

# Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

July 2008  
VOLUME 8, ISSUE 7

## Volunteers helping DHHS achieve its mission of "helping people live better lives"



Photo: Pat Engelhard

Volunteers play a vital role in enhancing both quantity and quality of services, helping DHHS achieve its mission of "helping people live better lives," says Chief Executive Officer **Christine Peterson**.

Turn the page to find out which volunteers **Governor Dave Heineman** and First Lady **Sally Ganem** are recognizing through the Governor's Points of Light program and information about additional volunteers featured in this issue.

### INSIDE

"From the CEO"	Page 3	Happenings	Page 9
Recycling	Page 4	Titanic	Page 11
Volunteers	Page 6	"In Their Own Words"	Page 12
Water Testing	Page 7	Wellness	Page 13
Front Liner Loretta McCrimon	Page 7	Volunteer Awards	Page 14

Connections is now an online publication, available at [www.dhhs.ne.gov/connections](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/connections).



# DHHS in the News Update...

A small sample of news releases recently issued by Communications & Legislative Services about DHHS programs. A full text of all releases is available under "Newsroom" on the DHHS Web site listed below.

- **Dept. of Justice Applauds DHHS Efforts at BSDC** June 30
- **DHHS Says Storm Victims May Be Eligible for Disaster Food Stamp Assistance** June 26
- **Nebraska Safe Kids Promotes Fireworks Safety** June 25
- **Kids Count Report Shows Nebraska is 9th Best in Nation** June 12
- **PSA Campaign to Raise Awareness of Colon Cancer** June 12
- **\$17.1 Million Distribution - Final Chapter in Behavioral Health Reform** June 6

A full text of all releases is available under "Newsroom" on the DHHS Web site. Go to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/), click on the "Newsroom" link and then on "News Releases." You can listen to "sound bites" issued with releases by going to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio/](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio/).

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

## About the cover:



**A SHINING POINT OF LIGHT: Governor Dave Heineman and First Lady Sally Ganem (at right) present a "Points of Light" award to Barbara Ann Preissler, a volunteer at the Grand Island Veterans' Home (GIVH). Since May 2005, Preissler has donated nearly 1,000 hours of her time and talents in the Alzheimer special care unit.**

"Having had both of her parents living at GIVH, Barbara selflessly recognizes the value of an extra pair of hands," says Volunteer Coordinator **Joanne Badura**. "She has served as mentor and leader for monthly Alzheimer's support meetings. She also assists during activities, serves treats, assists with crafts, uses pictures to stimulate reminiscence, and escorts members on walks and to appointments."

"On admission days, Barb helps families make adjustments, and she has offered comfort to members and their families during end-of-life experiences," says Badura. "She also mentors and shares her knowledge with youth volunteers. Barbara Ann Preissler truly is a shining point of light."

Volunteers donated a whopping 68,881 hours of time valued at \$1,292,896 to DHHS programs, facilities and offices during fiscal year 2006/07. For more about how these exceptional people benefit DHHS clients and employees, see items later in this issue.

## 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@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto: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).

Governor:  
**Dave Heineman**

DHHS Chief  
Executive Officer:  
**Christine Peterson**

Behavioral Health  
Division Director  
**Scot Adams, Ph.D.**

Children and Family  
Services Division Director:  
**Todd Landry**

Developmental Disabilities  
Division Director:  
**John Wyvill**

Medicaid and Long-Term  
Care Division Director:  
**Vivianne Chaumont**

Public Health Division  
Director/Chief Medical  
Officer:  
**Dr. Joann Schaefer**

Veterans' Homes Division  
Director:  
**John Hilgert**

Director of Operations:  
**Bob Zagozda**

CLS Administrator:  
**Kathie Osterman**

Editor:  
**Jerry Crisp**

Graphics and Layout,  
Support Services:  
**Maisun Allahiq  
Judy Barker  
Nathan Putens**

### ► Readers are invited to submit news, photos & story ideas to the editor via:


**Phone:** (402) 471-3995 **Fax:** (402) 471-3996 **E-mail:** [jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov)

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

*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.

EOE/AA/ADA



 printed on recycled paper

## From the CEO

This news release was issued on July 1, 2008, to share with Nebraskans some of the accomplishments of the Department during the past year.

