

CONNECTIONS

August 2013 VOLUME 13, ISSUE 8

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Congratulations to Employees and Supervisors of the Year from DHHS

Good Job! Way to Go! • A team player who steps up and volunteers to help out at any time. • Amazing...caring • An honor well deserved.

These were just a few of the comments on the Bulletin Board when coworkers started receiving word that they had earned Employee and Supervisor of the Year awards. The following people and many more will be honored during employee recognition month in October. In fact, we've set aside the October issue of *Connections* for employee recognition, from Employee and Supervisor of the Year write-ups to a long and proud list of people receiving recognition for their milestone anniversaries of years of service to the state.

Employees of the Year for 2013

- Karen Berry**, Administrative Assistant II, Public Health, Lincoln
- Diana Duran**, DHHS Advocate/Helpline, Director's Office/Communications & Legislative Services, Lincoln
- Billy Easterling**, Social Services Worker, Children & Family Services, Eastern Service Area
- Renee Faber**, DHHS Program Coordinator, Behavioral Health, Lincoln
- Kristy Hanefeldt**, Social Services Worker, Children & Family Services, Northern Service Area
- Erica Hardessen**, Child/Family Services Specialist, Children & Family Services, Central Service Area
- Cynthia Hartley**, DHHS Program Specialist, Children & Family Services, Lincoln
- Grant Johnson**, Compliance Specialist, Behavioral Health, Hastings Regional Center
- Janet Johnson**, IT Business Systems Analyst/Coordinator, Director's Office/Information Systems & Technology, Lincoln
- Jackie Langan**, DD Service Coordinator, Developmental Disabilities, Lincoln
- Maggie McPherson**, Human Resources Officer, Operations-Human Resources and Development, Lincoln
- Trish Montgomery**, Case Aide, Children & Family Services, Northern Service Area
- Joette Novak**, DHHS Program Specialist, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, Lincoln
- Nadine Wearne**, DHHS Quality Assurance Coordinator, Western Nebraska Veterans' Home, Scottsbluff
- Scott Wilson**, Facility Maintenance Specialist, Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, Bellevue
- Sue Yates**, Developmental Technician II, Developmental Disabilities, Beatrice State Developmental Center



Supervisors of the Year for 2013

- Jill Aksamit**, Social Services Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Fremont Customer Service Center
- Katherine Becker**, Social Services Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Lincoln Customer Service Center
- Kim Bro**, Child/Family Services Specialist Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Southeast Service Area
- Shawn Bryant**, Psychology Director, Developmental Disabilities, Beatrice State Developmental Center
- Lori Burns**, Business Manager II, Norfolk Veterans' Home
- Jane Cleveland**, DD Service Coordination Supervisor, Developmental Disabilities, Dakota City
- Jon Eisenhauer**, Food Service Manager, Children & Family Services, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Geneva
- Chad Frank**, Medical Services Unit Manager, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, Lincoln
- Ross Manhart**, DHHS Resource Developer Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Eastern Service Area
- Mark Miller**, Health Data Coordinator, Public Health, Lincoln
- Tom Nider**, Pharmacy Manager, Behavioral Health, Lincoln Regional Center
- Lisa Sedlak**, Food Service Director II, Grand Island Veterans' Home
- Emily Walter**, Human Resources Manager II, Operations-Human Resources and Development, Lincoln
- Heather Wood**, Quality Improvement & Data Performance Manager, Behavioral Health, Lincoln

Editor's Note: Throughout the course of the year, some of the people listed above may have moved to different positions and locations. The job titles listed here are the ones the employees and supervisors had when they were nominated for these awards.

DHHS STARS SHINE BRIGHT

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DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>
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[DHHS' Employee Website....](#)

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts and the dates they appeared. Like what you're seeing and reading? Then check out the employee homepage every day! Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[Adoptions Abound! July 8, 2013](#)



All children deserve to grow up in a good home. When a child cannot be returned to his or her original family, adoption becomes the goal. Adoption can provide children with families for the rest of their lives. It's such an incredible gift.

