

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

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This eye-catching scene of a “sun dog” bracketing the Nebraska State Capitol Building greeted Lincolniters recently. Less colorful than more familiar rainbows, sun dogs are bright spots in the sky appearing on either side of the sun, formed by refraction of sunlight through ice crystals high in the earth’s atmosphere.

Photo: Bill Wiley and Greg Votava

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DHHS now on

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 the DHHS Intranet home page, and click on "[DHHS In The News](#)" for links to Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal Star articles updated daily involving DHHS programs and services.

[Radon is Leading Cause of Lung Cancer in Nonsmokers](#) January 11

[ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Centers Timeline Announced](#) January 8

[LIHEAP Helps Thousands of Eligible Families with Energy Costs](#) January 7

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

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

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Connections can be made available in an alternative format for those with disabilities. Requests will be filled within 15 working days. Prior consent has been obtained for this publication to identify and publish photos of all individuals receiving DHHS services.

H1N1 Update:

More H1N1 Flu Resources
at Your Fingertips

Children Under 10? Don't Forget the 2nd Dose of H1N1 Vaccine

Flu season continues, and nasty viruses still have the potential to pick up the pace and invade homes, schools and child cares.

"A second dose of H1N1 flu vaccine is recommended for children 6 months through 9 years old," said Chief Medical Officer **Dr. Joann Schaefer**. "We know kids not only spread the flu but they're more susceptible to complications. It's important for children who've already received their first dose of H1N1 vaccine to get that second shot in the arm or spray in the nose to make sure they achieve full immunity."

The H1N1 virus has been harder on children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 289 flu-related child deaths were reported nationwide from April through December of 2009.

Health officials say almost all kids can benefit from getting the H1N1 vaccine, especially those under 2 years old and those with chronic health conditions.

The nasal spray vaccine is a great option for children who are afraid of needles. It's available for healthy kids 2 years old and up.

If children haven't received any H1N1 flu vaccine yet, it's not too late.

To get your child vaccinated against H1N1 flu, contact his/her health care provider or your local health department. For a list of local health departments go to <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/puh/oph/lhd.htm>.

If you're an adult who has children or works with children, you should be vaccinated too. That includes parents, grandparents, and other relatives, child care providers, teachers and health care providers.

The Good Life: A reminder of what we share and hope to provide our fellow Nebraskans

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Have you heard the phrase “Perception is reality?” If so, you might wonder why I mention it in relation to DHHS.

What the saying means to me is that people often believe what they think is true – whether or not it is! Sometimes it’s based on their own experiences, but oftentimes people base perceptions on what others say and do.

When I became CEO last July, one thing I put on my “to do” list is to improve the public’s perception of DHHS.

If you consider all of the news stories that mention our agency, most are informational and positive in nature. In fact, we put out a lot of that information through our news releases. But those aren’t the stories people often remember. That was true for me, and it may be true for some of you, too.

That’s frustrating because in my short time here, I’ve learned that DHHS employees are dedicated and mission-driven. You want to make a difference so that people really do live better lives.

Your hard work shows in many success stories all across the agency, and has resulted in a number of programs and services placing high in national standings.

You want to do the best for people, and the employee survey says as much. Some of the highest ranking responses across the agency are for statements like “I have pride in what I do,” and “The work I do makes a difference.”

I want to find new ways to share with the public our good news stories so they have a better understanding of what DHHS is all about. Communications is helping me with that, and you can, too.

There are success stories all around us, and I’ve asked the division directors to share them with me. (So please share your success stories with them.)

We’re going to try to do a better job of sharing information with you, and if you hear something from the public that doesn’t sound right, check it out so you can share accurate information. And don’t shy away from telling your friends and neighbors about the good things we do.

Beginning this spring, I’ll be scheduling presentations to start telling those stories. I’m interested in speaking



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

at statewide annual meetings as well as at service and community organizations like the Rotary, Kiwanis, and others, too.

Do you belong to an organization that would be interested in having a speaker from DHHS? Please contact Jerry Crisp, public information officer and Connections editor, with the information so he can add to the Speakers’ Bureau database we’re developing. If I’m not available to speak, we will see if one of the division directors is.

Changing the perception people have of DHHS won’t be easy and it won’t happen overnight. We’re a large agency and when things happen that aren’t positive, we’ll have to address those and move on.

There’s one thing for sure, and that’s that the public’s perception won’t change if we, you and I together, don’t take the first step.

Please join me in making it happen.

Thank you, again, for the work you do. Let’s share it!

