

CONNECTIONS

2016 VOLUME 16, ISSUE 1

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' employees closer together

Matt Wallen, DHHS Chief of Staff

Matt Wallen, the new DHHS Chief of Staff, didn't expect to devote his life to public service. He went to college to play baseball instead. The western New York native said he quickly realized that baseball wouldn't be his life and transferred to SUNY-Fredonia where he spent his college years interning with his local Congressman's office, both in Washington, D.C. and at home. That experience awoke the passion that Matt has today for public service.

After finishing undergrad, Matt moved to D.C. to work on Capitol Hill in a House Committee, while working on his Master's Degree in the evenings. He eventually worked his way up to Sub-Committee Staff Director for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He says he gained valuable legislative and parliamentary experience. Matt's leadership and time there did not go unnoticed, and soon he was asked to become the Chief of Staff for an Ohio Congressman. He spent five years doing everything from working directly with constituents, to attending meetings in the White House!

Matt's experience with transportation and infrastructure was invaluable, and he was given the chance to travel to Beijing, Europe, and Cuba to discuss

high speed rail systems, embargos, and other issues.

The last five years he was in D.C., he worked in the Executive Branch of the Government as a Senior Executive Service appointee. The area he worked with was basically the economic regulators of the railroad.

In 2011, Matt's wife Jill was recruited for a position in Omaha at UNMC. So the couple decided to leave the fast-paced world of Washington, D.C. behind and moved to Nebraska.

Matt worked for Union Pacific in Marketing and Sales for a few years, then decided to get back into the public policy realm. He spent a few years doing some consulting, getting extensive experience in the health care world during the 2014 elections by talking with Nebraskans about the pros and cons of the Affordable Care Act.

He came to DHHS at the beginning of 2016 as the new Chief of Staff to the CEO, Courtney Phillips. Matt says what drew him to the agency was Courtney's energy and what changes she wanted to bring to DHHS. "She and her staff have already accomplished a lot. I'm really excited to be a part of that team.

Matt's objectives will be to align strategic communications and

coordinate initiatives within DHHS and with stakeholders. Like Courtney, he wants to extend access to the CEO's office for the 5,500 DHHS employees across the state. Matt says his door is always open. With his background in legislation and communications, Matt will take an active role in both sides. He says he wants to work towards creating better efficiency within state government, and making prudent use of taxpayer dollars while working toward our mission of helping people live better lives.

Matt says he is grateful for the chance to work with such a great team, "this is a tremendous opportunity and honor to come in and work in this atmosphere. I

don't take that for granted. I know that this is a tremendous position of public trust."

Matt and his wife Jill have two children, Evan, who is 2 1/2. Their daughter Molly just turned one in December. They live in Gretna.



Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>
DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via email at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

Chief Executive Officer: Courtney Phillips	Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division Director: Calder Lynch
Behavioral Health Division Director: Sheri Dawson	Public Health Division Acting Director: Courtney Phillips
Children and Family Services Division Director: Doug Weinberg	Veterans' Homes Division Director: John Hilgert
Developmental Disabilities Division Director: Courtney Miller	

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

CLS Administrator: Kathie Osterman	Graphics and Layout: Judy Barker
Editor: Melissa Lindell	

Readers are invited to submit news, photos and story ideas to the editor via:

Phone: (402) 471-4047
Fax: (402) 471-3996

E-mail: melissa.lindell@nebraska.gov

Interagency mail: NE State Office Bldg. 3rd Floor
 U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026
 301 Centennial Mall South
 Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

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 melissa.lindell@nebraska.gov

Homepage Homeruns

LiveWell Challenge Kicks off With Governor's Walk

State employees looking to take part in the 2016 LiveWell Challenge put on their sneakers and started walking Thursday, January 21st at the State Capitol. The statewide event-centric program encourages Nebraskans to train and complete at least 4 events in 2016 as a way to increase their level of physical activity. To meet minimum standards, an "event" must require exertion equal to or greater than that of a 5K walk or run. Thursday kicked off the program at the Capitol with the Governor's Walk. **Governor Pete Ricketts** and DHHS CEO **Courtney Phillips** took part in the event, and encouraged Nebraskans to get out there and move! You can still participate in the LiveWell Challenge.



