

# Connections

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL  
PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION  
COALITION'S GOLD AWARD

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

April 2010  
VOLUME 10, ISSUE 4



**What can a child's sketch teach us about DHHS? Turn page to find out.**

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You can follow DHHS at <http://twitter.com/NebraskaDHHS>

## DHHS in the News Update. . .

Here are a few headlines of news releases recently issued by Communications & Legislative Services about DHHS programs. You can read and subscribe to all DHHS news releases from the DHHS [Newsroom](#). You can also listen to [sound bites](#) issued with releases.

Go to [DHHS In The News](#) for links to Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal Star articles updated daily involving DHHS programs and services.

[DHHS Promotes Diabetes Risk Risk](#)

March 25

[DD Summit Offers Opportunities for Families and Guardians](#)

March 12

[Treatment is Available and Effective for Problem Gamblers](#)

March 2

Have a story idea you think DHHS should be sharing with media? Contact Communications & Legislative Services at (402) 471-9108!

## Making Better Tomorrows: DHHS through the Eyes of a Child



When 11-year-old **Noah Gould** and his 5th-grade classmates were assigned a class project of designing an ad for the Norfolk Daily News, Noah asked his father **Robert**, a Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinator in the DHHS Norfolk office, about his job.

“Do you really make people’s lives better,” Noah asked, “like the DHHS slogan says?”

“Yes, I believe we do,” came his dad’s reply.

A few days later, Noah showed his dad the finished product. It showed people facing challenges coming to the DHHS Norfolk office with clouds overhead giving way to a sunnier tomorrow. He told his dad he thought that what his dad and other DHHS workers do was “really neat.”

“The look on Noah’s face and how he said it was very moving,” says Robert. “I always felt this kind of work was very important, but I never really realized how important until looking through my son’s eyes. Doing work that’s not always valued or appreciated, it meant a lot to me.”

Sometimes looking at the work we do through the eyes of a child can help us all see things more clearly.

### make the connection . . .

**DHHS Public Web site:** <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov>

**DHHS Employee Web site:** <http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov>

**DHHS System Advocate:** 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at [diana.duran@nebraska.gov](mailto:diana.duran@nebraska.gov)

*Connections* is published monthly for employees of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services by Communications and Legislative Services (CLS).

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# The Good Life:

A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans

By CEO Kerry Winterer

I hope that by this time one of your regular activities includes checking out the enhanced Employee Website homepage and its new features.

Your feedback about the redesigned homepage has been very positive, and I want to thank each of you who commented to me about it. I hope it continues to grow as a way for all of us to share information and achievements with co-workers across the state.

I'm sure you could tell that I enjoyed "talking with you" through the "In the Box" video. This is something I intend to do again because I think it's important for you to hear directly from me, and a video seems like a more personal way to do that in such a large organization. A few of you commented on my acting abilities. I don't expect any Academy Award nominations, but it was fun to do anyway.

As I mentioned on the video, the new Employee Website homepage is a direct result of the employee survey you completed last December.

In your comments (and I did review them all) you overwhelmingly said that communication within the Department should be improved and more should be done to keep employees in the loop. I agree with you that these are important characteristics for a healthy organization and they set the tone for a good working environment.

Another thing that many of you said is that you hoped this survey wouldn't be like others that you feel have been put on a shelf and forgotten.

It's important to me that everybody feels like we are on the same page and all working as a team, and in order for that to work we have to share information. Some people already do this very well, and for others it will have to become part of their routine. This is the direction we're going.

Sharing information is only part of the communication equation, though. The other part is listening and understanding.

I want to hear from employees as we move DHHS forward, so I'll be looking for additional ways to talk with and hear from you, again based on survey results.

I'm also sharing the Department's mission and story with people outside of DHHS. During March and April, I'll have talked to hundreds of people in organizations like the League of Women Voters, Rotary and Kiwanis in Lincoln, Omaha, Hastings, Kearney, and North Platte, and I'll add more throughout the summer. I feel it's important for the public to meet me too, and to hear about the breadth of our responsibilities and the good work being done by DHHS staff, every day, across the state.