### DHHS Celebrates First Year Achievements

**Lincoln** – The new Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services turns one year old today.

“The year has gone by extremely fast and we’re proud of what we’ve accomplished,” said Christine Peterson, the agency’s Chief Executive Officer. “We’ve changed the way we do business to be more accountable, accessible and action-oriented.”

**Governor Heineman** introduced LB 296 in 2007, which combined three former agencies into DHHS, with six divisions that are clearly identified by their names and responsibilities.

“Governor Heineman’s vision for the Department has resulted in improvements in services and operations,” Peterson said. “I believe we’ve made incredible progress and we intend to continue on this path.”

Examples of accomplishments within the Department’s six divisions include:

**Behavioral Health.** The last of the LB 1083 Behavioral Health reform funding, \$3.5 million, is ready to be distributed. This has allowed an additional 9,000 consumers to be served in their communities, closer to friends and families. Since LB 1083 was passed in 2004, over \$30.1 million has moved to community-based services by closing 232 adult and 16 youth psychiatric beds at two of the state’s three regional centers. In addition, a children’s behavioral health program was created and is being integrated into the division. An assisted living facility study group and a veterans/behavioral health study group have been established. Housing-

related assistance for persons with mental illness has increased from 127 people in 2006 to 557 people last year.

**Children and Family Services.** Nebraska leads the nation in Food Stamp accuracy and achieved an increase in finalized adoptions, both resulting in federal bonus money to the state. The number of state wards has decreased, as well as the number children and youth in out of home care. Nebraska is first in the nation in establishing permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time. The division has signed performance-based contracts for new safety and

information system was awarded to replace the current 30-year old system. It will improve claims processing, information retrieval and enhance reporting. A contract has been signed to provide Medicaid nurse home visitation services for high risk pregnant teens to improve



Christine Peterson  
Chief Executive Officer

**“Staff across the state have renewed energy and have shown a commitment to make improvements; I’m very proud of their work.”**

in-home services. Because more children have moved to permanency, worker caseloads have decreased and are more in line with national standards. The Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers in Kearney and Geneva are accredited by the American Correctional Association.

**Developmental Disabilities.** The division has met the staffing challenges at the Beatrice State Developmental Center head-on. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) approved BSDC’s plan of correction, and this week DHHS and the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ) reached a settlement regarding the care given to people served at BSDC. The mandatory overtime at BSDC went from over 650 hours a pay period earlier this year to 84 hours at the end of June. The census has decreased by 69 since December, transitioning people to community-based services when appropriate. Effective today, over 200 developmental disability service coordinators will move to the developmental disabilities division from the children and family services division to improve efficiencies in the program.

**Medicaid and Long-Term Care.** A contract for a new Medicaid

health and parenting skills. The enhanced care coordination project is being created to address the needs of clients who use a disproportionate share of Medicaid dollars by coordinating their care and ensuring that services are used in the most cost effective way. The Money Follows the Person project is being implemented to rebalance Medicaid long-term care spending by increasing home and community-based services.

**Public Health.** The Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System (CODES) and Nebraska Cancer Registry reports have both met their respective national Gold Standards. The new state immunization registry is being implemented. A survey of licensed health care professionals on interactions with the division during investigations and reviews showed a 96% favorable assessment. The department was one of 16 states to receive a Critical Access Hospital Health Technology Grant and a 5-year cardiovascular health grant.

**Veterans’ Homes.** All four Veterans’ Homes have new administrators and the new Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home opened in Bellevue. All four homes have received positive federal  
*(article continued on page 14)*

# Youth at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney are part of DHHS recycling efforts

By Jerry Crisp

Once considered only a pleasant pastime for purists and folks on the fringe, recycling has become a priority plan for conservation of natural resources and a healthy global economy. For instance, “Recycle! It’s Good for Nebraska!” is a phrase found in almost all DHHS offices and facilities on each of 6,000 desk-side containers distributed to state agencies for recycling office paper.

State employees have made great strides in helping conserve Nebraska’s natural resources while creating a healthy local and global economy. According to **Aaron Boucher**, Recycling Coordinator in the State Department of Administrative Services, they recycled 1,895,047 pounds of office paper in 2007—a 29% increase from 2006. If you include cardboard (647,425 pounds recycled in 2007) and newspaper (53,428 pounds recycled in 2007), state government employees recycled 6,752 pounds of paper every work day!