Go to www.livewellchallenge.com for more information. There are more than 80 events to choose from throughout the year.



Governor Praises DHHS in State of State Address, January 15, 2016

During his State of the State address to the Nebraska Legislature, **Governor Pete Ricketts** asked members of the ACCESSNebraska team (in balcony) to stand and be recognized for improvements in call wait times and accuracy in processing applications that provide benefits to deserving Nebraskans.



During his address, the Governor said, "As I traveled the state, I used to hear a lot of complaints about ACCESSNebraska. The average call wait time in August 2014 was almost 24 minutes. Now, because of process improvements, the average wait time for the last three months is under five minutes." Following the State of the State address, employees were invited to a reception at the Governor's Residence. First Lady Susanne Shore greeted and spoke with employees and was moved while commending their work for Nebraska's most vulnerable citizens.

Recently DHHS CEO Courtney Phillips wrote a Midlands Voices article that appeared in the Omaha World-Herald about all the progress and changes across DHHS. Below is an excerpt of the article. "It has been an honor to serve Nebraskans as the CEO of the Department of Health and Human Services since April. Our team has worked diligently to improve our responsiveness and service to our state's most vulnerable citizens, and we already see results so Nebraskans live better lives each and every day.

Gov. Pete Ricketts assembled a dynamic team of directors at HHS who share their experience and insight to develop high-quality, efficient and customer-friendly services. Directors and staff have stabilized and improved the services we provide Nebraskans...."

[To read the full article go here .](#)
 Homepage Homeruns (cont. on page 4)



Courtney Phillips, CEO

Happy 2016 #TeamDHHS!

With the start of a new year brings new priorities for everyone, including DHHS, and this year has started off with a bang.

One new initiative is the development of a business plan for DHHS that outlines our priority initiatives through June 2017. I've been working with division directors and others on this and hope to have it completed soon. Once completed, it will be shared with all of #TeamDHHS. I want to thank you for your valuable input into the plan. I believe having a clear direction and purpose will serve us well in the coming

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

year. It'll have a positive impact on DHHS as an agency and for you all.

It will guide us and help us clearly communicate our direction and chart our progress. It will also provide a new level of transparency and accountability for the benefit of taxpayers and help us build the credibility that is so important.

We will know when we reach significant milestones. That's important for many reasons – we need to know that we're moving toward our goals. It also gives us the opportunity to tweak our process if we see we are not meeting our goals. And it means we'll be able to recognize our progress internally and also share successes with our stakeholders and the public.

Another priority, at least into April, is our legislative package, and I sent an email to you all last week about our eight bills. We were successful in having more bills introduced on our behalf this year than in many recent years.

These bills reflect our work at DHHS to improve transparency, and offer the

opportunity to reduce regulatory overlap and complexity, create a more effective state government, and improve supports and services for Nebraska's most vulnerable citizens. The ideas for these bills came from employees who brought them up through our bill proposal process that started last summer, and who felt we should be doing something better or differently. I appreciate that focus.

I'm also grateful to the senators for working with us on these initiatives and introducing them for us. We also met with many of our stakeholders and they provided diligent and constructive feedback throughout the drafting process. Working together with our partners is important because we share many of the same goals. When passed, these bills will make a positive impact on furthering our mission of helping Nebraskans live better lives.

In addition to these bills, we're tracking about 150 other new bills that could have an impact on DHHS, as well as following carry-over bills from last year that could impact our work.

We post our testimony and letters that are presented at the public hearings to our public website. You can subscribe to that page if you're interested in knowing what action we take. You can also access information on the legislature's website. Bryson Bartels is our DHHS legislative coordinator and Jessie Sampson is our legislative assistant. If you have any questions about our bills or how to access information, feel free to send them an email or call.