At DHHS we have a website of children available for adoption. Each child featured has a photo and a short biography for prospective parents to get to know him or her a little better.

Last week was a great week for DHHS and Webmaster **Greg Votava**. Greg changed DHHS' adoption website for the better when he was able to take down the portraits and profiles of seven children available for adoption because they all found permanent homes through adoptions.

"This is the first time I've been able to take seven kids off at one time," Greg says. "It's one of the best parts of my job."

[Colorful Wrappers, Mighty Good Messages... YRTC-K's Canteen Makeover is Sweet, July 10, 2013](#)

Look carefully at this special candy artwork and you will see the positive messages that these colorful wrappers contain. Under the supervision of art teacher **Derek Rusher**, young men from the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney helped paint these inspirational candy wrappers to add extra color to an essential part of YRTC-K's campus, the canteen.

The canteen is a gathering place for youth to purchase snacks and personal care items. The words found in the candy wrappers represent some of YRTC-K's Principles of Daily Living which help teach youth to think and act responsibly. The bright candy wrappers make sure that these positive messages get the attention they deserve every day.

This artwork is just one of several unique opportunities for young men at YRTC-K to polish their artistic skills.



[WNVH Veteran Enjoys Crafts, Hobbies, July 25, 2013](#)

Anton Koncaba has lived at the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home since June 2011. Anton enjoys many unique hobbies including making curtains and colonial chairs from pop cans and a house with a deck of cards. One of his biggest hobbies is crocheting. Since residing at WNVH, Anton has crocheted approximately 25 blankets. While visiting with Anton he mentioned that in the past he and his son enjoyed going to craft fairs just to see all the different crafts while getting new ideas.



The Good Life:

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



By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Protecting Nebraskans – Preparedness Planning Never Stops

I'm proud of the work we do in preparedness to protect Nebraskans. DHHS plays a critical role in an emergency and we're ready to respond. DHHS' Division of Public Health is part of the Nebraska Homeland Security Senior Advisory Group. We

work very closely with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the Governor's Office along with other state agencies and federal and local partners. Depending on the emergency, other divisions may become involved in helping clients and others, too.

A lot has changed since Sept. 11, 2001. As a state, we're more prepared now than ever before. Every county in Nebraska is covered by a local health department thanks to LB 692, the Nebraska Health Care Funding Act, which passed in 2001. Emergency response always starts off as a local response so those local health departments and local emergency management agencies are the ones on the front lines.

DHHS has received more than \$112 million in preparedness funds from 2002-2013. Those funds were distributed across the state to increase response capacity at the state and local level. But it's about more than building capacity; it's about building relationships. That is how we get things done here in Nebraska...we work together.

We work together with all partners at the federal, state and local levels, and we work together to share important information.



Since September is National Preparedness Month, I thought it would be a good time to give an overview about state and local preparedness and also to talk about how important it is to remember that preparedness is everyone's responsibility.

Depending on the size and the scope of the disaster, police, fire and rescue may not always be able to reach you quickly if you need assistance. So you'll need to prepare yourself and those in your care for emergencies and disasters. Everyone needs to be prepared to take care of themselves and their families for at least three days. Think about three days without electricity, water service, access to a supermarket, or local services. Here are some of the steps you can do to prepare:

- ✓ Be informed by learning about the risks and responses. [Ready.gov](#) is a

good resource for information about what to do before, during and after an emergency.

- ✓ Make a Plan. Work together with family, friends and neighbors.
- ✓ Build an emergency supply kit. Keep enough supplies on hand for you and those in your care. Think about what you need to do to maintain your health, safety and independence.
- ✓ Get involved in preparedness in your community.

September may be the month we promote emergency planning, but all of us who live in Nebraska and have experienced floods, fires, ice storms, and so on, know that emergencies can happen at any time. That's why preparedness planning, both personal and here in DHHS, never stops.