Boucher says that state government employees recycled a grand total of 2,873,667 pounds in 2007, which includes paper, plastics, electronics, toner cartridges, and tin and aluminum cans. This translates into a savings of at least \$30,177 in avoided landfill costs.

Recycling offers opportunities for everyone to help reduce climate change, save energy and conserve natural resources. Boucher says that recycling just one ton of aluminum cans saves the energy equivalent to 36 barrels of oil or 1,655 gallons of gasoline. Moreover, using recycled materials instead of new materials

saves energy and reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and using recycled glass instead of new materials consumes 40% less energy.

“Without recycling, given current virgin raw material supplies, we could not print the daily newspaper, build a car, or ship a product in a cardboard box,” says Jerry Powell, editor of the Resource Recycling magazine. “Recycling is not some feel-good activity—it’s one of the backbones of global economic development.”

But can one person or one office or one facility really make a difference? According to Boucher, the answer is a resounding yes!

For example, the DHHS office at 3737 Lake Street in Omaha

recycled 3,775 pounds of office paper last year. This translates into 32 trees being saved, 13,213 gallons of water conserved, 7,739 kilowatts of electricity conserved and 874 gallons of oil saved. This same office recycled 190 pounds of plastic containers, which conserved 2,280,000 BTUs of electricity. And just by recycling 45 pounds of aluminum cans, they conserved 180 pounds of bauxite.

Multiply that by all DHHS efforts, and you have some idea of how grass root efforts quickly become global.

**Wade Remmenga**, Procurement Manager and Recycling Coordinator within DHHS Operations’ Support Services, works closely with Aaron Boucher.



Youth at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney are part of DHHS recycling efforts. Photo: Sue Divan

“DHHS also puts a lot of property back into action when it’s surplussed,” Remmenga says. “If that property can’t be used within DHHS, then we ask State Surplus Property to make it available to another agency or to sell it at public auction. Surplus computers are processed by staff in Information Systems & Technology, and all non-computer surplus property is processed by **Kathy Reidy** and **Karen Homes** in Support Services.”

The state hosts six property auctions and two vehicle auctions each year.

“We also try to ‘buy green’ whenever possible by purchasing products with recycled content such as paper towels and writing tablets,” says Remmenga. Having Office Depot’s ‘Green Book’ on state contract made it possible for state employees to purchase \$52,596 worth of recycled-content file folders, papers, pens, and the like.

“The key to success is to move recycling from policy to a personal level, from global to grass roots,” says Remmenga. “We start with smart planning and clear policy. We proceed by enlisting all Support Services staff from the mail room in Lincoln to Material Specialists and Supply Workers in DHHS Service Areas and 24-hour facilities, as well as maintenance personnel assigned directly to those facilities. We finish by enlisting every employee in a concerted, coordinated effort to recycle whenever possible.

“What state employees recycle with solid success includes items from office paper to toner cartridges,” says Remmenga. “What we all need to work on more are plastic bottles and pop cans many of us still toss in the wastebasket. It’s only a couple of plastic bottles or pop cans, we tell ourselves, but every little bit quickly adds up to a lot.”

“We’re stewards of the earth’s resources, and recycling is just one way to help preserve them,” says DHHS Chief Operations Officer **Bob Zagozda**. “And it’s easy, with all of the receptacles for paper, plastic, and aluminum, there is no reason not to recycle everything we can.”

Aaron Boucher and others suggest that recycling has gone from “something we should really give some thought to one of these days” to something on today’s front burner.

Here are some tips on what you can do as one person to help the recycling effort. The Department of Administrative Services calls them the “Five Re’s of Recycling”:

## REDUCE!

The most effective way to conserve is to prevent waste in the first place by practicing “source reduction.” Source reduction means any change in the design, manufacture, purchase or use of materials or products (including packaging) to reduce their amount or toxicity before they become municipal solid waste. Not buying anything that you don’t need and making sure that what you do buy is durable and as free of toxics as possible are ways of practicing source reduction. Print and copy on both sides of paper, use bulletin boards, e-mail, routing slips and word-of-mouth to help reduce paper use.

