

Connections

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL
PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION
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Bringing Nebraska D

and Human Services employees closer together

December 2008

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 12

Adoption Day



DHHS in the News

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.

[DHHS Receives Health Promotion Grant for Mothers](#) November 5

[Nebraska Gets \\$44 million to Help Eligible Families with Energy Costs](#)
November 14

[Great American Smoke-out is a Great Day to Quit Tobacco](#) November 17

[It's Normal to Experience Strong Feelings Related to One-Year Anniversary of Von Maur Shootings](#) November 25

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

make the connection . . .

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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@dhhs.ne.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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EOE/AA/ADA

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About the cover...



Photo: Crispin Mayers

In Lincoln, 3-year-old **Sierra Maness** was just one of a record number of 56 children who joined their new adoptive families. Shown with her are mother **Kelly**, father **Sydney** and brother **Dakota Maness**.

A celebration was held at the Lancaster County Juvenile Court. Judge **Reggie Ryder** and Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice **Mike Heavican** addressed the gathering.

■ For more on this heartwarming story, see article on page 4.

From the CEO



By Christine Peterson
Chief Executive Officer,
Nebraska Department
of Health and Human
Services

As you may already know, I am retiring on January 2, 2009. I've been fortunate to have one of the best jobs in state government, and I have so many fond memories.

One of the things I've learned during my time with the Department is that DHHS employees don't always receive the recognition they deserve, and that's unfortunate. I leave the Department with a sense of pride in the quality of DHHS employees who put our mission statement — *Helping People Live Better Lives* — into daily action. I'm proud of the work you do for your fellow Nebraskans and you should be proud of yourselves and each other, too.

We've worked together on so many major initiatives, starting with the reorganization that went into effect in July 2007. We've worked to be open and transparent so that the public would know where to go to get assistance. Nebraska's behavioral health services are serving more people in the community, closer to family and

friends. Nebraskans can be assured that our water is safe, and that health care professionals and facilities are being monitored to ensure quality services. Thousands receive care through our ten 24-hour facilities, and whether its community services for people with developmental disabilities, food stamps, Aid to Dependent Children, child welfare, child support or Medicaid, DHHS is there to lend a hand. We've also been complimented on the level of detailed information on our Web site.

We have made tremendous progress, and as a result of your combined efforts, thousands of Nebraskans live healthier, happier lives. I know there are still challenges ahead, but I am confident that there are good people in place, from frontline employees to Division Directors, to meet those challenges.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Adoption Day Celebrations!

438 children who state wards were adopted statewide in the first 11 months of this year. Local celebrations were held to celebrate and finalize adoptions in several communities on Saturday, November 15.

In Grand Island an Adoption Day event was held at a local church to celebrate 39 children adopted by 21 families. The event was facilitated by DHHS offices in Grand Island and Kearney.

Attended by **Judge Philip Martin**, the celebration included a roll call of adopted children attending and gift packages donated by local businesses for each adoptive family. Gifts included an adoption book, puzzles, games, and gift certificates for movies. Guest speaker was **David Seizys**, a former Husker football player who was adopted.

SEE ADOPTION, PAGE 5



(Above) **Judge Linda Senff** totes 10-month-old **Kipton**, adopted by **Tomas** and **Trace Boley** of Aurora. Judge Senff opened the Hamilton County Courthouse in Aurora to finalize the adoption, and the Boleys joined in the Grand Island celebration.

Photo: Marge Creason



(Left) Happy faces and hearts were the order of the day in the Douglas County Courthouse to celebrate the creation of new adoptive families for more than 45 children. Among these were the Ashley family: (l-r) **Marteisha**, mother **Christina** with foster child **Jose Paneo**, newly adopted **Zion** with father **Wilfredo Ashley**, **Aisha** with baby brother **Neveah Moroes** and **Judge Douglas Johnson**.

Photo: Sherry Buhrmann



ADOPTION

FROM PAGE 4

It's said that no one stands so tall as when they stoop to help a child, as **Judge Jack Ott** proved again when he bent to tie a bevy of balloons to the wrist of three-and-one-half-year-old **Hunter Showalter**. Hunter was adopted by **John and Lisa Showalter** when the Judge opened the Adams County Courthouse in Hastings on a Saturday to finalize adoptions.

A celebration followed at the Adams County Fairgrounds, where members of law enforcement, emergency responders, and firefighters showed off their vehicles and equipment. Games with "hero" themes were included.

The final heroes recognized were the new parents and families. All new families who completed the 23 adoptions throughout the 10th Judicial District in 2008 were invited to attend.

Photo: Lisa Jurrens

Interested in adoption?

During December, families reconnect as holiday festivities bring them closer together. Each year, an increasing number of children who are in the state's care can also celebrate becoming part of a new family through adoption.