I'm excited about the year ahead of us and what we can accomplish in our efforts to help people live better lives. I want you to know that I appreciate all the hard work and effort you put in on a daily basis. Without you, there is no #TeamDHHS.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Courtney Phillips'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Homepage Homeruns

Homepage Homeruns (cont. from page 2)

Special Band Performance at GIVH (January 7th)

The Hamilton County Area Band plays at the Grand Island Veterans' Home on New Year's Eve 2016, one of many volunteer groups who visit our Veterans' Homes across the state. DHHS Training Specialist, Beth Bartell, is a band member, and is pictured second from the right. Activity Manager Nancy Klimek lines up events at GIVH.

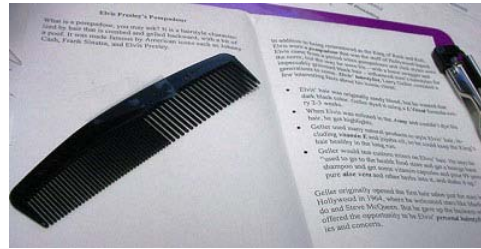


Elvis is IN the building! (January 8)

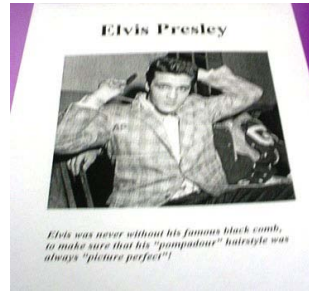
When a large donation of black combs arrived at the Grand Island Veterans Home it did not take the Recreation Department long to find a fun way to get them distributed. In honor of Elvis Presley's 81st Birthday today a celebration took place. They showed a documentary on The King, had a life size cardboard cutout of him, as well as root beer floats and a fun favor card for the residents. The party was sponsored by Jessie Kiser (pictured at right) who is the Department of Nebraska American Legion Auxiliary Representative for GIVH.

Special thanks to:

Edith Soper – DVD – “Rare Moments with the King” & informational brochure creator.



Nancy Klimek – Recreation Mgr. – souvenir brochure on comb & info on Mr. Presley's pompadour hair style-creator.



Joanne Badura – Volunteer Coordinator-Photos.



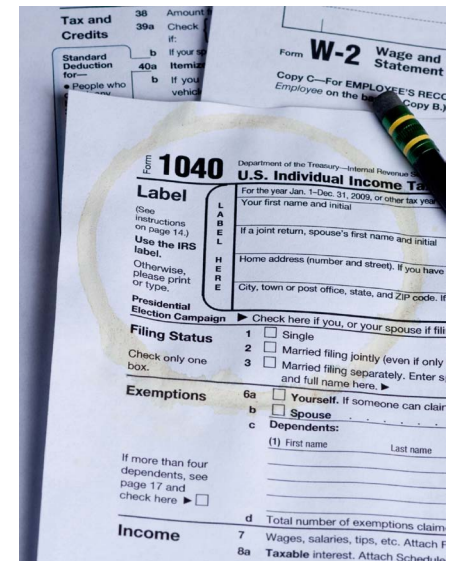
Things to Remember:

Let's not forget - **April 15th is Tax Day!** This wonderful day of the year signifies the last date for individuals to file their annual taxes. Remember as you go to complete your filing for 2015, you'll need a few documents from DHHS as your employer.

First is the “Form W-2” form. This form reports your wages and corresponding tax information recorded by your employer. If you elected to receive your W-2 electronically, you should have received an email that the form is available to print. Don't remember if you signed up for the electronic version? Log into the Employee Work Center through www.link.ne.gov, click on the “Current Benefit Elections” button and view the coverage for “W-2 Elections – State of Nebraska W-2 Election”. A “yes” means you elected to receive your W-2 electronically; if “no” is listed, you will receive a paper copy. Paper W-2's were mailed by January 31st.

