

Connections

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

July 2009
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Photo: Jen Rae Hein

New DHHS Chief Executive Officer Kerry Winterer meets the media at a new conference on June 29, as Governor Dave Heineman looks on approvingly. See inside for more details.

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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.

[Volunteers Sought for Health Boards](#) June 4

[Substance Abuse Prevention Grants Awarded](#) June 12

[DHHS Provides Fans to Help Nebraskans Cool Down](#) June 23

[Practice Summer Safety This Fourth of July](#) June 26

[Gov. Heineman Names Kerry Winterer of Omaha CEO of Health and Human Services](#) June 29

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

make the connection . . .

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About the Cover:



Kerry Winterer, DHHS' new CEO, took the helm on July 13. He began his work with health care in 1988 cofounding the Benefit Group, Inc., which administers health care and other plans for small employers. As vice president and general counsel, Winterer was responsible for operational areas such as administration and financial oversight, as well as helping clients with governmental compliance concerns. He currently serves on the State Board of Education.

"To head a department as large and diverse and important as Health and Human Services is certainly a daunting task. But, at the same time, the fact that it is large and provides important and many life-sustaining services to citizens of the state is invigorating," Winterer said.

"The department's mission provides all the more motivation to find ways to effectively provide those services and make a difference in the lives of so many people."

Winterer is a 1975 graduate of the Columbia University School of Law in New York and earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1972. He was born in Scottsbluff and graduated from Gering High School.

The Good Life

By Kerry Winterer, CEO

I've been thinking about how to introduce myself to you – thousands of employees with different perspectives, interests and jobs. I think the best way is to tell you a little about myself, my background, and my thoughts about being CEO.

To begin, I know Nebraska from west to east. I was born in Scottsbluff and raised in Gering. While I've called Omaha home for many years, I still have a connection to Scottsbluff where my sister lives.

I graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and then received my law degree from Columbia University in New York City, but Nebraska called me home. What I like most about Nebraska is its people – open, straightforward, trustworthy and hard working.

Many great opportunities have helped prepare me for the work of DHHS. There are a few I'd like to share.

After practicing law in a variety of settings, in 1988 I co-founded a company called the Benefit Group, Inc., that administers health care and other benefit plans for small employers. I was with the company until a few years ago. I was involved with compliance concerns, including HIPAA and COBRA. This experience helped me learn a lot about the kinds of health care needs people have.

At various times over the past 20 years, I've served on the board of Omaha's Heartland Family Service, twice as president. HFS provides important services like counseling, children and juvenile services, domestic abuse services, child care resources, senior services, corporate employee assistance programs, and community and worksite education. HFS touches many people's lives, just like DHHS.

Probably the most personal connection of all is that my father, later in his life, called the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home in Scottsbluff home. He was a realtor who also served his community as



The Kerry Winterer family: (L-R) Grant, Norma, Martha and Kerry.

a city councilman for more than 20 years, and he had a great deal of influence on me. My family and I are thankful for the wonderful care he received there.

I've been married to my wife, **Norma**, for 32 years and have two children. **Grant** is a student at Creighton University and **Martha** is in the 8th grade at King Science and Technology School in Omaha. I enjoy reading American and historical fiction and I've recently rededicated myself to running. With that focus on wellness, I've lost over 35 pounds and expect to keep it off!

To head a department as large, diverse and important as Health and Human Services is a daunting task. At the same time, the fact that it's large and provides important, and many times life sustaining services, is invigorating.

The department's mission provides all the more motivation to find ways to effectively provide these services and make a difference in the lives of so many people.

DHHS deals with many emotionally charged challenges, and I've already been involved with some of them since beginning as CEO on July 13. Visibility and public scrutiny are often high. While

this can be difficult at times, it's OK because that's the way it should be in a democracy. We serve and are accountable to the public.

I also know there are many DHHS success stories across the state that often get overlooked. We'll find ways to focus on those successes and promote openness and transparency, while still being sensitive to the issues of privacy and other legal constraints.

I believe that each of us has an obligation to help others who face challenges in their lives. This can be done in so many different ways, through our jobs and our community involvement.

Anything each of us can do to help others will make a big difference to someone else – in ways we may never really know.

I look forward to sharing more with you in coming months through this space, and I hope to meet many of you as I find time to travel across the state.

You might wonder why this column is titled "The Good Life." It's a reminder of what we all share and what we hope to provide to all of our fellow Nebraskans who we serve.