Nebraska WISEWOMAN Program: Taking care of hearts and minds alike

By Cathy Dillon, WISEWOMAN Program Manager, and Bill Wiley

Heart disease is the #1 killer of Nebraska women; yet so many of us worry about cancer, breast cancer in particular. Fortunately for Nebraska women and those who love them most, one component of the Every Woman Matters (EWM) Program offers screening and education for the early detection and prevention of breast cancer and heart disease. How does WISEWOMAN fit in?

Thanks to federal funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), eligible Nebraska women between 40 and 64 are able to benefit from WISEWOMAN (Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation) services as a fully integrated part of EWM.

“Without this program, I would probably go most of my life without the medical attention I need.”

The EWM Program has reached over 70,000 women since it began screening for breast and cervical cancer in 1991. As one of the first 12 programs to receive WISEWOMAN funding in 2001, Nebraska has also helped over 19,000 women receive important screening and education to help reduce their risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Risk factors include elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, diabetes and tobacco use. Tailored education is aimed at increasing physical activity, improved nutrition and tobacco cessation.

“Thanks to all of your help I lowered my cholesterol from 250 to 215, went down two dress sizes in clothing, and my blood pressure was so much better. All of this means so much to me.”

The Nebraska WISEWOMAN Program received national praise this past July. Federal HHS Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** released a report highlighting Nebraska’s efforts as an example for innovative programs and initiatives that can serve as models for a reformed American health care system. “WISEWOMAN is a great example of a community-based prevention program that can help keep Americans healthy and out of the hospital,” said Secretary



Sebelius. She commended Nebraska’s efforts to reach 19,000 women and help them live heart-healthier lives.

Nebraska’s program has been invited by CDC on a number of occasions to submit success stories for peer journal publications. It’s been featured on the CDC WISEWOMAN Web site and the official U.S. government Web site for healthcare reform.

“Living a healthy life is my hope for all Nebraskans. Access to screening services and tailored education aren’t available to some women. WISEWOMAN closes that gap for many Nebraska women who wouldn’t otherwise be able to make their health a priority,” said **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. Access to services is aimed at low-income, uninsured or underinsured women between 40 and 64. Special attention is given to populations of women at higher risk for cardiovascular disease – African American, Hispanic and Native American women.

“By learning to eat and exercise properly, I have my diabetes under control without medicine. This program gives me the incentive to make my life better.”

Like the breast and cervical cancer component of EWM, WISEWOMAN appreciates the support and collaborative efforts of its partners. Many key partners include the DHHS Tobacco Free Nebraska Program for its substantial efforts to help reach clients with tobacco cessation support and the American Heart Association, Midwest (continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

and the American Heart Association, Midwest Affiliate and the DHHS Cardiovascular Health Program for their efforts in promoting Wear Red Day and Heart Month. Partnership efforts continue to expand and evolve with non-traditional partners like the Game and Parks Commission to help women be more active. In addition, the program offers screening services statewide with the essential support and reach of over 700 clinical providers and physicians who link clients with all of the EWM Program services.

Don't wait for October and Breast Cancer Awareness Month to turn to the Every Woman Matters Program. February is National Heart Month and with the offering of WISEWOMAN services, helping women live healthier lives means more than just putting their minds at ease when it comes to breast or cervical cancer. It can mean putting their hearts at ease, too.

For more information about the Nebraska WISEWOMAN Program, [visit www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth/ewm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth/ewm).



Volunteer helps keep state vehicles ready to roll in southeast Nebraska

By Jerry Crisp

Volunteers help DHHS in many ways. A prime example is **Don Marx**, a retired physical therapist who has helped maintain state vehicles for the past three years.

“Reliable, trustworthy, hard-working are all adjectives that describe Don,” says Eike Marthaler, a Resource Developer with the Division of Children and Family Services. “Helping maintain a fleet of 26 state vehicles used by many of the 300 employees at the DHHS Lincoln office in the Gold’s Building is not an easy task but essential to our daily functions.”

Don gasses vehicles, takes them in for oil changes, keeps windshield fluids filled, inspects tires, inflates flat ones and recharges batteries. He also washes vehicles, vacuums and cleans interiors, and during winter months arrives early to scrape off any accumulated snow. On top of that, he assembles winter survival kits for each vehicle.

In addition, Don maintains a database on all work completed on each vehicle so that routine maintenance can be done regularly.

“Organizational skills are a must in this effort and Don truly shines in this area, too,” says Marthaler. “Without the assistance of people like Don Marx, important services wouldn’t run as smoothly.”

Marx says that he enjoys volunteering because he’s just not one to sit at home and likes to stay busy. He also does volunteer work for his church, provides respite service for an individual with Alzheimer’s, and officiates at track meetings.