Don't remember how to print off your W-2? Click on the User Guide link under the Help section at www.link.ne.gov. Select Payroll and Financial Center and then Employee Self Service. Follow the steps in the user guide to retrieve your electronic W-2. Even if you did not elect to receive an electronic copy, all employees will be able to access the electronic version of this form beginning in February.

Secondly, all full time employees who have been offered health insurance, will also receive a “1095 Form”. This form reports when health insurance was offered and the months you had coverage. This form will be mailed to you in early March. You will not need a 1095 form to complete your 2015 tax return; however, this will be a requirement for years going forward. If you have any questions on your W-2, 1095, or other fun HR form, reach out to your HR contact or Payroll representative for assistance.



Source: ThinkStock

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer

Did you know that Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer? **It's true.** And this colorless, tasteless, and odorless natural radioactive cancer-causing gas may be lurking at dangerous levels in your home, and you don't even know it. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer deaths among nonsmokers in America. It claims the lives of about 21,000 Americans each year. Much of Nebraska has elevated levels of radon.



Mark Versch (right) explains the outdoor pieces of a radon mitigation system to KETV reporter **David Earl**.

But there is something that you can do about it. Get your home tested and take action against radon!

January was National Radon Action Month and the Nebraska Radon Program recommends all homes be tested for radon, as testing is the only way to know the radon level in your home. Testing your home for radon is easy and inexpensive. There are effective ways to reduce radon levels in your home if they are elevated. New homes can also be built with radon resistant features during construction, called radon resistant new construction (RRNC).

Mark Versch, a DHHS Environmental Health Analyst, recently inspected and tested the Omaha home of KETV Reporter David Earl. Earl was working on a story on National Radon Action Month. He had recently had his home inspected by the Nebraska Radon Program when he bought the house and found out that he needed to mitigate the radon in his home.

If you are buying a home, or want to get your home inspected, there are few things you need to know. Whenever practical, a licensed radon mitigation specialist will try to inspect your home when invited to do so. During a visit to your home, they can inspect your house and consult with you about how a system would be installed in your home.

Designing a mitigation system often requires several discretionary decisions and the homeowner's perspective is important. A properly designed mitigation system should be both effective at lowering the radon level and acceptable to the homeowner.

A radon mitigation system will collect and remove soil air from below your basement floor from either:

1. a sump pit, if one is present, or



Mark Versch (center) explains the radon system to a KETV reporter and camera man.

2. a five-inch suction point (the size of a common CD) that will be drilled through the floor in an unfinished storage area or your utility room.

To see Earl's full report, [click here](#) . For more information on the Nebraska Radon Program, [click here](#) .

Way to Go!

Statewide and National Recognitions, Honors and Awards

Workers in the Child Support Division don't always get to see what happens after they are able to secure back child support for a custodial parent. This letter shows just what impact the work of Child Support Enforcement employees have on families.

Back in October of 2008, the Child Support division in Lincoln, Nebraska reached out to me to inform me that they had procured a large sum of money from my ex-husband. He hadn't been paying child support for many years. I had never reported him or reached out to Child Support, so you can imagine my shock and surprise when I received that phone call.

The woman on the phone was so happy and excited to tell me the news, and I fear, due to my shock, that my reaction was not what she had hoped for. I was basically speechless and more than a little doubtful that it was real.

I am reaching out now to let the individuals in the Child Support division know how grateful I am for their efforts almost 8 years ago. Why did I wait so long you may ask? Well, I wanted to wait so you would know what became of that money. And how it impacted my son's life.

I took that money, \$20,000, and invested it in a college fund for my son. At the time, he was a sophomore in high school, and I didn't tell him about the money or about the fund. And then, I waited. He graduated in the top 5% of his high school class and went on to college at Iowa State. He joined a fraternity, made lots of lifelong friends, played intramural sports, worked at several internships. In short, he had the ideal college experience. This past December, he graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He already has a job at Caterpillar in Illinois and will be starting next month.

Oh, and as for the college fund . . . it more than doubled in value and will cover all of his student loans and then some.