Thank you for your comments, for your interest in improving DHHS, for helping people live better lives...and for checking the Employee Website regularly!



**Kerry Winterer during video shoot for enhanced Employee Homepage**

*Photo: Bill Wiley*

Continued on next page

Official Nebraska Government Website

# DHHS EMPLOYEE INTRANET

THE SOURCE FOR DHHS EMPLOYEES

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH | CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES | DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES | MEDICAID & LONG TERM CARE | PUBLIC HEALTH | VETERANS' HOMES

Search Clear

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## NEED to KNOW

[DHHS News Releases](#) - [DHHS In The News](#)

### Employee Bulletin Board

[- Submit a Bulletin](#)

[Improvements](#)  
Crystal Hier

[1st one on](#)  
Amy Winter

[Welcome to YOUR Improved Employee Homepage!](#)  
Kerry Winterer

### "In The Box"

#### New Homepage Features

0:00 / 3:26

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[DHHS Help Desk](#)  
[Library Consortium](#)  
[Security Awareness Training](#)

**NIS**  
Nebraska Information System

The redesigned Employee Homepage that includes the new Employee Bulletin Board, Need to Know, Neat to Know, and In the Box sections. This screenshot is from the very first day the new page design was published and includes Kerry Winterer's video and his first post to the bulletin board. *Screenshot: Greg Votava*

## Telling the DHHS Story:

CEO speaks with community groups to enhance Department image

CEO **Kerry Winterer** has launched a speaking tour around the state to ensure that Nebraskans know the many ways in which DHHS helps people live better lives. In all of these speaking opportunities, he provides an overview of DHHS services and success stories.

Winterer wants people to know that DHHS priorities include focusing on customer service, using tax dollars as effectively and efficiently as possible, and being as accountable and transparent as possible. He tells every group he speaks to that DHHS employees really care about the work they do.

Winterer also wants to dispel myths about the Department and its services, like the notion that DHHS employees take children from their homes. Fact is, only law enforcement or the courts have the authority to remove children from their homes because of abuse or neglect.

By telling the DHHS story, Winterer hopes to enhance the public's understanding of DHHS programs and services. Connections will update you on his future outreach efforts to set the record straight.

# State's Top Doc: We could be healthiest nation in one generation!

By Marla Augustine

“Our kids could be the healthiest nation in one generation if we take action,” says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer.

You might think that we're one of the healthiest nations in the world but we're not. U.S. life expectancy ranks 46th in the world, behind Japan, South Korea and most of Europe.

Public health has made major strides in our country in the last century—immunizations, safe drinking water, seatbelts, smoking prevention and cessation, and health promotion. In 1900, the average age at death was 48. Today it's 78.

“Thanks to public health, we've gained 30 years of life that our great-grandparents didn't have,” Dr. Schaefer said. “Unfortunately, the growing rate of obesity among children may mean that our kids will live shorter lives than their parents.”

Obesity is associated with Type II diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer. All three of these are in Nebraska's top ten causes of death.

What will it take to meet the goal of the American Public Health Association—“the healthiest nation in one generation?”

It will take healthy mother/healthy baby check-ups, breastfeeding, clean air, school nutrition programs, safe workplaces, services for the elderly, STD awareness and prevention, and more public health efforts.

Public health ensures safe communities that provide conditions in which health can flourish—those that supply jogging trails and bike paths, that make farmers markets and grocery stores with healthful foods readily available in all neighborhoods, that have smoking bans for indoor workplaces, and that provide safe playgrounds for children.

“A healthier America won't be possible without the support of our communities,” Dr. Schaefer said. “And by adopting a healthier lifestyle, we encourage others to do the same. We can teach a new generation that simple actions—like eating healthy, exercising and not smoking—will lead to happier and longer lives. Healthy children become healthy adults.”

To learn more about public health (and see a creative video), check out <http://www.generationpublichealth.org/>.