## REUSE!

If you have ever been to a garage sale, thrift store, auction or antique mall, then you have benefited the environment and community by reusing items that would otherwise have landed in your local landfill. Another way to reuse is to use a product more than once, either for the same or a different purpose. Reusing is preferable to recycling because the item doesn’t need to be reprocessed before it can be used again. Shopping at State Surplus Property is an excellent way to reuse office supplies, office equipment, computers, vehicles, furniture and much more.

## RECYCLE!

Recycling turns materials that would otherwise become waste into valuable resources and generates a host of environmental, financial and social benefits. After collection, materials are separated and sent to facilities that can process them into new materials or products.

## REBUY!

Buy recycled! Buying recycled content products and materials helps create a demand for materials recovered from recycling efforts. By buying recycled, you help to divert reusable materials away from landfills, reducing waste disposal costs and conserving resources.

## RETHINK!

Think again! Next time you go to throw something in your garbage can, take a minute to think about other possibilities other than adding it to your local landfill. Can it be reused either by you or someone else? Can it be recycled? If so, when you go to replace it, remember to think about replacing it with a product made from recycled materials.



For additional information about recycling, contact State Recycling Coordinator Aaron Boucher at (402) 471-2431 or [aaron.boucher@nebraska.gov](mailto:aaron.boucher@nebraska.gov), DHHS Recycling Coordinator Wade Remmenga at (402) 471-0786 or [wade.remmenga@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:wade.remmenga@dhhs.ne.gov), or go to <http://www.das.state.ne.us/materiel/recycling/recycling.htm>.

# Volunteers paint mural to “friendly up” Kids’ Room

By Jerry Crisp

The “Kids’ Room” in the DHHS Lincoln office is a place for children who have been removed from their homes to play while waiting to be placed in a foster home or other care facility.

“It’s a scary time for kids, and they deserve a comfortable, friendly setting,” says **Pat Pittman**, Resource Developer with the Division of Children & Family Services in Lincoln’s Gold’s Building. “The room had seen better days and was painted hideous purple with scuff marks all over the walls.”

On a service day known as “The Big Event,” local volunteer groups donate a day to help out, and the Association of Students at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (ASUN) set to work on a mural that would both brighten and “friendly up” the Kids’ Room. The ASUN groups were from the Kappa Delta sorority.

“It was a long day of work, but with energy provided by knowing that the mural would spruce up the room considerably,” Pittman says, “the time flew by.”

Volunteers contribute to DHHS in many ways, from donating their time and talents to giving gifts of clothing, food, funds, gift certificates, toys and services. Thanks to them, DHHS employees are better able to fulfill their mission of helping others live better lives.



(Above) The mural takes shape with members of the Kappa Delta sorority and a helping hand from **Tony Schmidt**, the 5-year old son of Southeast Service Area Administrator Jeff Schmidt. (Below) Five of the volunteers pose before the completed mural.

Photos: Pat Pittman



# DHHS water program helps out neighboring state

By Marla Augustine

**A**lamosa, a Colorado community of 8,600, recently experienced a water-related outbreak of salmonella - a bacteria that can cause diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. Over 400 people ultimately became ill in the outbreak, with one death reported.

For 24 days, residents couldn't drink the water or use it for brushing their teeth, washing dishes or cooking. For a time, they couldn't do much with it except flush their toilets. Because of the contamination, schools and restaurants closed. The National Guard handed out bottled water.

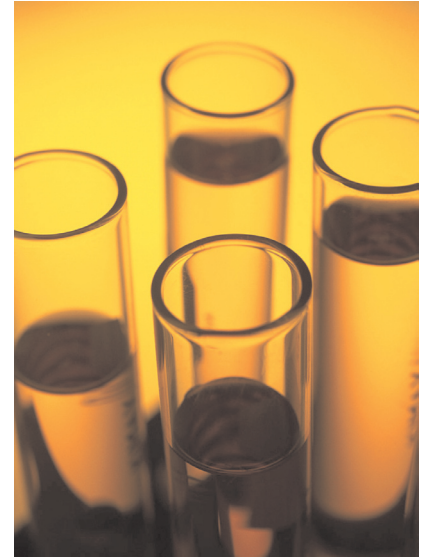
When the salmonella problem was detected, the city called on the Mid America Alliance for help. The Alliance

is a group of 10 states that includes Nebraska and its neighbor, Colorado, that agree to help one another without a federally declared emergency. Nebraska sent DHHS Water Program field staffers **Tony Martinez** of North Platte and **Jeff Brannon** of Lincoln to Alamosa.