I just told him the news about this fund last weekend. His reaction was worth the 8 year long wait. I wanted to share this success story with you because it wouldn't have been possible without the efforts of the individuals in the Child Support division. I suspect you don't often get to hear good news of this magnitude in your day to day operations. So I hope this story will remind you of all the good you do and how your efforts can, literally, change someone's life.

Thank you. And God bless you all.

*Sincerely,
A grateful mother and son*

BE IN THE KNOW...about DHHS

Having information about your workplace is important. Not only does it give you insight across the agency, it also helps you inform others—like family and friends—about the work of DHHS.

Here are a few of the ways Communications and Legislative Services helps you be in the know:

Daily:

- Any mention of DHHS, its divisions, or directors are collected in the Daily News Clips on the homepage. Just click on the "News" tab, then select "[DHHS in the News](#)".
- Also on the homepage, under the "DHHS in the News" area, is a link to all the News Releases that are sent out.
- The employee homepage is also a good way to keep up-to-date on what is happening across the agency with stories In the Box and in the Neat to Know categories.
- Employees are always encouraged to post things on the Employee Bulletin Board on the homepage.
- You can also follow the DHHS Social Media sites on Facebook and Twitter for the latest updates.

Monthly:

- Published monthly is "[Connections](#)" the employee newsletter. You can always suggest articles or send in kudos for this by emailing [Melissa Lindell](#) with any ideas or information you might have.
- We also issue "[Highlights](#)" an electronic newsletter to stakeholders with short articles about the good things that are happening here at DHHS. Those go out on an as-needed basis.

You can also subscribe to different pages on the public website to get any web updates. Just [click here](#), to pick which pages and how to get your alerts.



nice work

If you have good news about you or other DHHS staff, then we want to know about it! Please send any positive Kudos or messages on to Melissa so they can be published in upcoming issues of Connections! It's always nice to get a pat on the back for a job well done!

8 New Year's Resolutions for the Workplace

“Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right”
Oprah Winfrey

By Richard Mettler,
 Human Resources



This New Year is an excellent opportunity to re-commit to creating a workplace that is truly worthy of us all. Following are New Year's resolution suggestions from numerous authorities on organizational culture.

(1) **Put to rest resentments and grievances with others.** Get into the habit of forgiving people for the past, including yourself. 2016 is the time to build bridges and remain on good terms with folks.

(2) **Rein in complaining.** Excessive complaining, especially about ordinary things (“They got a casual day and we didn’t!”), only fuels negativity and leaves us and people around us feeling worse.

(3) **Avoid gossip and rumors.** Redirect conversations to topics that are known to be true and positive.

(4) **Be a welcoming resource for co-workers.** Support others on their way to success. Teach a work task, provide advice where you are knowledgeable, or simply be a good listener.

(5) **Ease up on yourself and keep perspective.** Don't beat yourself up over

honest mistakes. Take responsibility for your mistakes, learn from them, and move on. Give yourself the credit you deserve. Keep in mind all that you do well and the value your efforts bring to DHHS.

(6) **Continue learning.** Commit to learning three new things every day.

(7) **Learn optimism.** Begin by challenging your own unfounded negative thoughts. When things don't turn out the way you wanted, learn from this and move forward. Optimists think of setbacks as temporary, and as opportunities to learn to succeed next time. As Wayne Gretzky said, “You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.”

(8) **Practice common courtesies.** Be kind and courteous: smile at people and say ‘Good morning,’ ‘Hello,’ ‘Please,’ ‘Thank you,’ ‘You're welcome.’ The consistent habit of courtesy positively influences others. Courtesy at work can be contagious as people follow your lead. Remember, “A rising tide lifts all boats.”



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

“Celebrate what you want to see more of.” Tom Petters

Practice the Penguin Shuffle

By Jean Luther
 Safety Specialist at Hastings Regional Center

What is the Penguin Shuffle and why should we practice it? Because it's winter, ice is here and it's one of the recommended ways to walk safely on the ice. At the beginning of this year we had six falls on ice in one morning, one ending in a broken bone. Most of the falls happen when walking to or from the parking lot and the building.

