the more rewarding for those involved, including David Talbot, a Corps senior program manager who joined the project this spring.

“To be able to serve people who served our nation through this work is definitely something that I’m very proud to be able to do,” Talbot says.



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— GERALD DIPAOLO,
project manager