“I’ve Met Angels in Tennis Shoes”



By Andy Raun, Regional and Farm News Editor, Hastings Tribune

Reprinted with permission from May 1, 2009 issue

“When we took Walt for ‘walks’ in his wheelchair around the sprawling campus and grounds, virtually every employee we met had a warm smile and words for him. Most impressive for us, they knew him by name.”

What do angels look like?

Artists often have portrayed them with wings and haloes, hovering somewhere between heaven and earth, the very picture of mildness. Michael the Archangel is shown carrying a sword and roughing up Satan, a serene expression on his face.

I believe in angels, but I must admit I’ve never spent much time thinking about them or contemplating their appearance. Whatever mental images I have tend to come from paintings, religious statuary, and the young women who brave the elements each holiday season to appear in my hometown of Minden’s Christmas pageant, “The Light of the World.”

Lately, though, my wife, **Ruth**, and I have been broadening our thinking about angels. We’ve decided a lot of them live right here on earth with us and wear tennis shoes.

Of course, these angels don’t have wings. Nor do they hover; if they

weren’t on their feet all day, they wouldn’t need their tennies for traction and support.

Instead of flying up to heaven or playing the harp, they go home at night — or during the day — to live their lives and contend with ordinary tasks like paying the light bill, taking out the garbage, studying for a test or fixing a meal for their families.

What makes them angels is that day after day or night after night, they lace up their sneakers, punch the clock and come back to work, caring for the men and women who live at the Grand Island Veterans’ Home.

My wife’s dad, **Walter Hartmann** of Minden, moved to the Veterans’ Home in May 2004. He had suffered a stroke back in 2002 and then more recently had been hospitalized with a severe infection. With his accumulation of physical problems, he no longer was able to live in his own home.

As a proud U.S. Army veteran from Korean War days, Walt, a retired television engineer, was eligible to live at GIVH. And while nobody likes the idea of needing nursing care, I can honestly say that the Veterans’ Home was a godsend for Walt; his wonderful wife, Viola; and all the rest of us who cared about Walt and his well-being.

My purpose here is not to eulogize my father-in-law, who died April 15 at age 77. A column wouldn’t suffice to tell you about this fascinating and unique character — this man of many talents, rare humor and deep faith who loved his wife, children and grandchildren more than he could ever express. No, to give Walt his due, I probably would have to write a book. I’ll think about that some other time, when the pain of his passing isn’t quite so fresh for us.

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Angels:

(continued from page 4)

What I do want to accomplish here is to let you know the people who have cared for Walt these last five years — and those who do similar work all around Tribland — are my personal heroes.

These are men and women of all ages. Some may be just out of high school and working part time while going to college. Others are raising their own families at home, while still others are grandparents themselves. I learned a few of their names over the years, but am ashamed to say I never got most of them straight.

When we took Walt for “walks” in his wheelchair around the sprawling campus and grounds, virtually every employee we met had a warm smile and words for him. Most impressive for us, they knew him by name — and not because he was wearing a name badge, because he wasn't. Keep in mind that nearly 200 residents live at the home.

Whether it was a custodian pushing a mop, a nurse on her way to break, a snack bar attendant or a kitchen worker, we would hear “Hi, Walter!” Walt's face would light up, he would chuckle and grin, and he would return the “Rock On,” hook-em-horns hand salute many of them sent his way. (We aren't sure how that got started — but it's none of our business, anyway. That was something special between Walt and his caregivers. They were his second family, after all — and all families need their own traditions and inside jokes.)

Walt was a friendly guy, and he loved to kid around and joke with others. Frankly, he reveled in the attention he received from so many people working with him and crossing his path on a daily basis. I will always believe the people who served his needs at GIVH



Photo: Andy Raun

Walter Hartman celebrates his 75th birthday with his family at the Grand Island Veterans' Home. With him are his wife **Viola** and daughter **Ruth**, the author's wife.

genuinely enjoyed his company even though he was hard of hearing, couldn't always verbalize his thoughts clearly, and certainly could be grumpy at times.

I know, though, that Walt's caregivers weren't playing favorites with him. I can say this because I spent time on various occasions just sitting beside him and “people watching” in the dining area of the Anderson Building — the GIVH secure unit for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia.

Walt lived in the Anderson Building, but he was much better oriented than were many of his comrades — fellow patriots pulled into a world of shadows by the effects of aging, injury and disease. From our vantage point at the supper table, Walt and I could watch staff members reaching out to these people, speaking gently and respectfully to each of them while tending to their unique physical and emotional requirements.

To say I am humbled by these dedicated workers and the good they do would be a gross understatement. As a matter of fact, I am in awe of them. The work they do is physically difficult and must be mentally exhausting. They put in long hours for modest wages. The patience and compassion they exhibit every time they are on duty is beyond my ability to even imagine in myself.