*Thank You* to public health employees  
from Dr. Joann Schaefer

It's Public Health Month. I want to recognize all you do for Nebraskans every day.

From issuing professional licenses to ensuring safe drinking water, surveying facilities, supporting breastfeeding, crunching numbers, following up on cases of tuberculosis, investigating food-borne outbreaks, helping people test their homes for radon, making sure that flu vaccine is delivered to local health departments—these are activities that help Nebraskans lead better lives.

So, hats off to you and Happy Public Health Month!

*DOC*





# Drinking Water & Environmental Health's Record of Progress

By Jerry Crisp

The Drinking Water and Environmental Health Section of the Division of Public Health has been earning international recognition in recent years. One reason for this is Water Well Standards program manager **Tom Christopherson**, who was notified in March that he had been named the 2011 McEllhiney Distinguished Lecturer.

"Your stature, as one of the most outstanding groundwater professionals in North America, will have tremendous effect on our goal to foster professional excellence for the ultimate purpose of protecting the world's groundwater resources," said **Richard Thron**, chair of the McEllhiney Lecture Series Task Force with the National Groundwater Research and Educational Foundation (NGWREF).

That organization provides up to \$12,000 for a lecture series and an additional \$8,000 for international travel.

Christopherson's first presentation will be the McEllhiney Lecture at the National Groundwater Association's Expo in Las Vegas in December. Additional invitations to speak will come from state and regional associations, foreign associations of groundwater contractors, academic institutions teaching water well technology, and water well regulators.

NGWREF often receives more requests for lectures than can be accommodated but encourages lecturers to visit at least 30 locations across the nation.

"The title of my lecture will be 'You Can Make a Difference,' and the Nebraska Grout Task Force study will be the topic," Christopherson says. "This was a groundbreaking research project, and the findings will impact the way ground water professionals view the protection of groundwater resources internationally."

According to DHHS Health Section Administrator **Jack Daniel**, "Nebraska is blessed to have on staff a person with national recognition in groundwater protection. The work that the Department has done in water well grout research over the past eight years is being recognized nationally, and Nebraska's grout research will affect water well construction both nationally and worldwide."

"The state is so lucky to have Tom, and this just proves the quality of work he contributes not only to the state but the nation and the field as a whole," adds **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Director of the DHHS Division of Public Health and Nebraska's Chief Medical Officer.



**Tom Christopherson**

## Drinking Water & Environmental Health's Record of Progress

For eight years, the DHHS Water Well Standards Program conducted a project to help ensure that water is safe to drink. A total of 168 water wells with transparent casings were drilled to observe what happens over time to the grout column that lines the well.

Over 800 hours of video were shot during a 16-month period to document the sealing properties of all types of wells. Grout is the sealing found between a well and excavated ground that stabilizes the well and keeps contaminants out of the water.

The study discovered that grout with bentonite and water develops cracks, while dry bentonite with wet sand above the water table seals and protects much better.

The study was a joint project of DHHS, the Nebraska Well Drillers Association, the Nebraska Conservation and Survey Division (part of the University of Nebraska School of Natural Resources), Baroid, Cetco, Wyo-ben Drilling Products, and Design Water Technologies.

# Peer support moves forward statewide

By Jeanne Atkinson

A new focus by the Division of Behavioral Health on creating and improving peer support in the areas of addiction or mental health is paying off.

“Peer support is a service provided by someone living with mental illness or addiction,” said **Carol Coussons de Reyes**, administrator of the Office of Consumer Affairs in the Division. “A peer has ‘been there, done that’ and can relate to others who are now in a similar situation.”

Thirty people from across the state attended an eight-day training on providing peer support in February. They can use the skills they learned to provide peer support for an employer, their own non-profit, or a local support group. In part, peer support training emphasizes relationship building with others and the community.

Fifteen of the 30 people trained will go on to train-the-trainer training, and they’ll participate in training the next class of peers.