I'd like to personally thank everyone who made a positive difference in a child's life this year through adoption, and I invite others to consider opening their hearts and homes to these deserving children.

Adoptions of children who were state wards went from 297 adoptions in 2003 to a record-high 467 adoptions in 2007, a

57.2% increase. So far, 2008 is on track to make that number even higher. In addition, another 410 children are legally available for adoption right now and are waiting for a family to call their own.

Take a moment to consider whether adoption could be the right choice for your family. Call 1-800-7PARENT to get a packet of information to get you started. Visit <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/adoption/children.htm> to find photos and vignettes of children who are looking for families to call their own.

Todd Landry, Director
Division of Children & Family Services

DHHS Spirit of Holiday Giving!

We invited DHHS employees from programs, offices and facilities across the state to share holiday traditions, and here are their responses:



The DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office crew: Standing left to right, Supervisor **MaxCine Jackson**, **Joan Schakat**, **Trishka Simmons**, **Jocelyn Paulson**, **Tina Liebenritt**, **Jo Beth Forst**, **Gretchen McCulley**, **Cindy Glynn**, **LaKisha Neal** and **Stewart Giddings**; Kneeling left to right, **Gloria Phipps** and **Laura Ekstrand**. *Photo: Linda Soukup*

My unit and I give to those who do not have the means of reciprocating. We contact different organizations and get the name of a family in need, and we all contribute money to buy gifts, toys and clothes for that family. This holiday tradition is spearheaded by the chairpersons in my unit, Social Service Workers **LaKisha Neal** and **Gretchen McCulley**.

This holiday tradition started three years ago when we decided that, instead of giving gifts to each other, we should give where it would really put a smile on some child's face on Christmas day. We get a lot of joy out of wrapping gifts, taking

them to the family, and seeing just how appreciative they are. It helps us realize just how fortunate we are to be able to give.

One of those families wrote to Social Service Worker **Cindy Glynn** to say, "Thanks for all your help! You really made a difference! I just wanted you to know you're making a difference every day!"

MaxCine Jackson
Social Services Supervisor
DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office

'Holiday Troop Care' is being coordinated at the Hastings Regional Center for the first time this year, under the leadership of Treatment Unit Manager **Sherry Block**. Employees were asked to donate treats and supplies that will be packaged and sent to employee family members who are serving our country in the armed forces overseas. This is our way of showing our troops that we care about them and to provide them with gifts during the holidays when they are not able to be with their families.

Corrine Jensen, Administrative Assistant
Hastings Regional Center, Division of Behavioral Health

Here on the 4th floor of the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln, we established a holiday tradition of buying gifts for children and nursing home residents. We ask for donations from the entire 4th floor N-FOCUS group and use them to buy as many gifts as possible. This holiday tradition started five years ago as an alternative to trading gifts with each other in our work areas.

In the past, we have used gift-giving trees located at downtown banks for ideas for the gifts. We now contact social workers in a couple of nursing homes to get specific gift ideas for their residents. The children's gifts generally go to the Salvation Army. This has become a very successful and fulfilling tradition for us.

Danny Johnson
Business System Analyst, Economic Assistance
Division of Children & Family Services

YES, WE HAVE "THE SPIRIT OF GIVING!" We have five hallways at our office, and each has a different theme. We decorate for Christmas and always give to needy organizations.

Hallway #1 gives donations to the Humane Society, and dog and cat items abound all down the hallway.

Hallway #2 gives warm clothing to the Open Door Mission, and children's pajamas, scarves, mittens and hats are the garland theme throughout this hallway.

Hallway #3 sponsors a family with needs that have been referred to us. The decor in this hallway might include toys, clothing or food.

Hallway #4 gathers toys and stuffed animals for a variety of homeless shelters. A large Christmas stocking hangs on each door, and we fill them with toys.

Hallway #5 collects food for the Food Bank. This hall has a kitchen setting in which we pile food.

We've been doing this for more than ten years. Thanks for asking about our SPIRIT!

Linda Dorrell
Developmental Disabilities Services Coordinator
1821 North 73rd office, Omaha

Before Thanksgiving, we secretly exchange names for what we call "Secret Santa." You pick a name out of a hat, and we give secret gifts to that person for about four weeks. Givers reveal their identity just before Christmas day.

Presents don't have to be elaborate or expensive. Sometimes you just get a candy bar, so I guess the phrase "It's the thought that count" is valid. Some gifts are funny, and some touch your heart. It's fun to try to find out who your 'Secret Santa' is. It's the season of giving, and this is how we show each other we care and make our holiday fun, too!