The city had to ensure that chlorine sufficient to kill pathogens was reaching every spot in the water system. Jeff and Tony became part of a four-member team assisting in flushing samples out of valves at designated parts of the water system for testing to ensure that chlorine residual had reached a high enough point to kill bacteria.

After working three 12-hour days, Tony and Jeff were glad to get home.

"Alamosa needed help, and Jeff and Tony's know-how was important



in getting the city back on track," says Jack Daniel, Administrator within the Division of Public Health.

While the cause of the Colorado contamination hasn't been determined, what remains clear is that DHHS employees not only help Nebraskans live better lives but their neighbors as well.

# Improved forms system benefits DHHS employees, public

**A** new forms system now makes it easier for DHHS employees to view, order, and receive shipments of envelopes, forms and publications on DHHS' internal Web site. It also allows public users to view public forms and publications, print copies and fill out some forms on DHHS' external Web site, such as applying for financial assistance or food stamps and mailing the forms in.

Employees who previously had to contact the Forms and Publications Design unit within Support Services or the Warehouse in Lincoln by phone

or mail to order forms, envelopes, letterheads, posters or brochures can now check the new system for themselves. Members of the public who before might contact the reception desk at the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln or program area can now also check for themselves.

"The new system is all about self-service and was a collaborative effort between Support Services and Information Systems & Technology within DHHS Operations and the Office of the Chief Information Officer within the Department of

Administrative Services," says **Maisun Allahi**, Forms and Publications Design Unit Manager with DHHS Support Services. Allahi first suggested the new system to provide greater accessibility, prevent duplication and save printing, postage and mailing costs.

This new system can be accessed on the internal (or employee) home page at <http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov> by clicking on "Forms" under "Resources." Members of the public can access the system on the external or public Web site by clicking on "Forms."

# Front Liners

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

By Jerry Crisp

**Loretta McCrimon**, Housekeeping Supervisor at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, doesn't spend much time behind her desk.

"I need to pitch in and help my staff of 10 and oversee their efforts from one end of the Home to the other," Loretta explains. "We have 119,000 square feet of floor space to keep clean for members, visitors and employees, and 80% of that is carpeting. That means that it's not a matter of mopping up a spill on linoleum but more like using steam carpet cleaners to get the job done each day."

Loretta and her trusty crew are also responsible for picking up and delivering the members' personal laundry and linen.

"We also dust, sweep, mop and clean toilets," says Loretta, "Sometimes it seems like no matter how much you do, there's always more to be done."

Far from complaining, Loretta says that it's worth every hour she and her crew put in.

"The hard work we do is nothing at all when you stop and think about the contributions and sacrifices veterans made," says Loretta. "Some of the wartime experiences they



Loretta McCrimon, hands-on Housekeeping Supervisor at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home in Bellevue, spends more time using a housekeeping cart like this one than sitting behind a desk. *Photo: Pat Howe*

relate make the work we do sound like a walk in the park. It's a real honor to serve those who did so much more for all of the rest us."

A memorable moment for Loretta came during the move from the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home at Omaha.

"A member in a wheelchair who hadn't ridden in a car for years was concerned about the drive to the new home at Bellevue," Loretta recalls. "Business Manager **Verna Evans** worked with him

to make the move more comfortable. She wheeled him to a vehicle to look inside, let him sit in the car briefly, and later took him for brief rides around the old campus before the big move."

Later, Evans, Loretta and two other staff helped the member into the vehicle for the trip to Bellevue.

"These efforts helped make the ride less anxious for the member and more of an adventure," Loretta recalls.

According to her, the new home at Bellevue has opened doors to a better life for the veterans living there.

"They love it," Loretta says. "Everything is on one floor, and they can get around more. They also love the new soup and salad bar that offers lighter fare for warmer weather."

The veterans' new home at Bellevue may have changed the lives of veterans' for the better, but one thing that hasn't changed is the dedication and devotion of the entire staff to the members they respect and admire so much. Loretta McCrimon said it best when she said, "It's a real honor to serve those who did so much for all the rest of us."