A federal grant made it possible to bring in experts from Yale University’s Department of Psychiatry, a consulting firm from New Hampshire, and from Focus on Recovery-United of Connecticut to do the February training session.



Peer Support trainers from left to right: **Shery Mead, Heather McDonald, Chris Hansen and Chyrell Bellamy.**  
*Photo: Carol Coussons de Reyes*

# Vets’ Home a great training resource

By Jeanne Atkinson

The Grand Island Veterans’ Home (GIVH) is becoming recognized as a training facility for health care delivery.

“This is such a win-win,” said **Alex Willford**, administrator of the Home. “We’re creating a hands-on training opportunity for students that also highlights the clinical and teaching skills of GIVH staff.”

Being part of a student’s rotation is important, he said. It gives students a chance to experience working in a state-operated facility, and opens the door to that student coming back to work after graduation.

GIVH is involved in several training opportunities, including:

- ❖ Serving as a clinical training site for Central Community College for the nurse education programs.
- ❖ Providing clinical training site education for future social workers through a collaboration with the University of Nebraska at Kearney.
- ❖ Serving as a testing site for the Nebraska Health Care Association’s Certified Nursing Assistant teaching program.



The World War II Memorial Building at the Grand Island Veterans’ Home *Photo courtesy GIVH*

# Front Liners

There are thousands of stories to be told about DHHS employees who deliver direct customer services that *help people live better lives*. This is only one of them.

By Jerry Crisp

**Cheryl Trimm** has been a “QMRP” (Qualified Mental Retardation Professional) for three years with the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) and with DHHS for 12 years. As a “Q,” her job is to chair team meetings, advocate for people on her case load, and ensure that each person’s individual program plan is implemented.

A typical day for Trimm starts by touching base with the individuals living at 108 Kennedy Boulevard on campus to see how things are going. Multiple meetings plus documentation duties follow, and Cheryl fields phone calls from guardians and service coordinators.

“In addition to hanging out with the guys as much as possible, I also keep in close contact with direct support staff and other core team members,” she says. “That teamwork is vital to providing services that truly benefit the individuals we serve.”

BSDC has undergone major changes over the past three years in its efforts to come into compliance with federal standards.

“As a result, our jobs are ever-changing and that can create real challenges sometimes,” Trimm says. “But I am privileged to work with the best team in the state—employees who have supported people who live here in achieving some major goals, including social skills, community employment and successful transition to community life. This helps us all to meet all challenges head-on!”

Trimm recalls one individual who went back to school, now lives in the community, and has become his own guardian with the strong support of his family. Another individual, Donny Valenti, was previously more dependent but now travels on campus on his own and holds a job in a Beatrice factory.

“The best part of my job is knowing that the hard work of the team pays off in helping individuals live happy, integrated and successful lives,” she says.

Trimm’s contributions are appreciated by others.

“Cheryl is always willing to step up to the plate, and individuals she supports know she will be there for them no matter what,” says **Pam Spier-Edmond**, Neighborhood Services Assistant Administrator. “If you were lost on a desert island, you would want to be lost there with Cheryl. She will bring fun and laughter to being lost, and somehow she will figure out something that makes you feel like you’re not lost, even if you are.”

“Cheryl has been and continues to be a valuable part of the BSDC team,” adds CEO **Dan Howell**. “Her positive attitude and her unique ability to help create a culture of ‘not no, but how’ makes her a champion of BSDC efforts to be known as a service and not a place.”

DHHS employees like Cheryl Trimm and her teammates demonstrate that whenever personal commitment and a team approach are valued, employees are empowered to meet whatever challenges come their way.



Front Liner **Cheryl Trimm** with **Donny Valenti** (second from left) and other members of his 108 Kennedy Boulevard interdisciplinary team. From left, Shift Supervisor **Kem Portwood**, Human Services Treatment Specialist **George Clark**, Shift Supervisor **Jason Arnold** and Home Manager **Joe Johnson**

Photo: *Lindsay Mierau*



# May Observances

## Foster Parent Appreciation Month

At any time, approximately 3,000 children and teens are living with foster parents. During May, these foster parents are recognized for their willingness to care for our most vulnerable children.