Edilma (Eli) Him Osorio
Certification and Birth Registration Section Supervisor
Vital Records

When I was at the age when parents or school kids said there's no such thing as Santa Claus, my heart was broken, and I cried. So I thought, what if 'Santa' or 'Saint Nicholas' was a real person?

Matter of fact, Saint Nick was a real person. So don't tell your kids there is no such thing as Santa. Tell them what I and other parents tell their kids:

Santa needs help getting presents to people, and you can help him. It doesn't have to be for Christmas but all year round. For example, give someone some change if they need it. If someone needs something, take it to them—a meal for a homeless person, a blanket or clothes for a person who is cold, shoes for someone who is barefoot, a hand up when someone falls. Just doing something nice without getting something back for it helps keep Santa—and good deeds—alive and well.

Jamie Snyder
Vehicle Operator, Laundry Section
Beatrice State Developmental Center

DHHS Spirit of Giving Year-Round

DHHS employees not only giving during holidays but throughout the year!



Truckload of Caring: Thanks to "Employment First" (EF) staff in the Eastern Service Area, contractors Arbor Education & Training and the Policy Studies Institute and even participants in the EF program, nearly 1,000 pounds of food and other items shown here were donated to the Omaha Food Bank in February. Just goes to show that *helping people live better lives* aren't just words to live by during regular business hours or during the holiday season but truly all year round.

Photo: Samantha Whaley



Giving Hearts: Like other local Food Drives across the state, the 2008 Food Drive in Lincoln did a bit better than last year. While the 2007 drive netted only \$752 in monetary donations, this year's effort brought in \$2,115. **Diane Pearson**, Staff Assistant in Communications & Legislative Services, reads newspapers to track coverage of DHHS as one of her jobs. But she also volunteers to serve as one of many Food Drive coordinators who helped DHHS show a dramatic increase last year. Just goes to show that when there's a need, efforts of a lot of folks help, and DHHS employees are among the first to respond. *Photo: Bill Wiley*

On February 13, 2008, **Governor Dave Heineman** sent a message thanking state employees for their contributions to last year's Charitable Giving Campaign saying, "This year 2,419 employees participated in the campaign and donated \$286,158...Your generosity and continued support...proves your commitment to enhance the quality of life for all Nebraskans."

In the July 2008 issue of *Statehouse Observer*, the Governor said, "I want to express my sincere thanks to all the State Employees who contributed to the success of this year's State Campaign Against Hunger...As a result of your efforts, this year's campaign raised \$17,967,32 and 20,196 pounds of food... Please take pride in your achievements and know that your contributions are continuing to make a difference."

Nebraska ranks second nationally in the percentage of citizens who volunteer ... according to "Volunteering in America: State Trends and Rankings," released by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

"This report verifies what I have always thought, that Nebraskans are exceptionally giving and caring individuals," says Governor Dave Heineman.

If you're interested in volunteering your time and talents to help others, check out the ServeNebraska Web site or www.1-800-volunteer.org.

Caring About Furry and Feathered Friends, too: Many animal lovers in Building #3 at the Lincoln Regional Center show a year-round spirit of giving by supporting the Capitol Humane Society. Some donate time and money to help the animals, while others donate aluminum cans, which the shelter turns in for extra money.



Community Contributors: The Dakota City office has a Courtesy Club that organizes potlucks and parties for such things as holidays, baby showers and retirements. This year, members hosted fundraising events for the community.

Children and Family Services Specialist Supervisor **Erin Grace** tells about a breakfast fundraiser that helped families DHHS serves in Dakota City and South Sioux City buy school supplies for their kids. The event raised over \$100 that the Club persuaded Wal-Mart to match! Five families received \$50 gift cards and one family a \$33 card, benefitting 34 children who had supplies for school they wouldn't have had otherwise.

From left to right, Club members who made it all happen: Service Coordinator **Mona Kramer**, Resource Developer **Arlene Shockman**, and Child Support Enforcement Worker **Jean Morgan**.

Photo: Erin Grace

Service With a Smile: A couple of staff members at the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) help several clients volunteer their time twice weekly to deliver Meals-on-Wheels. The group picks up hot meals at the Beatrice Community Hospital and delivers them to homebound seniors. Here, Center citizen **Ron Tillman** brings lunch to **Ruth Drake**.

"Everyone feels good about helping others, and the clients jumped at the opportunity," says Activity Specialist **Brandon Shelby**.

"They make sure that senior citizens get their meal with a smile and know they are doing a good thing," adds Activity Specialist **Max Schmidt**.

Meals-on-Wheels provides nutritious meals to older citizens at senior centers or churches and delivers meals to homes of persons who are unable to leave their home due to injury, illness or frailty.

Photo: Jerry Crisp



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.