## Wannabe carpooler finds help via *Connections* and Webmaster

**Debra Lamprecht**, Health Licensing Specialist in the Division of Public Health, commutes from Wahoo every day to her job in the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln. When she contacted *Connections* to ask about any carpooling resources, Editor Jerry Crisp said he would take her request to a weekly brainstorming session he facilitates for Communications & Legislative Services the next day.

A mere 12 minutes after the close of that session, fellow brainstormer and DHHS Webmaster **Greg Votava** added a link on the DHHS Intranet's homepage that helps carpoolers find each other.

A few days later, Debra Lamprecht notified the DHHS employee newsletter editor that "The addition of the e-ride to the employee Web site was of great help to me. I have already located two people to carpool with and started this morning! I hope others find it to be as helpful as I did."



# Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state

## INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP

Employment First (EF) students graduating from a welders' course this spring in Lincoln have much to celebrate. They've completed their training and look forward to a brighter future. They also enjoy the distinction of being the first class in an innovative partnership that brings together people who need jobs, jobs that need people, and the skills needed for both.

"This is a great opportunity for Employment First clients to enter the workforce in a high demand trade," said **Todd Landry**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services. "We're hoping that this partnership leads to additional course offerings in the future."

EF is a DHHS program that helps clients get jobs through training, education and employment preparation. Eight students graduated at the May 29 ceremony at Southeast Community College in Lincoln (SCC).

Oasis Staffing, a temporary staffing and job placement agency, identified a need for welders to fill current job vacancies. DHHS contracts with Arbor Education and Training to provide workforce development services in the Southeast Service Area. Arbor worked with SCC to offer a special welders' course to EF clients, and worked with the clients to ensure success. Shown (l-r) are graduates **Sherry Blackbonnet, Staci Justus, Blake Jones, Sarah Lowe, Cody Kizzire, Cliff Cline** and (foreground) **Christopher Townsend**. (Not pictured, **Kimberly Richison**). *Photo: Dennis Becking*



## HELPING HANDS

Brightly colored shovels ready to fill sandbags to hold back rising waters await helping hands in Schuyler during spring flooding. In the background are houses surrounded by sandbags doing just that.

Several DHHS employees were once again called on to assist the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), in collaboration with other state agencies, during the tornados and flooding that ravaged central Nebraska.

While some traveled to trouble spots to assist local emergency responders, others staffed communication posts or emergency operation centers to aid several Nebraska communities in their time of need. *Photo: Mike Wight*



# Happenings (continued)

## A SPECIAL PLACE

Members of the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH), their families and visitors will now enjoy a new pavilion, thanks to **Diane Garrett**, daughter of NVH Member **Gene Degaillez**, and her collaborators.

The idea for a pavilion came from the NVH Member Council, and Diane Garrett donated the funding. She wanted to honor her parents, now in their 68th year of marriage, by creating a special space where they and others could spend quality time together.

NVH Volunteer Services Coordinator **Jenny Last** and the "Garden Committee" she chairs worked with the local Carhart Lumber Company to get building materials at cost, saving around \$2,000. Jenny's group also worked with a building construction class at Northeast Community College that was looking for hands-on experience and a great learning experience. The result was the Degaillez Pavilion. In accordance with Diane Garrett's wishes, a plaque inside the pavilion reads: "May all who enter feel love in their hearts and peace in their soul."

According to Last, "All of these hands being joined together have created a special place at the Norfolk Veterans' Home that will make lasting memories for years to come."



(Top) Jenny Last opens the May 1st dedication ceremony, and (bottom) Diane Garrett and her mother, LaVonne Degaillez, cut the ribbon. *Photos: Linda Sparr*



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 print as many as space allows.

# Grand Island Veterans' Home relives former era ...for a week

By Jerry Crisp

Sometimes employees initiate an activity in the workplace they know their co-workers and the clients they serve might enjoy and maybe even learn from it. An example occurred recently at the Grand Island Veterans' Home (GIVH).

Volunteer Coordinator **Joanne Badura** took it upon herself to launch a Titanic week of activities centered around the story of the world's largest and most luxurious ship in the early 20th century.