Did you know there's always a need for more foster homes—especially those willing to welcome teenagers or brothers and sisters who want to stay together? If you're interested in learning more about this life-changing experience for both adults and children, call 1-800-7PARENT (1-800-772-7368) or go to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/chs/foc/focindex.htm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/chs/foc/focindex.htm).



## Adult Abuse Prevention Month

Almost 140,000 Nebraskans are age 65 and older. Many older Nebraskans are more active than ever before, but there are other older Nebraskans who exhibit impairments that make them more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, or exploitation.



Adult Protective Services (APS), a program of the Division of Children and Family Services, investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of adults who are 18 years of age and older and who have serious impairments that limit their ability to live independently. When abuse has occurred, APS may offer time-limited services and arrange for services in the community.

During 2009, Nebraska received 7,093 reports alleging possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation of vulnerable adults of all ages who were living in the home or a facility setting. During fiscal year 08-09, Adult Protective Services served almost 750 adult victims who were 60 years and older.

There are many types of adult abuse. They include:

- Physical abuse —infliction of physical pain or injury;
- Sexual abuse — unwanted sexual contact or activity;
- Neglect — failure to provide shelter, food, clothing, needed medical care;
- Self-neglect — failure to provide one's self with necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, needed medical care or financial management; and,
- Financial exploitation — taking of a vulnerable adult's resources by undue influence, coercion, or other means.

Be aware of indicators of abuse, neglect, or exploitation and if you have reason to believe a person is in a situation that would result in abuse or has been abused, make a report to the Adult Protective Services hotline. Call: 800-652-1999

For more information, go to: <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/nea/aps/apsindex.htm>.

## Women's Health Week

Observance of National Women's Health Week is May 9-15, 2010, and is sponsored by the National Office on Women's Health (OWH) in partnership with several national, state, and local organizations.

With the theme "It's Your Time," National Women's Health Week encourages women to take simple steps for a longer, healthier, and happier life. Important steps include:

- Getting at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or a combination of both each week
- Eating a nutritious diet

(article continued page 10)



- Visiting a health care professional to receive regular checkups and preventive screenings
- Avoiding risky behaviors, such as smoking and not wearing a seatbelt
- Paying attention to mental health, including getting enough sleep and managing stress

**National Women's Checkup Day** — a day where women across the country are urged to visit their doctor — will be held on May 10. In addition, the Woman Challenge, an eight-week online physical activity program, will be held May 9–July 3. For more information about National Women's Health Week, please visit <http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw>.

The Nebraska Women's Health Advisory Council will also sponsor the distribution of health information packets and Mother's Day cards to various locations throughout the state.

The DHHS Office of Women's and Men's Health will partner with local community agencies to coordinate events for National Men's Health Week, June 14-20, 2010. Information on all of these events will be posted on the Web at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth>.

For more information, or if you would like to sponsor an event for National Women's or Men's Health Week, please contact **Andrea Wenke** at 402-471-2772 or [andrea.wenke@nebraska.gov](mailto:andrea.wenke@nebraska.gov).



## Older Americans Month

May is Older Americans Month—a tradition dating back to 1963 to honor the legacies and ongoing contributions of older Americans and support them as they enter the next stage in life. This year's Older Americans Month theme—Age Strong! Live Long!—recognizes the diversity and vitality of today's older Americans who span three generations. Older Americans are living longer and are more active than ever before. And with the aging of the baby boomer generation—the largest in our nation's history—America's senior population is expected to number 71.5 million by 2030.

As the new generations of seniors become better educated and more financially secure than their predecessors, they are spending more time making significant contributions in their communities through civic and volunteer opportunities.

In fact, older Americans are a core component of service delivery to seniors. They volunteer at group meal sites and deliver food to homebound seniors; they act as escorts and provide transportation for older adults who cannot drive; they help seniors with home repair, shopping and errands; and they provide vital counseling, information and referral services. Their energy and commitment reminds all Americans—not just senior citizens and their caregivers—to do their part to enhance the quality of life for older generations.

