

SARASOTA, FLORIDA -- Congressman Vern Buchanan today welcomed the newly named director of the future VA National Cemetery in Sarasota. Sandra Beckley began her Veterans Administration career in 1972 and has served as the director of national cemeteries in Atlanta, Georgia; Pensacola, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; and Florence, South Carolina. She was appointed to her new position in Sarasota on October 14, 2007.

"We are fortunate to have someone of Sandra's experience to guide this important project," said Buchanan. "She is very knowledgeable about cemetery activities, construction, and community relations. We welcome her to Florida's 13th Congressional District where she will be responsible for all burial and maintenance operations at the cemetery."

The VA announced today that the cemetery has been named the "Sarasota VA National Cemetery". According to the VA, the name of the cemetery has to be descriptive of the geographic location. The cemetery will be located east of Interstate 75 on Clark Road in Sarasota, but will serve nearly 400,000 veterans living within 75 miles of Sarasota.

"This new national shrine will be a magnificent, lasting tribute to the service of military veterans in the greater Sarasota area," said Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield.

Currently in the design phase, officials expect to begin the construction in May 2008 with the first burials anticipated in October 2008. The entire first phase of the project expected to be complete in 2011. The 60 acre site will provide 25,700 casket and cremation burials. The entire property is expected to provide burial capacity beyond the year 2050.

The House and Senate fiscal year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Administration appropriations bills include \$27.8 million in federal funding for the construction of the cemetery on Clark Road in Sarasota County. The bills need to be reconciled in conference.