Joanne started by giving folks "boarding passes" with actual passenger names from the Titanic's manifest. A week later, they had an opportunity to find out how their passenger alter ego weathered the trip, either being one of the 711 lucky souls taken aboard a rescue ship or sinking along with 1,518 beneath a cold and merciless sea.

The facility got into the spirit, converting its Liberty Cafe into the ocean liner's Savoy dining room, with a portal affixed to the door.

GIVH member and Granada veteran **John Huebner** was Joanne's chief accomplice. He helped decorate for the event and made a Styrofoam "iceberg" for a Titanic model in a plastic tub. The 1996 made-for-TV version of the event starring **George C. Scott** and **Catherine Zeta Jones** was shown on the Liberty Cafe's big screen.



Joanne Badura and GIVH member John Huebner assume identities of "Captain Adolf Humblin" and Titanic passenger "Bertha Lehman." *Photo: Bill Derr*

As if that wasn't enough, John also donned a costume to play the part of host "Captain Adolf Humblin." Employees got into the act, too. Recreation staff made "iceberg snow cones" served during the movie.

Why did Joanne Badura go to all this work to relive a tragedy so distant in time?

Part of the reason is that Joanne is from Canada, a nation that played a prominent role in rescue efforts. Joanne's grandson, **Caleb**, also happens to be a big Titanic fan, and Joanne gave him an antique suitcase for his 8th birthday that she filled with Titanic memorabilia that she crafted or bought from museums.

"Our family is planning a trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Caleb's 12th birthday on April 12, 2012," Joanne says. "That's the 100th anniversary of the Titanic's ill-fated journey."

Another reason Joanne coordinated a week-long event is that she knew the members and her co-workers would find their adventure into the gone-but-not-forgotten past a fascinating journey.

Lessons were learned from the tragedy that led to lifeboat requirements, automatic alarms triggered by distress calls, and an international ice patrol to issue warnings, now via satellites.

"The cool thing was that some staff members even took home what they learned to share with their families," Joanne says. "I am so glad it went over so well with everyone here. We got a lot of very nice comments from people."



Just for fun, GIVH Store Clerk Donna Callihan mimics the pose from the famous scene from the 1997 epic blockbuster, "Titanic," starring Leonardo Di Caprio and Kate Winslet. *Photo: Joanne Badura*

# In their own words...

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

Dear **Amber Kearns** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Scottsbluff One Stop Shop):

I would like to thank Nebraska Health and Human Services for all of its help. Thanks to **Brigette Palmer** (Social Worker, DHHS Scottsbluff One Stop Shop), my caseworker, and everyone else in the Scottsbluff office for all of their help while my son and I got back on our feet. Thank you!

**A Scottsbluff area service recipient**

[Editor's Note: This participant also asked that all of her program cases be closed, as she could now provide for herself and her child.]

Dear **Margaret Bitz**, Unit Administrator, Children & Family Services, Nebraska State Office Building (NSOB), Lincoln:

Recently I was involved in an interstate adoption involving Nebraska and Kansas. As part of that process, I often had to rely on **Rita Krusemark** (Program Specialist, NSOB-Lincoln) and **Mary Dyer** (Adoption Specialist, NSOB-Lincoln) in your Children & Family Services Division. In spite of countless phone calls asking for information and advice, they were always pleasant and helpful. They were very professional and competent in the information they provided.

All too often, state employees are taken for granted, and I can assure you in this case, their assistance was invaluable and resulted in completion of successful interstate adoption. I wanted to bring to your attention their performance and commend them for their assistance

**From a law office representative**

Dear **Kim Krueger** (Protection & Safety Worker, DHHS Hastings office):

I just wanted to say thank you for all the hard work and care you put into this case. It was an honor to work with you. You, by far, are one of the best caseworkers I have ever worked with on a case. Thank you for always promptly returning calls and staying so active, including attending interdisciplinary team meetings. They helped tremendously to ensure that we were always on the same page.

I enjoyed working with the client and hope he gained skills necessary to make positive choices and continue to be successful. Again, thank you for the time and energy you put into this case! I hope our paths cross with another client again.

**Jamie D. Eberly**, MS, LMPH  
Psychologist  
Epworth Village, Inc.  
York, Nebraska

While *Connections* receives more letters from satisfied customers than we can ever publish, please send letters via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll print as many as space allows.