Eagle Scout Project Brings Dignity, Honor to People Buried at LRC Cemetery

By Linda Henslee,
Lincoln Regional Center

Ethan Cecava, a 15-year-old Boy Scout from Lincoln, had a special idea for his Eagle Scout project, and it involved the Calvert Street Cemetery at DHHS' Lincoln Regional Center. Over the last few months, Ethan worked on and completed his project, a way to remember and honor those buried at LRC's cemetery and make it easier for relatives to find and pay their respects to them.

Ethan's project involved reviewing the LRC cemetery map to create a large spreadsheet with the names and dates of people buried in the cemetery on the LRC ground, and designing a kiosk to display those names. The entire planning process took about a year.

On Aug. 3, Ethan, along with his parents and several other volunteers, set up the kiosk located in the Memorial Garden at Calvert Street Cemetery, and also worked in the cemetery to flag and



uncover several grave markers that over time, have sunk in the ground. Using LRC's map, Ethan and volunteers placed orange and white flags where grave markers should have been. The volunteers worked to unbury the stone markers that they were able to find. It was a huge task considering that this cemetery was operational at LRC from 1872 to 1927, and there are 467 graves in all.

Ethan and his father, Scott Cecava, and the volunteers set up the kiosk, and placed the list of names in the cemetery kiosk. Years ago when people were buried in the LRC cemetery, the grave markers could only identify patients by a number. The kiosk now displays the name of each patient and the date of

death, and maps out the location of each grave in the cemetery. This will make it easier for people to find the graves of their deceased relatives, and give honor and dignity to the people buried here.

Many thanks to Ethan Cecava and his father, Scott Cecava, for their work on this very worthwhile project, and to all of the volunteers who assisted them. Thanks also to **Kurt Anderson**, LRC Maintenance Supervisor, **Andy Miller**, Maintenance Specialist, and **Mark Townsley**, Groundskeeper, for their help in building the kiosk.

Read more from a recent Lincoln Journal Star story titled, ["Scout project unearths, identifies long-lost grave markers"](#)

NVH Food Service Worker Turns Fruit into Works of Art

By Linda Sparr,
Norfolk Veterans' Home



Keng Hanson in Thailand

If you have never thought of a watermelon as a work of art, you have never met **Keng Hanson**.

Piyarat “Keng” Hanson is a Food Service Worker at the Norfolk Veterans’ Home and so much more. Keng came to the Norfolk area by way of Thailand, where Keng earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics with emphasis in food and nutrition. In Thailand, Keng is a Certified Dietician and Certified in Food Therapy. Keng worked at a restaurant carving fruit all day prior to becoming a Dietician at the St. Louis Catholic Hospital in Bangkok, where part of her responsibilities

included consulting with patients on how to cook healthier at home.

Here at the Norfolk Veterans’ Home, Keng’s talent for carving fruit and vegetables came to light when **Dani Fischer**, Keng’s supervisor at NVH, resigned her position to move to Arizona, and Keng presented her with a beautifully-carved watermelon that had the words “Good Luck” carved in amongst beautiful flowers. To say Dani and her coworkers were impressed would be an understatement!

Keng later carved a watermelon and a honeydew melon used as beautiful centerpieces for the Norfolk Veterans’ Home’s 50th Anniversary Celebration in June.

Keng is married to Gregg Hanson, the Madison County Veterans Service Officer. Gregg and Keng met through

mutual friends, and the rest is history.

Keng shyly admitted that she seemed to have a “knack” for carving fruit, but her talents with food go far beyond the edible decorations.

In addition to the Thai specialties that Keng has introduced her husband to, she makes many Chinese dishes that she learned from her mother who is a Chinese Chef. While Norfolk markets do not carry many of the special ingredients Keng likes to use, she has no problems finding what she needs in Omaha and Sioux City. When asked what her favorite “American “ dish is Keng quickly replied “Steak, and my husband cooks it

the best!” Gregg did say that she does douse hers with Tabasco Sauce.

In addition to the differences in food, Keng shared that she’d never seen snow before coming to Nebraska. When asked to describe Thailand’s weather she said they have three seasons “Hot. Very Hot. And Rainy!”

If you’d like to see more of Keng’s work check out her Facebook page. Search for: Thai Food, Carving, Decorating and other Tantalizing Foods.