A Tale of Two Brothers

By Jerry Crisp

Two brothers work at the two DHHS facilities in Norfolk, and both have stories to tell about serving members at the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH) and patients at the Norfolk Regional Center (NRC).

Terry Doten and his younger brother, **Roland**, are members of a Navy family. Their father, **Ted**, served on the USS Fanshaw Ray in World War II as a radio operator. Terry also served in the Navy as a radio operator, and when he left in 1972, Roland joined the Navy Seabees, the construction battalions that build bases and bulldoze and pave roads and airstrips.

Terry Doten has managed the Vets' Home Canteen for a couple of years, after managing the Canteen at the Regional Center for 32 years. First thing each morning, Terry puts the coffee on, ensures that freezers and fridges maintain proper temperatures, and then spends the rest of the day waiting on customers and does his best to meet their needs.

The biggest challenge Terry faced on the job was that the Canteen had been one staff position short, meaning he needed to do the work of two. A new person has been hired now, so that challenge is already behind him.

Terry's biggest reward is serving veterans at the Home, including his parents who recently moved there.

"It such a pleasure serving the men and women who served our nation," Terry explains. "They all have stories to tell and need folks to listen, which I could do for hours, if I only had the time."

In between all of the tales of battle and bravery, Terry recounts what one vet told him after a long spell of dry weather that always threatened rain but never delivered.

"With a twinkle in his eye, he said it looked like we were in for 'two or three inches of thunder,'" Terry recalls. "I still smile about that every time I think of it."

"Terry is a very hard worker with a wealth of knowledge and experience," says supervisor **Joe Mrsny**, NVH Food Service Director. "He's committed to his role as 'keeper of the goodies' for members and always has a smile and positive attitude for both members and staff."

Roland Doten is a Food Service Assistant who is also employed by the Veterans' Home, where food is prepared, but serves it at the Regional Center. His work involves serving trays to four wards, as well as serving at the Cafeteria.

"In addition to working at the Regional Center, I was often called to work in the Veterans' Home canteen so that my brother could enjoy a day off," Roland says.

Shortly after starting work at the Regional Center, Roland encountered a considerable challenge.

The Tale of the USS Fanshaw Bay



Ted, the Doten family patriarch, served on the USS Fanshaw Bay, an escort aircraft carrier. His ship

launched anti-submarine patrols, combat air patrols and reconnaissance flights, as well as air raids on Japanese positions to pave the way for the invasion of Saipan.

Dodging torpedoes and downing several enemy fighter planes, the ship was struck by a bomb that killed 14 and wounded 23. The Fanshaw also took part in the invasion of Leyte, where she was hit by shells from Japanese cruisers and destroyers, and also took part in the invasion of Okinawa and the occupation of Japan.

For its contributions during WW II, the Fanshaw Bay earned a Presidential Unit Citation and five battle stars.

"We had a power outage, and I had to use a flashlight to read menus and serve food," he recalls. "As luck would have it, the power didn't come back on until almost the very last moment of my shift!"

The biggest challenge Roland faced, however, was adapting to different systems at the Veterans' Home and the Regional Center.

"Since I only recently started working at the Regional Center and still needed to work at the Veterans' Home canteen, I needed a way to keep everything straight," Roland explains. "I picked up the habit of stuffing my pockets with 'cheat sheets' to remind me of which details to attend to at each place, and that worked pretty well."

SEE BROTHERS, PAGE 11



WHAT A REAL NAVY FAMILY LOOKS LIKE: Seated, **Ted Doten**; standing, **Roland, Irene, and Terry**. When asked who the real crew commander was, Irene replied, "Probably me." The other members of the family all agreed. *Photo: Linda Sparr*

BROTHERS

FROM PAGE 10

But the challenge of working jobs at two places had compensations, too.

"I consider myself blessed to know members, patients and staff at both facilities," Roland says. "None of them are average, run-of-the-mill people, and I'm glad to serve and work with all of them."

"Roland gives 110% with a smile on his face at all times," says NVH Food Service Supervisor **Lori Rector**. "The Dietary Department is proud to have him on our team!"

"Roland is a hard worker like his brother, Terry," says Joe Mrsny. "It must run in the family. Terry and Roland are excellent employees and valuable assets."

"When I asked Terry and Roland how it felt to be veterans serving veterans, they told me, 'real neat,'" says **Linda Sparr**, Administrative Assistant at the Veterans' Home. "The Doten family has made a nice addition to the extended family here at the Veterans' Home."

At the close of Charles Dickens' novel, "A Tale of Two Cities," Sidney Carton gives his life for another with the immortal words, "It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done before. It is a far, far better place I go than I have ever been before."