# For What It's Worth

*An anonymous tip from a DHHS co-worker you might be able to use*

## Agreement the right yardstick?

“They just won’t listen to me” is a complaint we often hear and say. But do those who use that phrase so freely really mean it? We all deserve the basic respect and right of being listened to, but what is often meant by “they won’t listen” is “they don’t agree.”

Being listened to means just that—a fair hearing that leads to understanding—not acquiescence, accord or agreement. If someone knows what we’re saying but doesn’t accept its validity or feasibility, “they don’t agree” is more accurate than “they won’t listen.” To believe that someone hasn’t listened because they don’t see eye-to-eye might mean blinding ourselves to the truth and selling both that person and ourselves short.

Once someone understands our viewpoint, they have a perfect right to decide whether what we’ve said makes sense to them or not and whether or not they agree.

To share your tip (anonymously if you like), contact Jerry Crisp by phone at (402) 471-3995, by fax at (402) 471-3996, or by e-mail at [jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov).

## Wellness Words: MYTH - Information

Many ideas about health have been held so long or repeated so often that we accept them as so...even when they’re not. Here’s a commonly-believed myth you need to know the truth about!

### “Reading in dim light damages your eyes.”

Reading in a dimly lit room can make reading more strenuous and tire our eyes sooner but won’t actually harm or damage eyesight, just as listening to whispering voices won’t strain our ears. But using good lighting to read still makes sense in terms of avoiding fatigue and making reading easier.



## *Good Things Are Happening!*

In a guest editorial in the Omaha World-Herald (May 8, 2008), **James Blue**, CEO and president of CEDARS, a group that serves neglected and homeless children, said:

“The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services... is moving forward aggressively to transform our child welfare system... The Department recently approved a new home-based, preventive initiative that specifically targets young parents who are at risk of maltreating a child. Home visitation programs not only work but also are legitimately cost-effective in comparison with the public costs necessary after a child has been abused...HHS has requested bids from private organizations throughout Nebraska to provide a comprehensive array of support and developmental services for families...

With the focused attention of child abuse and neglect designated as a public health priority, I congratulate the Department of Health and Human Services for its progressive actions in the much-needed transformation of our state’s child welfare policies and practices to keep children and families strong.”

*DHHS knows it’s making progress, and it’s great when others notice it, too!*

# Springtime thanksgiving for volunteers

First Lady Sally Ganem congratulates **Chedli Hafi**, a volunteer from the Senior Workforce Solutions' "Experience Works" program, in April at the DHHS Lincoln office's 3rd annual volunteer recognition event. (Seated is **Todd Landry**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services, and at right is Resource Developer **Eike Marthaler**). About 70 volunteers and interns were honored. Within the past year, the Lincoln office alone placed 38 interns and utilized more than 100 volunteers, resulting in 34,681 hours of work donated to DHHS. In addition, five organizations volunteered 8,000 hours of donated time throughout the year.

Interns from colleges and universities are placed in the Lincoln office's Child and Adult Protection and Safety areas, Developmental Disabilities, Child Support, Economic Assistance, and Resource Development. Internships not only provide training for interns but lead to job opportunities for some.

Among agencies providing volunteers are the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Vocational Rehabilitation, Region V Developmental Disabilities Services and Workforce Development. Individual volunteers also offer DHHS invaluable assistance in such areas as clerical, switchboard and even maintenance of state vehicles.

One of the organizations volunteering time and talent is the Lincoln Quilters Guild, which regularly provides quilts for children from DHHS-served families. *Photo: Larry Wells*



## From the CEO continued from page 3 :

surveys during the past year. The Veterans' Homes have developed performance indicators and a systems clinician has been hired.

Peterson said the reorganization into one agency has increased communication and improved working relationships, as evidenced by the development of the Children's Behavioral Health Plan, a joint effort between the divisions of Behavioral Health, Children and Family Services, and Medicaid and Long-Term Care.

Across the agency, internal auditing procedures have been tightened and improved and a contract template and review process has been implemented.

Efforts are underway to increase electronic interactions with the public, and people can now subscribe to receive new information as it's posted to the DHHS Website at [www.dhhs.ne.gov](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov).

"These are only examples of all that's been accomplished," said Peterson. "Staff across the state have renewed energy and have shown a commitment to make improvements; I'm very proud of their work."

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