The annual commemoration of Older Americans Month is our opportunity to recognize the contributions of older citizens and join them in providing services and support that empower the elderly. Americans of all ages and backgrounds can volunteer with programs that improve health literacy, increase access to quality health services, offer food and nutrition services, provide financial and housing counseling, sponsor social activities and community engagement, and more. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging by visiting <http://www.eldercare.gov> or calling 1-800-677-1116 to find out what you can do to strengthen services for older Americans, this month and all year round.

There are many programs and services available to Nebraska's older adults. To find out more about these programs, go to Aging Services at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/ags/ags-services.htm>.

## Nurse Appreciation Week (May 6 - 12)

**Florence Nightingale**, the "Lady with a Lamp," is considered the founder of the nursing profession. Her birthday is May 12.

Nurses work in many roles in DHHS. They are surveyors who inspect facilities, who work in DHHS' Medicaid & Long-Term Care Division, Behavioral Health's three Regional Centers, the four DHHS-operated Veterans' homes, the Beatrice State Developmental Center, and who work in the Licensure Unit providing guidance on issues of importance to nurses in the state.

There are 24,059 RNs and 6,055 LPNs licensed by DHHS.

National Nurses Week provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the spirit of nursing and acknowledge nurses' tireless efforts.



# In their own words

Letters to DHHS employees who are *helping people live better lives*

Dear **LaDonna R. Mead** (Children & Family Services Specialist Supervisor, DHHS Norfolk office):

I just wanted to commend **Judy Spale** (Children & Family Services Specialist, DHHS Columbus office) for her hard-working effort, efficient communication and assistance for my daughter. You have a sharp, on-the-ball, dedicated employee there, and she's not even in Lincoln! I hope she stays around for a while!

**Parent of a Lincoln client**

Dear **Michelle Cassell** (Children & Family Services Specialist, DHHS North Platte office):

Just wanted to drop you a note to say a big THANKS for all you have done to protect my son. Sometimes we get so caught up in what's wrong with a situation that we forget to see all the good things that are happening, too. My son is doing GREAT and, if it weren't for you, this would never have happened.

**A Grateful Parent**

Dear **Cheri Swanson** (Medicaid Payment Reviewer, State Office Building, Lincoln):

Thanks for all your help! It was just delightful to talk with a REAL person today who had answers and genuinely cared about my child. Wish we had more people just like you!

**A Grateful Parent**

Dear **Jana Peterson** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney):

On behalf of **Rich Skelton**, myself and the entire membership of Elk's of Kearney Lodge #984, thank you and your students for their assistance in helping us stage the "Elk's Hoop Shoot." Having your guys keep the ball moving during the competition really helps us get things done in an efficient and timely manner, which is invaluable to the shooters and all involved.

With over 60 boys and girls shooting in each group, this is a great benefit. We hope to see you again next year.

**Gregory W. Williams**  
Co-Chairman, Elk's Hoop Shoot

# In their own words

Letters to DHHS employees who are *helping people live better lives*

Dear **Lannelle Eastburn** (Unit Web Coordinator, Licensure Unit, Division of Public Health):

May I send a BIG thank you and congratulatory note for everyone working in the nursing departments. Every time I call, and no matter who I call in a nursing department, I always hear "How can I help you?" If I can't be helped by that person, they will take my name and number and have someone return a call.

I have dealt with two other states that do not even come close to the customer service you all offer. As always for the past 20 years, I have been treated very well, and I walk away with honest and applicable answers. I know I can always count on Nebraska for help, and I thank you kindly.

**A Grateful Nurse**

Dear **Sue Black** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office):

THANK YOU! For **Sue Pluta** (Case Aide, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office), who volunteered to provide phone coverage yesterday in our building. Her professionalism, warmth and knowledge were so useful and helpful. She has a great team philosophy in her willingness to step outside the box to help others. I always enjoy talking to her, too!