While Terry and Roland Doten have thankfully not had to sacrifice their lives, they have dedicated their lives to the service of others, first serving their country in the US Navy, and later serving members of the Norfolk Veterans' Home, including their parents, as well as patients at the Norfolk Regional Center. This "tale of two brothers" is the story of two people who have lived to help others live better lives.

SOMBER POSTSCRIPT

Prior to publication, we received word of the sudden death of Terry Doten. His family asked that this article be published in *Connections* as planned as a final tribute and celebration of his life, and a framed copy now hangs in the NVH Canteen. A slightly different version was also published in the *Norfolk Daily News*.

Way To Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, awards, honors

Brenda Knutson named EXPO 2008 Manager of the Year

Brenda Knutson, Nurse Executive at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home (ENVH) at Bellevue, has earned "EXPO 2008 Manager of the Year" by the Nebraska Chapter of the National Management Association.

The NMA bestows such awards to acknowledge leadership and managerial skills. Knutson received the honor on October 2 at the State Capitol.

Knutson was singled out for an array of reasons. For one thing, she reviewed all ENVH nursing care processes to ensure they were effective, resulting in a change in wound management protocols that drastically reduced the incidence of pressure ulcers at the facility.

Knutson also evaluated the restorative nursing program and made changes that decreased the number of veterans with loss of mobility. While preparing for the move from Omaha to Bellevue, she also arranged new building orientation and training for over 80 nursing personnel at the new veterans' home at Bellevue. At the same time, they continued care for all residents at the former home in Omaha. Combined with efforts of other ENVH staff, the move was described by an ENVH veteran as "running like a well-oiled machine."

Knutson also champions recognition efforts so nursing personnel know how valued they are, and helped develop mentoring for staff to enhance their knowledge and mentor new employees in order to decrease turnover rate.



Worth considering...

Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.

—DALE CARNEGIE

January observance

Healthy Weight Week (January 18–24)

An “obesity epidemic” now threatens public health in the United States. Obesity is generally caused by too many calories eaten and/or too little physical activity. Obesity can lead to several serious and sometimes fatal diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol or triglycerides, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and some cancers. It is estimated that 14% of deaths from cancer in men and 20% of deaths in women are due to being overweight.

Maintaining a healthy weight can increase life expectancy, quality of life, and physical and mental well-being. As an individual, you can help maintain a healthy weight by eating the recommended number of calories each day and getting regular exercise.

Consult your physician before making any changes to your diet or



The MyPyramid Menu Planner

beginning a new exercise program. For more information about food choices and appropriate calories, visit www.mypyramid.gov or

contact **Holly Dingman**, Registered Dietitian in DHHS Health Promotion, at (402) 471-3442.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT!

Easy-to-apply tips to help us all recycle more

According to the Center for Ecological Technology, each ton of recycled paper saves 60 pounds of air pollution, 17 trees and 7,000 gallons of water. Every year enough paper is thrown away to make a 12-foot wall from New York to California! In 2007, State of Nebraska employees recycled 647,425 pounds of cardboard; 1,895,047 pounds of office paper; 21,179 pounds of phone books; 53,428 pounds of newspaper and 36,344 pounds of books.



What will YOU do with the next scrap of cardboard, paper, phone book or newspaper—pitch it into the nearest wastebasket or garbage can?

OR...

AT WORK, deposit paper products in the appropriate recycling container or ask your local recycling coordinator or office manager to provide one.

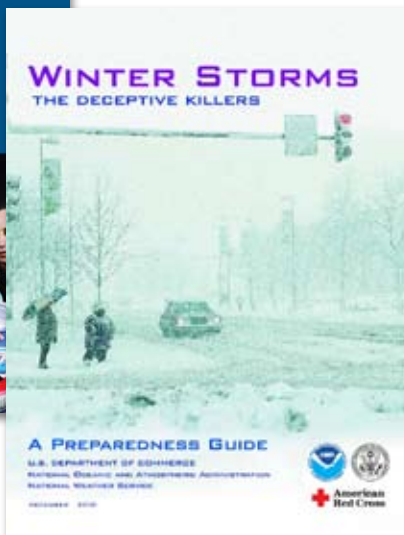
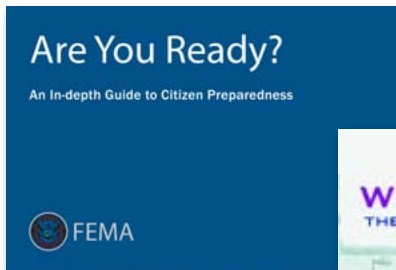
AT HOME, save paper to take to the nearest recycling center!

Wellness Words: *Personal* Preparedness

While many work behind the scenes to help citizens of Nebraska and our nation be better prepared for emergencies, here's something you can do to be better prepared yourself!

