

Press Release 1/9/08**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Major League Baseball Umpire Visits the Brooklyn VA***by Raymond P. Aalblue, VA New York Harbor Healthcare System Public Affairs Officer*

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK --- There are scores of people who visit Veterans in VA Medical Centers in every state in the union. There are very few who visit Veterans in every VA hospital.

One of those volunteers, if not the only one, is former Major League Umpire Larry Barnett. Since 1976, he has visited patients in every VA hospital across the country. A member of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) VA Voluntary Service program Barnett retired from calling balls and strikes in 1999, and then served as the major leagues' supervisor of umpires in 2000-2001.

Now he visits about 50 medical centers a year, often appearing at two hospitals in one day. On this trip, he visited both the New York and Brooklyn campuses of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System.



At each of the facilities Larry Barnett visits, he presents a jacket to a lucky patient. Army Veteran Tisheba Sykes was the recipient in Brooklyn.

An Army Veteran, Barnett brings smiles to all who meet him. A dozen patients at the Brooklyn campus of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System really enjoyed the baseball highlights he showed them and the answers he gave to their many questions. "Who is the best catcher," was one of the questions thrown his way. He answered, "Munson and Fisk were two great catchers, but this guy "Pudge" Rodriguez is really good. He can pick you off at third real easy."

He also said the best all-around player is Ken Griffey, Jr. who is also the nicest guy in baseball. "You can tell why," Barnett added. "His father Ken Griffey, Sr. was a great role model. He wouldn't expect anything else from his son."

The number one graduate in Umpire School, Barnett started calling balls and strikes in the minor leagues and by the time he was 24 he was in the majors. Barnett officiated in 4 World Series, a record 7 American League Championship Series and in 4 All-Star games. One of the most memorable events for Barnett was being behind the plate when Cal Ripken of the Baltimore Orioles broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive game streak. "That was special," remarked Barnett.

Barnett started visiting Veterans hospitals at the request of a friend who is a member of the DAV. At one of the hospitals, he stopped to chat with a blinded Veteran patient for a few moments. As he began to leave, the patient began to cry and asked him to stay just a while longer. He said, "It was one of the most moving experiences of my life."

Barnett says the Veterans at VA medical centers don't get many visitors and he tries to entertain them with light and humorous baseball stories. "There are a lot of funny incidents that happen on and off the field in the course of a season, and I really enjoy sharing them with these Veterans," he said.

Tom Smith, the Chief of Recreation Services at the NYHHS, was pleased Barnett came to the city, "We see a lot of arguments between umps and managers on TV, but we can't hear it. Larry gave us all insight into what really goes on when the ump is discussing a close call with a manager. All the Veterans really enjoyed the highlights and behind the scenes anecdotes."

One such incident involved Lou Pinella when he was the manager with the Yankees. Barnett was calling "balls and strikes" and Pinella didn't agree with one of the calls. "Where was that pitch at..." Pinella yelled. Barnett told him he wouldn't answer him because he didn't end his sentence with a subject. Pinella then rephrased his question, "Where was that pitch at stupid."

Barnett summed up his visit best when he said, "These guys gave up their limbs or their health for this country. That's become very important to me, especially since I've been able to meet and talk with them on a first-hand basis. I feel warm inside when I leave a hospital. If I've made three Veterans happy, I feel I've accomplished something important." On this particular trip, he made twelve Veterans happy in Brooklyn.

For more information and to obtain a digital photo, please contact the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System Public Affairs Office at 718-630-2804.