**Mary Jane Austin**

Social Services Supervisor  
Children & Family Services  
DHHS Omaha South 42nd Street Intake Center

Please send letters from satisfied customers via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

## Close but not quite...



Not withstanding a couple of suspicious looking members, this motley crew of staff at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Geneva (YRTC-G) ALMOST managed to eek out a victory on the basketball court against a team of YRTC-G youth in a 41 to 40 heartbreaker...well, a heartbreaker only for the staff. This matchup... or mismatch if you prefer...is part of a facility tradition in which basketball, volleyball and softball teams close their seasons with a staff/youth playoff and pizza party.

The game was a barnburner that saw the lead change hands often, but the clock ran out before the winning will of the youth team.

"If we had fed the youth the pizza first, maybe we would have stood a better chance of victory," said one of the participating staff members in a bit of post-game strategizing.

Shown from left to right are: **Anita Haumont, Jimmy Thimsen, Trish Fowler, Dr. Don Belau, Cristi Clark, Max Schmidt** and **Dennis Thimsen**. Photo: Debra Thimsen-Villa

## Are we really listening?

We often think of "communication" as speaking or sending a message, but a key to successful communication happens when we don't even make a sound or touch a keyboard. It's called *listening*.

However clearly or effectively a message might be sent, successful communication requires both sender and receiver. Only when a message has been both sent and received can it truly be said that communication has occurred.

Listening should never be confused with hearing. Doesn't a person with total hearing loss who uses Braille or sign language experience successful communication without sound? And don't we send more and more messages via email or texting without making any sound at all?

While hearing is a passive act that involves sound falling on an eardrum, listening is an active choice to accurately *interpret* the meaning at the core of any message sent our way. The real measure of successful communication is whether or not we *understand*.

Listening is most likely to occur when we set aside distractions, see things from another person's perspective, and be willing to walk a mile in another person's shoes. Perhaps actor **Alan Alda** put it best when he described listening as "letting another person in."

The next time someone speaks to you or sends you a message, ask yourself, "Am I really letting the other person in? Am I really understanding? Am I really listening?" Then repeat this process for the rest of your life.

# Bearing Witness to contributions of veterans

By Jerry Crisp

Fourteen hand-made teddy bears are on display at the Norfolk Veterans' Home throughout April. This display is the second leg of a tour that has already visited the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue and will next visit the two other DHHS-operated veterans' homes in Scottsbluff and Grand Island.

All made from fabric from military uniforms dating back to WWI, these cuddly cuties were the creation of Independence INK of Lexington Middle School.

With the help of teachers **Judy Biehl**, **Marni Westerhaus** and **Tim Huerta**, the students began making teddy bears for deployed soldiers' families last year. Independence INK is a program at

Lexington Middle School for students in special education, as well as students at risk of dropping out of school.

Independence INK is part academic, part service and part entrepreneurial. Products sold through this program enable it to contribute to community through projects like the teddy bears.

Asking the local military museum for uniforms not usable for display, the students found uniforms from every modern American war and four branches of the armed forces (They're still looking for something from the Coast Guard.). The fabrics had to be pressed and cleaned, with 23 pieces cut and sewn together.

Since many of the uniforms had unit patches on them, they made a larger bear, "Corporal Bob Add-a-Patch,"

wearing a vest on which the patches are displayed. First displayed at Lexington Middle School on Veterans' Day, the bears will spend some time at the Alliance Military Museum before finding a permanent home at the Heartland Museum of Military Vehicles in Lexington.

According to the Lexington teachers, each bear represents the men and women of the wars from which the uniforms came.

"Making the bears gave us the opportunity to honor those who wore the uniform, preserve a small part of history in a positive way, and show our appreciation for the soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen who keep us safe every day."



(Above left) "Corporal Bob Add-a-Patch" sporting his vest of patches. (Above right) Other bruins made from uniforms of various branches of the military now touring the four DHHS-operated veterans' homes. *Photo: Linda Sparr*