Severe storms we experienced this summer may be over, but winter weather isn't far behind. Even though some forecasters are predicting the worst this winter, the good news is that preparing for one type of emergency helps you get ready for another. Three basic preparedness steps—building an emergency supply kit, developing a family communication plan, and learning about threats in the area—are useful in all kinds of emergencies, including severe weather.

When assembling your emergency supply kit for winter, think about warmth. In Nebraska we've had a lot of experience with ice storms and know that it's possible to lose power and heat. So, stock your supply kit full of warm clothing for each family member, including jackets or coats, long pants, long sleeve shirts, sturdy shoes, hats and gloves.



Have a sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person. And, make sure you're prepared for cold weather when you're traveling by car as well.

Looking for more information? "Winter Storms... The Deceptive Killers" is a brochure with information on winter storm facts, how to detect frostbite and hypothermia, what to do in a winter storm, and how to be prepared. It's available online at <http://www.weather.gov/os/winterstorm/winterstorms.pdf>.

More information about winter weather and other emergencies is available at www.ready.gov. For an in-depth guide to citizen

preparedness, call 1-800-BE-READY and ask for a copy of "Are You Ready?" Or, you can read a copy on-line at http://www.ready.gov/america/downloads/emergency-preparedness/are_you_ready.pdf.

For additional information about personal preparedness, contact Public Information Officer **Dianna Seiffert** at (402) 471-1695 or dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

For What It's Worth Anonymous tips from DHHS co-workers you might find useful

Best way to forget your troubles and just get happy?

The best way to forget our troubles is to help someone else overcome theirs. Brightening the lives of others brightens our own, and helping others resolve problems

or meet challenges also helps us learn how to become better problem-solvers and challenge-meeters when we tackle our own.

Forget your troubles by remembering that someone else can always use your help, and see if helping that person doesn't make you both happier!

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



Fine Feathered Friend

Otto Krohn, a World War II veteran who lives at the Norfolk Veterans' Home, has found a true friend in a cockatiel named "Sweets." Otto talks and coos to Sweets, even kisses it on the beak, and both benefit from the relationship.

"Sweets, an aviary and some fish certainly enhance the lives of all members at the Norfolk Veterans' Home," says Volunteer Coordinator **Jenny Last**. "It's wonderful to see how such small creatures can bring so much joy to their lives." *Photo: Jenny Last*

If you have a photo of a DHHS activity you'd like to share with co-workers across the state, contact *Connections* by any means listed in the editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.



Putting out fires

"Putting out fires" is a technique familiar to many state workers, but sometimes those flames are quite literal. Here, **Leslie Schlecht**, Quality Assurance Program Specialist in the West Point office, practices her fire-fighting skills with an extinguisher during fire safety training involving DHHS and court house employees. The training was provided by **Jim Hladky**, a member of the West Point volunteer fire department and husband of Eligibility Technician **Kate Hladky**.

Knowing how to put out fires, whether figurative or literal, is a technique all state workers need to practice regularly.

Photo: Tina Bruning



A Special Holiday Connection

Speech and language students at West Kearney High School recently shipped 10 boxes of items to American soldiers serving in Iraq and Kosovo. West Kearney High is located on the grounds of the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center in Kearney (YRTC-K).

Students worked on written language and proper letter writing forms, while YRTC-K teachers and staff showed their generosity by



Photo: Cathy Emrick

donating items requested by soldiers overseas. The packages included such items as hygiene products, snacks, books, magazines, cards and candy.

Speech Language Pathologist **Shantel Eatherton** initiated the project after learning about www.anysoldier.com, a Website that links soldiers with folks back home who want to do something for those serving their country.

On December 1, 2008, Eatherton and YRTC-Kearney youth received this e-mail:

"Thank you for the boxes your kids sent us. We are very grateful. We are a combat infantry/field artillery unit stationed in the middle of Baghdad with little comforts of home... so on behalf of my unit in response to all the letters we received, we want to say thank you.

I am 31 years old, and my wife just had our first child November 17th. I will get to meet my daughter sometime in April. I am from Louisville, Kentucky, and I share a similar story with some of your students. At age 17, I was a troublemaker and was signed over to the state. I, too, was in several juvenile facilities. I didn't listen at first and eventually was sentenced to seven months in the county jail.

That was 13 years ago, and the last time I even had a negative encounter with the police. It is never too late to change, and there is no obstacle too difficult to overcome. Now is the time for YRTC-Kearney youth to adapt, to overcome, to take advantage of your treatment facility. I'm sure they all think nobody understands them or has been there before, but I have. It's easy to start making good decisions, and so rewarding in the end with the quality of life you will eventually enjoy.

Please share this letter with your kids, and thank you for your support.

SPC Scott Parham

Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment Field Artillery

In Their Own Words...