Volunteer **Don Marx** checks out a state car to help ensure that it's ready to roll. *Photo: Pat Pittman*

Front Liners

By Jerry Crisp

To say that **Nancy Marez** is an Activity Assistant at the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home (WNVH) is accurate but merely skims the surface. To say that what she does makes a positive difference in the daily lives of the members she serves comes a lot closer to the truth.

Nancy and her teammates plan meaningful activities designed to help WNVH members live better lives and then try to ensure those plans work. Marez sums it up this way:

"We plan, implement, set up, tear down, clean up and do whatever else it takes to make all of the members' daily activities as meaningful and enjoyable as humanly possible in both larger groups and one-on-one," Marez explains. "Basically, we try to fill any unmet needs we can identify."

This includes keeping members company, taking walks, going on outings, conducting exercise sessions, doing crafts, playing games, shopping, cooking, just to name a few.

"We also work with volunteer groups from the community who come out to contribute to members' lives, as well as veteran groups who organize activities like bingo and holiday parties," Marez adds.

Those community volunteer groups include church groups, students, Scouts and others who entertain members with singing, concerts and celebrations.

"Our job in these instances is to introduce the groups to the veterans and coordinate to make sure their plans go just as smoothly as we want our own to go," says Marez.

Marez and her teammates also regard every interaction as a learning opportunity.

"During refreshment time at exercise sessions we conduct, we chat with them about both history and current events," she explains. "During elections, we ask their views on candidates, the first Presidential candidate they voted for, and who was their favorite President. That helps keep them engaged in the world. and we learn from them about events that occurred before we came on the scene."

While much of what Marez and co-workers do is in larger groups, an equally important part is done one-on-one.

"Shining shoes a couple times each month is something most members enjoy," she says. "People who look better feel better, and a little thing like shining shoes can even build self-esteem. One-on-one interaction with all members lets them know that someone cares and relates to them on a more personal basis."

The main challenge Marez and the rest of her team face is finding new activities for members to keep things fresh and interesting.

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.

"Since brand-new activities are hard to come by, sometimes we simply put a new twist on an old activity," says Marez.

Instead of just going for a drive through the same areas, for example, they might go someplace special like a drive to a nature center or through the Wildcat Hills, or drive to where the members used to live in the community or surrounding area.

"Our biggest challenge is to help them feel involved and connected," says Marez. "Retirement for anyone should not be a time to do nothing but a time to live and laugh and help others. Maybe the best way to do that is to encourage them to bring something to the group that allows others to learn from them."

The kind of commitment that Marez brings to her work is very personal.

"My father was a WWII Army vet who landed on Omaha Beach, and I consider it a privilege to serve service men and women of any generation. To make their lives more meaningful makes our lives more meaningful as well. A job that allows us to get beyond ourselves and serve others is a real blessing."

Marez regards feeling needed and useful as her biggest reward.

"When I come back from vacation and a member says 'We missed you,' I know I am making a significant difference," she says, "and if I can lighten their load toward the end of their lives, that's not a duty but a privilege."

Marez has held the hand of a dying service man or woman many times and told them she would miss them, too.

"I recall one member who was Jewish who faced the final curtain alone because there is no synagogue in our community," Marez explains. "I contacted a rabbinical



Nancy Marez

Photo: Cindy Gellner

student in Cheyenne, Wyoming, who said she'd be glad to help make his final moments easier, and that experience has stayed with me ever since."

Marez taught school before coming to WNVH as a nurse's aide.

"Neither of those wonderful fields were for me, and I've been doing what I'm doing now for the last 20 years," says Marez. "I'm tired at the end of each day but truly blessed."

In addition to the veterans who inspire her, Marez also credits her success to her co-workers who employ a team approach to everything they do and to Activity Supervisor **Laura Singleton** and WNVH Administrator **Lonnie Starke**.

"My co-workers offer active support day in and day out," says Marez, "and Laura and Lonnie provide the perfect balance between leadership guidance and freedom to be creative."

Those Marez works with think highly of her, too.

"Nancy is an advocate for members, a friend to staff and brings innovative ideas to the Activity Department," says Laura Singleton. "She has been an asset to WNVH for many years, and we look forward to many more years of working with such a kind and caring person."

Employees like Nancy Marez at all of the four DHHS-operated veterans' homes succeed in making members feel connected because they are committed to connecting with them. We are grateful to these employees who help us express our undying gratitude to veterans to whom we all owe so much.