Look closely. The orange “carnations” are carrots and the pink “roses” are radishes.
Photo: Linda Sparr

Comforting a Coworker During a Time of Grief

"In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life. It goes on." Robert Frost

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development

Your coworker has just suffered a personal loss or other serious setback, and you may be unsure about how to show your regard and support. After all, you're not a family member and you're probably not a close friend. But you're concerned for this person just the same.

As a coworker, you want to demonstrate that you care.

Depending on how well you know this person, you can act on your own or with a group of coworkers.

Following are some suggestions.

Group Card or Gift - Circulate a sympathy card to be signed by coworkers. Be sure everyone has an opportunity to sign the card. You can also take up a collection for flowers, a fruit or other food basket, or a gift card.

Personal Expression - If you're close to this coworker, consider a hand-written note of condolence. Keep it simple and sincere, for example, "I was very sorry to hear the news. You are in my thoughts."

You can send an email after hearing the news to ensure quicker contact. Because it doesn't require an immediate response, an email is often more considerate than a phone call to someone who is upset.

Practical Help - Subject to supervisor approval, ask if you can lighten the

coworker's workload for a few days by taking on some of his or her work tasks.

If you know this person well enough, offer to help with home responsibilities such as child care, personal errands, grocery shopping, cooking or other household chores. Don't just ask, "Is there anything I can do?" Be specific in volunteering your help.

Be There - Be in the moment. Be a sympathetic, comforting listener if your coworker wishes to talk. It is not your responsibility to come up with just the right words. Allow the important words to come from your coworker.



Please email your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your idea in a future column.



Most "Bounce Back" When Facing Loss or Trauma

By Marla Augustine

Into each life a little rain must fall, but some people experience an occasional downpour. That's what it feels like when a loved one dies or your home is swept away by a tornado.

Rather than succumbing to severe depression or experiencing an emotional roller coaster, most people are resilient. That's the conclusion of Dr. George Bonanno, a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University, who spoke at the disaster behavioral health conference on July 12th in Lincoln.

"Most people are exposed to at least one and often several violent or life-threatening events during their lives," Dr. Bonanno said. "These events can be deeply distressing and sometimes debilitating for some people."

These events can include the death of a spouse, the loss of a child, suffering sexual abuse as a child, or losing a loved one in a natural disaster.

Most people are resilient in the face of loss or trauma, he said. Psychological resilience is an individual's tendency to cope with stress and adversity, bouncing back to normal or simply not showing negative effects. He said the ability to

rebound remains the norm throughout adult life.

Since Sigmund Freud, treatment has relied on the false idea that humans are not resilient, Bonanno said. Therapists and psychologists thought that the absence of grief was abnormal and indicated something was wrong. But he said that the absence of grief or trauma symptoms is healthy.

And for people who are functioning well, sometimes asking them to talk or cry about a loss after a traumatic event can even be harmful. Offering treatment to otherwise well people can cause harm by producing the symptoms therapists hope to avoid, Bonanno said.

"Bonanno's research has important implications for public policy, such as how to treat veterans returning from war and whether to counsel large numbers of people affected by a natural disaster," said **Scot L. Adams**, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "His research is causing the behavioral health field to rethink ideas about what an appropriate response to loss is."

Generally, most people will be OK.

For more information visit; <http://www.disastermh.nebraska.edu/>.

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Cheryl McMurry, LRC, Receives Patriot Award

The Nebraska Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) committee presented a Patriot Award to **Cheryl McMurry**, Director of Nursing at the Lincoln Regional Center, for her support of a coworker in the Army National Guard. LRC Team Leader Kyle Diefenderfer, also known as Sergeant Steven Diefenderfer, a member of the GSAB, C-Company 2-135th in the Army National Guard, nominated Cheryl for this award. This award was presented to Cheryl in the July 18, 2013 meeting of the LRC Steering Team.

In his nomination letter, Sgt. Diefenderfer wrote: "LRC has always done a great job accommodating me for my military training every summer.