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

Dear **Cindy Betka** (Chemical Dependency Supervisor, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Geneva):

How are you? I'm doing OK now, thanks to you! I learned a very valuable lesson from you last night when you taught us about how you should forgive people for yourself, not for them. I honestly didn't believe it at first, but after I talked to you in your office, I felt a lot better about myself and the situation. I kept telling myself that I was really going to try!

During "Circle Up," gossiping was brought out by someone else before I had the chance, so I just added to what was said. I told everyone how I felt about it and gave everyone the same advice you gave me. I was passive in a way by not pointing out the two people and by generalizing the gossip issue, but at the same time, I was very assertive. I got my needs met and told myself I forgive them, then let it go the rest of the night. I was happy again, and I and the other two got along and had a good time together.

It wouldn't have happened that way if it wasn't for you and your advice. I really appreciate everything you've done for me. I plan on using your advice to better my life, and I'm going to take your advice seriously from now on.

A YRTC-Geneva youth

Dear **Vicki Newhouse** (Social Services Worker, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office):

With a heart like yours, know that you are making a difference in people's lives. Though this might never be said, *you are appreciated!*

I hope that some day I can give back to those who have helped me along the way. Until then, I do my best to "do unto others, as you want others to do unto you."

I'm pleased to be able to say I know you, because you are so special. Thank you again for what you do and who you are.

A service recipient

Dear **Tracy Fornander** (Social Services Worker, DHHS Sidney office):

Thank you for all you have done for my brother over the past several years. I'm so grateful as I think about how you have supported and helped him in very creative ways to achieve what is best for him. I'm convinced that his situation would not have had the positive outcome that it has, if it hadn't been for you.

Many times someone comes into our lives who makes such a difference. You are truly one of those very special people. I feel as if I'm losing a special friend who has been there working on my brother's behalf. You have always given me good direction and helpful information.

I felt sadness when you told me that you would no longer be my brother's case worker. I appreciate all that you have done to help me support him, even though from 2,000 miles away. Thank you once again simply for being there.

A client's family member

Dear **Linda Musser-Rumsey** (Social Services Worker, DHHS Columbus office):

I just wanted to thank you for everything that you have done for my son and me. You have gone above and beyond, helping us in times of need. Please know that you have my most sincere appreciation. It is people like you who show caring and concern for others who leave imprints on our lives.

...Please be assured that your work and dedication does make a huge difference in the lives of those you serve.

Mother of an autistic son

Dear **Cheri Anderson** (Social Services Worker, DHHS Holdrege office):

I would like to tell you how much we appreciate your help and the work you do for so many in need. It's difficult these days for the disabled and elderly to make it, even the young with children. Having people like you working for us makes a difference. Thank you.

A service recipient

Dear **Dr. Joann Schaefer** (Director, Division of Public Health):

On behalf of the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR), we would like to formally thank your organization for **David Montgomery's** contribution of time and talent at CLEAR's midyear meeting, January 10-12, 2008. The combined expertise of volunteer committee members enables CLEAR to offer numerous services to regulators, their staff and the broader regulatory community. Each year, CLEAR provides the preeminent regulatory conference for those involved in professional and occupational regulation, timely issue alerts and publications, and trains more than 1,000 professionals in best practices in investigative and inspection techniques, in effective executive leadership strategies, and provides training to board members from a wide variety of jurisdictions and professions.