(Above) Nancy Marez leads exercise classes to help members enhance range of motion and promote good health. **(Below) Nancy** serves ice cream during a snack time. *Photos: Cindy Gellner*



Special Education preps BSDC students for public schools

By Jerry Crisp

As anyone who has ever been a teacher or a student knows, teaching anyone anything can constitute a real challenge for both. Two teachers, **Dianne Springer** and **Cathy Shock**, have been meeting the challenge of helping prepare students at BSDC for the public school system.

According to Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) CEO **Dan Howell**, the ultimate goal of special education for students at BSDC is to get them ready for life in public schools and the community because BSDC believes that all individuals can be included in a public school system.

“That might mean they attend for only one or two hours daily,” Schock explains. “And CEO Dan Howell has said that if we need to be there with them to help them succeed, then that’s what we’ll do.”

Dianne Springer began teaching at BSDC in 1974.

“The challenge in any classroom is find the right approach to turn students on to learning,” she says. “I start by establishing rapport and sprinkling in lots of encouragement, and that seems to work.”

Springer recalls a boy who was easily embarrassed because he wasn’t able to tie his shoes.

“As often as possible, I would take him aside and work with him on one-on-one,” she says.

“When he wasn’t distracted by trying to succeed in front of others, he graduated his shoe-tying program.”

Asked about teaching awards or honors, Springer says “My successes aren’t sitting on a shelf or in a display case but out there walking around on campus and in the community. It’s nice to know that something I was part of helped students achieve their own success.”

Springer says she learned a lot from **Dr. Kathleen Remmers**, the BSDC Director of Special Education.

“She always encouraged creativity and new ideas, fresh approaches,” Springer says.

That influence helped shape Springer’s philosophy that “Everyone has the ability to learn—we just need to discover what’s important or interesting to the student and build from there.” She also believes strongly that teaching is not just something that happens in a classroom but at home and everywhere else.

“Teaching is everyone’s job,” she says. “We’re all teachers.” Cathy Shock started teaching at BSDC in 1988.

“You need to make something interesting for students if you really want them to learn,” she says.

Schock tries to provide a stimulating environment to motivate learning whenever possible.

“On Thursdays, we go to ceramics class,” Schock explains. “Shaping materials with your own hands into something useful or beautiful builds pride and lets them know that they have control within their environment and can even shape their future.”

Schock and Springer also use field trips to stir student interest.

“When surrounded by new sights and sounds, their senses come alive, and they’re ready to learn. We try to turn those experiences into learning opportunities.”

“Dr. Remmers gave us strong support and the freedom to be creative,” Schock says. “All of these elements are crucial to success.”

Most of us have at least one or more special teachers who will always hold a special place not only in our minds but in our hearts. Countless BSDC students feel this way about Dianne Springer and Cathy Schock.



BSDC Special Education Teachers **Dianne Springer** and **Cathy Schock**.
Photo: Jerry Crisp

March Observances

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

People with intellectual and other developmental disabilities are valuable members of our communities who live, work, recreate, and are involved in their local communities.

“Being included in the community is possible for everyone,” said **Jodi Fenner**, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities. “It is important to recognize that people with disabilities are valuable, contributing members of our communities.”

Over 4,600 people with developmental disabilities are receiving service coordination and/or day, residential or respite services through community-based programs. Another 181 receive services at the Beatrice State Developmental Center. While difficult to estimate the total number of people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in Nebraska, many individuals utilize natural supports to live independently and do not receive any services through DHHS.

Did you know that employees in many DHHS divisions help people with developmental disabilities live better lives? As mentioned, the Division of Developmental Disabilities serves people at BSDC and in community-based programs. Children and Family Services serves youth who are state wards and Behavioral Health serves people who also experience a mental illness. Medicaid and Long-Term Care may be able to pay for health care needs. Public Health licenses and certifies providers of developmental disability services, and also supports the Nebraska Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Fenner said that DHHS employees and community providers focus on providing services that offer real and meaningful opportunities to participate in fun activities, to volunteer and be a service to the community, and to have competitive employment, all based on personal preference.

“We want to remind people they can make a positive difference by inviting someone with a disability to participate in community activities and civic organizations,” Fenner said.

Problem Gambling Prevention Month

Nebraskans who gamble are racking up an average gambling debt of \$26,722, and some of them are experiencing significant financial difficulties.

Calls to the 24-hour Problem Gambling Helpline increased from 20% in 2008 to 47% in 2009. The Helpline handled 2,133 calls in fiscal year 2009, providing information, crisis intervention, and referrals. Operators can transfer callers directly to treatment providers in or near the caller’s community, if requested.

The 2008-2009 annual report for the DHHS Nebraska Gamblers Assistance Program showed that:

- The average age of someone receiving services was 42.8 years, with 57.1% male and 42.9% female.
- Males who were treated for gambling were significantly younger (40.5 years old) than females who received treatment (46 years old).
- Over 500 hours of gambling-related training was provided to health professionals.