They are aware of my strenuous training schedule due to being in an aviation unit and my pending mobilization. I am very respected by Lincoln Regional Center for my service and I greatly appreciate it."

ESGR seeks to foster a culture in which employers support and value the employment and military service of members of the National Guard and U.S. Reserve. ESGR facilitates and promotes that support by developing mutually-beneficial initiatives, recognizing support, increasing awareness of applicable laws and policies, resolving potential conflicts between employers and their service members, and acting as the employers' principal advocate with the Department of Defense.



Pictured from left: Eli Valenzuela, Command Sergeant Major NE Army National Guard; Steven Diefenderfer; Cheryl McMurry; Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Zink, NE ESGR Chair; and Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, TAG-NE.

Dr. Belau Appointed AAS Clinical Division Director

The Board of Directors of the National American Association of Suicidology, recently appointed **Dr. Don Belau**, a longtime AAS member, as the new Clinical Division Director. Dr. Belau (Psychologist, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Geneva) will fill the position until the next term begins in April 2014.

Dr. Belau specializes in the assessment and treatment of youth who experience self-injurious behaviors and suicidal tendencies, and provides workshops on the state, regional, and national level in the areas of suicide prevention, AMSR, self-injurious behaviors and bullying behaviors. Dr. Belau was honored by receiving the 2011 Counselor of the Year award by the Nebraska Counseling Association. In addition, he has been an active member of the Nebraska State Suicide Prevention Coalition, and is currently serving as a Co-Chair. He was instrumental in the development of the Lincoln/Lancaster LOSS team, and is serving as Clinical Director.

Congratulations, Dr. Belau, on this national appointment! Colleague **Maya Chilese** (Program Manager, Behavioral Health, Lincoln) summed it up best when she said, "We knew your awesomeness couldn't be contained in just Nebraska forever."



In Gratitude

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

Dear **Jana Peterson** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney),

We would like to thank you and your boys for your contribution to the 2013 Buffalo County Stampede half marathon and 5K. All of your time allowed us to make the 6th annual race a huge success.

Sincerely,

Trails and Rails Museum staff

Jana Peterson added that the volunteers included B1 youth at the YRTC-K and Youth Counselor Bradley Stolpart. They volunteered to run a water station at this half marathon community event. "The youth did an outstanding job and had lots of fun meeting and cheering on the runners."

YRTC-K Youth, Staff Help with "Color for a Cause" Fun Run

Youth with the Bryant Living Unit at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney along with **Bradley Stolpart**, YRTC-K Youth Counselor, and **Jana Peterson**, YRTC-K Administrator, helped with the "Color for a Cause" Fun Run on Saturday, Aug. 17. The fun run was a fundraiser for the Family Advocacy Network.

One of the staff members at the Family Advocacy Network thanked YRTC-K for helping to make the fun run successful. This was the Family Advocacy Network's first "Color for a Cause" event. Jamie Vetter, Director/Forensic Interview Specialist at the Family Advocacy Network, said around 250 runner/walkers participated in the color fun with about 40 people volunteering. Around \$5,000 were raised during the event. "Overall I think we had a good turnout and everyone had a good time," Vetter said.

Jana Peterson added, "The youth did a great job and had lots of fun! They represented YRTC-K well."

Deb Steidley, CSE Field Operations Administrator, Lincoln),

Randy Cramer (CSE Supervisor, Lincoln) is amazing! He's always the first to thank others for their work, and I would like to take this opportunity to do the same. He is always helpful, very knowledgeable in everything he does, and is very good at getting answers to tough questions. He's definitely an asset to Nebraska and all our clients. It's always good to have everyone working together on all sides to get the job done and to help people live better lives! Good Job Randy!

Mary Schwanke,
Social Service Worker, Fremont

Thank you to:

Donna Ellis, Case Aide, York
Janis Schmieding, Case Aide, York
Janae Phillips, Resource Developer, York

Thank you for helping out in Seward!
Your willingness to step up and help with coverage is very much appreciated. You deserve a Gold Star!

Darla Hopwood,
Staff Assistant, York



The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:
Helping people live better lives.



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