No matter how well we remove the snow or ice from the sidewalks, it melts during the days and refreezes at night and causes slippery surfaces. It is best if we are aware of these dangers and learn to walk safely. As soon as you step out of your car assume that the surface is slippery and use the car for support.

Some of the basic precautions are:

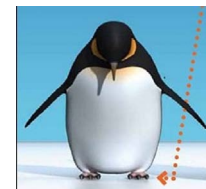
- Wear good shoes with thick non-slip treads (a lot of little nubs); sole made of natural rubber and wide low heels.
- Stay on your toes. Stay aware and keep your head up.
- Take your time and walk on designated clear paths.
- Keep your knees loose -- let them bend a bit. This will keep your center of gravity lower to the ground, which further stabilizes the body.
- Walk like a penguin. Your center of gravity widens this way. Point your toes out and shift your weight from side to side like a penguin does; this type of walking feels, and looks, a lot like a shuffle. Some people prefer to drag their feet or shuffle them. If this

feels better to you, then do so. Just remember to place your whole foot on the ice at once and keep your base of support approximately one foot wide. Keep your arms out at your side and slightly extended when on icy sidewalks; not in your pockets as this decreases your center of gravity and balance. Think of someone walking on a tightrope and maintaining balance with his arms.

- Wear a heavy, bulky coat that will cushion you if you should fall! And if you do fall avoid landing on your knees, wrists or spine. Try to fall on a fleshy part of your body

The elderly are particularly vulnerable to falls and it is the leading cause of life-threatening injuries. Just one bad fall on ice can have long-term consequences. These include: chronic pain in the affected area; a disabling injury that may mean loss of independence; or fear of another fall, which discourages a healthy, active lifestyle. We can help prevent falls by staying physically healthy and working to improve your balance. Those who have good fitness levels are stronger and more flexible, according to the National Safety Council.

Here's a fun video to demonstrate the [penguin shuffle](#) :



In Gratitude

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:

Helping people live better lives.



Here are some letters & notes DHHS employees have received thanking us for the work we do every day to help people live better lives.

Nikkia Dexter (MLTC Worker)

I am a mental health provider and needed a piece of information to resolve a problem that was complex in nature. She listened to the entire situation and quickly analyzed the situation to come to a resolution right away. I fully appreciate her patience and her ability to do her job in the most efficient manner.

Maria Goede

Mary Kulhanek and Sharon Wellensiek (Public Health Licensing)

Mary, I want to thank you and Sharon for a job well done. I have always felt that you have been fair, objective and always helpful when you have been here. Sharon is the same way. I hope your trip back was uneventful and safe. I look forward seeing you again. Thanks and take care.

Jack Green (Administrator of the Antelope Memorial Hospital in Neligh)

To CFS

"**Jodi Denson** (Staff Assistant, Central Office, Lincoln) was so helpful in providing me with the information I need in order to obtain a Central Registry Background check in Nebraska. Jodi did a great job and I wanted to let her supervisor know that I have never had a more pleasant experience in working with a state agency."

Background Check Agency

Director Courtney Phillips: I was reviewing the Governor's column from last week, and wanted to offer congratulations on all the efforts HHS, under your direction and leadership, has done to improve services and budget. As a tax payer, and a state worker I appreciate how much time and effort needs to be invested in providing excellent service to the individuals of Nebraska. I also know that many times, positive performance is under appreciated! Thank you for the strides made in your agency.

Respectfully, Claire Moore, DAS

About **Courtney Miller:** Again singing her praises. One of my son's new providers signed up through the new online Maximus. After getting nowhere for weeks in authorization, I contacted Courtney for assistance. Between Courtney and Mike Baumfalk, they had the situation rectified within two days. She's awesome and I absolutely love her hands on approach. She restores hope for DD services.

A mom of a son receiving service