Information about gambling and available help can be found at www.nebraskacouncil.com or www.dhhs.ne.gov/beh/gam/gam.htm.

Nebraska to host National Special Olympics Summer Games

Nebraska will be the site of the National Special Olympic Summer Games for the first time on July 18 through 23. As many as 8,000 volunteers will be needed to assist with security, event logistics, welcome committee, delegations services, awards, receptions, ceremonies, information services, technology, cheering committee and more.

If you would like to volunteer, go to info@2010specialolympics.org and sign up now. Volunteers must be 16 years of age (under 16, please come to be a “Fan in the Stands”), participate in volunteer training, optimally for two days or more volunteer commitment (approx. two 8-hour shifts), minimally for one day (approximately one 8-hour shift).

A meeting to recruit volunteers will be held at 7:00 p.m. on March 8 in the Chapel of All Faiths at the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC). Individuals and staff members from BSDC, Mosaic, Region V, Beatrice High School and interested members of the general public are invited.

In their own words

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

Dear **Lonnie Starke** (Administrator, Western Nebraska Veterans' Home, Scottsbluff):

I am a Pharmacy Inspector for the DHHS Licensure Unit of the State of Nebraska. On November 4th, 2009, I called on your Pharmacist, **Roxanne Skiles**, and conducted an inspection on your pharmacy. As documented by my report, your pharmacy was in full compliance, but that is not the purpose of this letter.

I believe it important that you be made aware of the impression your staff and members present to a visitor. When I arrived, Roxanne was finishing lunch, and during the brief wait until she returned, I encountered six to eight staff members and communicated with three of the veterans living there. I seldom find such welcoming, outgoing and cheerful people. Smiles were abundant, and almost without exception I was asked if I could be helped in any way. This experience made my day, and I commend and congratulate you on the atmosphere your facility has achieved.

This is the first time in my 30 years of serving the State as an inspector that I have been inspired to comment on the impression of a visit, whether favorable or unfavorable. Please compliment your staff on my behalf, and I would be remiss if I didn't add my appreciation for the competency and professional effort Roxanne gives to your pharmacy.

Mike Swanda
DHHS Pharmacy Inspector

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

I cannot thank you enough for all that you do. I know you put many hours and a lot of hard work into your job.

I can't afford much, but I'm hoping and praying this card reveals how much I appreciate you.

Thank you for all of this from the bottom of my heart to the tip of my toes. Your wise advice has helped me through many trials and tribulations.

Thank you!

A Service Recipient

Dear **Suzette Moeller** (Staff Assistant, Licensure Unit, Division of Public Health):

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU for all of your assistance! Although effortful, our health clinic licensure has not been an unpleasant task due to all of the support we received from your group.

I wish every agency was so easy to work with! You ought to give lessons.

Cathleen C. Piazza, Ph.D.
Munroe-Meyer Institute and Dept. of Pediatrics
University of Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, Nebraska

In their own words

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

Dear **Vital Records** (Division of Public Health, Lincoln):

I received a copy of my birth certificate from your office two days ago. I was fearful of possible delays in getting this document, as my job was in peril due to needing to renew my driver's license as a condition of my work. My experience with bureaucracies has been mixed, so imagine my surprise and relief in hearing from you after only a brief wait. I was able to renew my license the next day. I wish to convey my sincere THANKS and APPRECIATION to your office for helping me in such a fast, efficient manner.

Also, your Website could hardly be easier to access and use, and I was kept notified of your receiving my application in a timely manner. Thanks SO MUCH for being so capable. It was a pleasure doing business with you!

A Satisfied Customer

Dear **Paul Palazzola** (Youth Security Specialist, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney):

Thank you big time!
We just wanted to thank you for taking care of our state cars. We appreciate the work that you do to keep us safe in our travels.
Thanks again!

Denise Green, Dixie Jackson and Sally Nichols
Nursing Services Surveyors
Division of Public Health
Kearney, Nebraska

Dear **Katie Rosenthal** (Social Service Worker, DHHS North Platte office):

Just a note to say thank you very much for all you have done for me. You will not be forgotten for the good deeds you have done.

A Service Recipient

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.

2010 Employee/Supervisor of the Year Nominations

DHHS Employee Supervisor of the year forms
have been sent to you on-line, or you can
pick them up from your Human Resources office.

Nominations must be returned *no later than March 25th*.

DHHS employees are the core of our business. Recognizing them gives due credit and
harnesses the power of motivation!