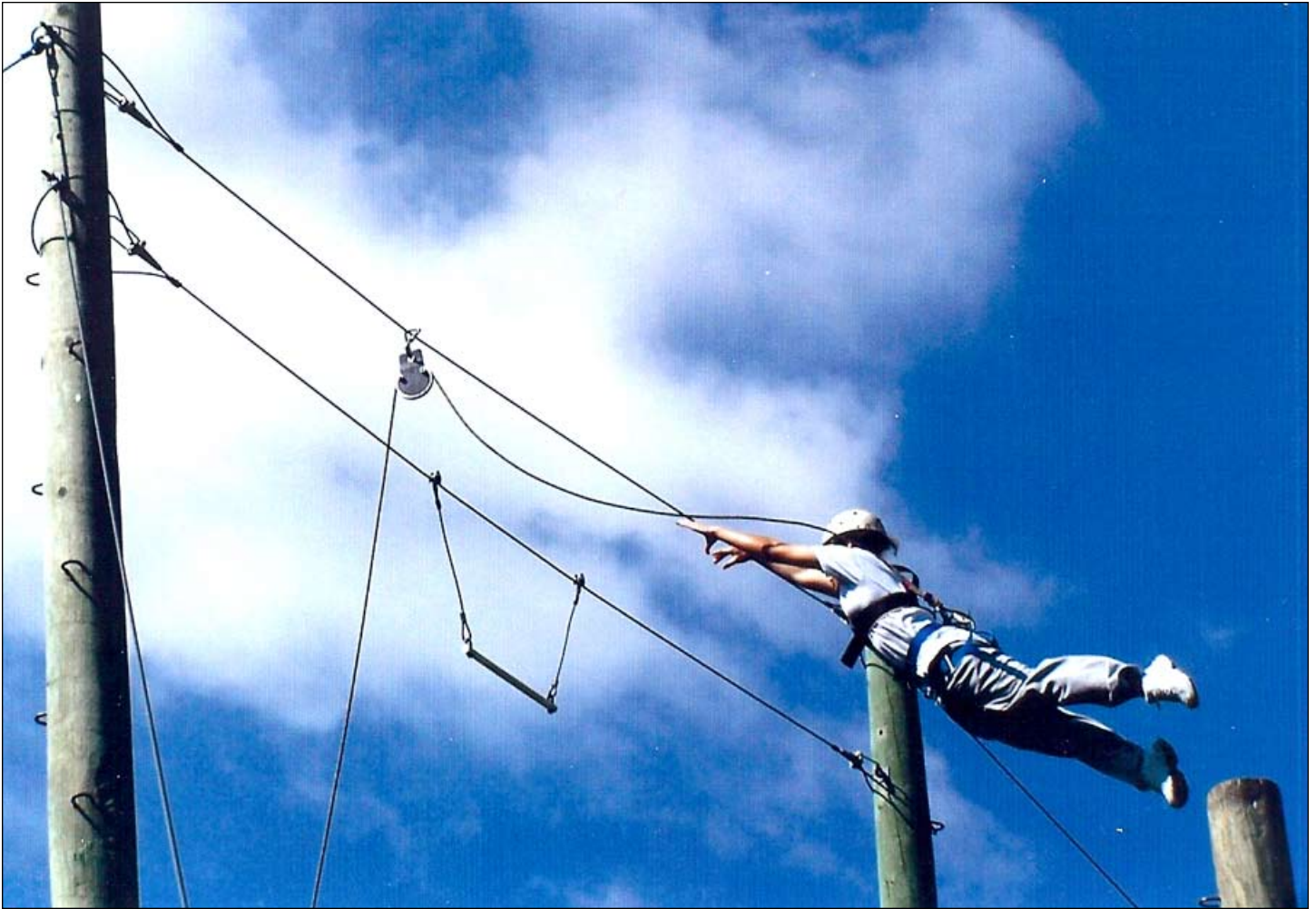
CLEAR is aware of the contribution your organization makes in allowing attendance at committee meetings and via the donation of valuable time and expertise. Thank you for your role in permitting CLEAR to conduct the valuable work it has undertaken during the last 28 years. We look forward to David's continued involvement in the organization and greatly appreciate their considerable contribution to all that CLEAR does.

Kathleen Nosbisch, CLEAR President,
and **Adam Parfin**, CLEAR Executive Director
Lexington, Kentucky



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.

Connections' Photos of the Year!



Congratulations to **Anita Haumont**, Recreation Assistant at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Geneva (YRTC-Geneva), who took top honors in *Connections'* Photo of the Year competition, chosen from among all photos published in the newsletter over the past calendar year. Anita's photo shows a YRTC-Geneva girl on a tether taking a daring "leap of faith" from a telephone pole and grabbing a cross bar. Part of an annual Timberlake Wilderness camp event near Central City, this activity helps conquer fear and build self-confidence. Other Timberlake activities include wall-scaling, horseback riding and swimming.

SEE MORE PHOTOS, PAGE 20

Connections' Photos of the Year competition is open to anyone except Communications & Legislative Services staff who produce this publication. All other photos submitted are entered automatically in the next year's friendly competition. Our thanks to everyone who submits photos for publication in the DHHS employee newsletter to make it more visually interesting and attractive!

PHOTOS OF THE YEAR

FROM PAGE 19



Claiming 2nd-place honors is a photo that appeared on the front cover of *Connections*' January issue, taken by **Nancy Cole**, former DHHS Child and Family Services Specialist in the State Office Building in Omaha. The photo shows **Octavia Fulton** sharing the joy of her adoption with **Judge Elizabeth Crnkovich** and her four-year-old cousin, **Jeremiah Spears**, at the Douglas County Courthouse. Octavia was one of 80 state wards to find a permanent family on November 17, 2007, when courthouses opened on Saturday to finalize adoptions at several sites in Nebraska and across the nation.

Taking 3rd place honors is a photo of **Otto Krohn**, a member of the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH), with his cockatiel, "Sweets," taken by NVH Volunteer Services Coordinator **Jenny Last**. This charming close-up appears as a "Happening" photo/caption in this issue.