These great people do what needs to be done for our loved ones when we can't do it ourselves, watching over them and giving them care, attention, kindness and simple friendship when they need it the very most. For all of this, they have my deepest gratitude and respect.

Moving on

Walt died of pneumonia at Grand Island's St. Francis Medical Center early in the morning on Tax Day — timing that caused us to smile through our tears. After all, we know that death and taxes are the only certainties we have in this life — and no one would have enjoyed a laugh over that connection more than Walt himself.

On the last day of his life, no fewer than three of his caregivers from the Veterans' Home took their personal time to drive across town and visit him.

The final caller brought a small cross, which Ruth pressed into Walt's hands as he lay sleeping. Before the woman left, she stood at his bedside and gave him one final, silent “Rock On” salute, as if for the road ahead.

The next day, no doubt, as Walt was finding his way around the corridors of the Almighty, his dear friends were back on the floor in Grand Island, wearing their tennis shoes and working their next shifts.

After all, an angel's work is never done.

Way to Go!

Statewide or national recognitions, awards, honors



Photo: Bill Wiley

SNAP-Ed earns national award

Nebraska's SNAP-Ed (formerly the Nutrition Education Program) won national recognition recently for effectively administering the program, outreach and access efforts, and improving the health of Nebraska's children and families.

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is the name of the former Food Stamp Program. Over 59,000

(L-R) **Donnia Behrends** and **Natalie Sehi**, UNL Dept. of Nutrition & Health Sciences; **Darlene Barnes**, Mt. Plain Region Food Nutrition Program; **Konnie Jividen**, DHHS Food Stamp Program; **Wanda Koszewski**, **Marilynn Schnepf** and **Jean Ann Fischer**, UNL Dept. of Nutrition & Health Sciences; and **Todd Reckling**, Division of Children and Family Services Director.

issues and purchasing the most healthy, inexpensive foods to improve their families' overall health and stretch their food dollars. In 2008, Nebraska SNAP-Ed reached 5,016 families, 15,256 youth, and 1,294 seniors.

Nebraska households received food stamp assistance in May 2009.

SNAP-Ed educates people who receive food stamp benefits about food safety

Charlene Kelly Leaves Lasting Legacy

By Jerry Crisp

Charlene Kelly, PhD, fought a year-long battle with cancer that took her life on February 20 but had earned victories in her field for many years.

Kelly had been Section Administrator for the Nursing and Nursing Support area of the Licensure Unit in the Division of Public Health for 20 years. She was

responsible for regulation of licensed nurses, as well as nurse aides and medication aides. Kelly also served as Executive Director of the Nebraska Board of Nursing. The Board is a member of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN).

In tribute to her life-long dedication to the nursing field, the NCSBN set up the Charlene Kelly Scholarship Fund after she died, and her family designated memorials to

the fund. Kelly is now being honored by the NCSBN at their annual meeting in August for her many contributions to nursing regulation with a donation of \$10,000 to the Charlene Kelly Scholarship Fund. The Fund will provide leadership growth opportunities for Executive Directors of state boards of nursing.

Kelly's contributions to nursing include being a leader in

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Way to Go!

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implementing the Nurse Licensure Compact, promoting legislation to enhance nursing regulation, and conducting research in areas that impact nursing regulation.

“Charlene had a lifetime dedication to nursing, working to ensure that regulations governing the licensure of nurses and nursing support personnel remain viable and focused on ensuring protection of public health and safety,” said **Helen Meeks**, DHHS Licensing Administrator in an article published in *Nebraska Nursing News*. I am honored to have had her as a colleague and privileged to call her friend.”

“Charlene will be missed greatly, as she has been a guiding force in nursing in Nebraska and a joy to work



Charlene Kelly

with,” said **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health.

Kelly earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in nursing from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and held a PhD in Community and Human Resources from the University of Nebraska. She spent 17 years as a nursing educator, including serving as chairperson of the Nursing Program at the College of Saint Mary in Omaha. Her involvement with NCSBN included serving as an officer and board member of the Board of Directors for several terms and a member and chairperson for many committees.

Charlene Kelly’s work serve not only as a personal testimonial but as an example of contributions nurses make to public health and safety that helps us all live better lives.

DHHS employees should be proud of themselves and each other. If you earn statewide or national recognition or know a co-worker who does, let Connections know, and we’ll proclaim it here!

What roles are played by DHHS nurses?

Here’s a list of just some of the functions served by nurses in an array of DHHS programs that offers a least a partial tribute to their contributions:

- Nurse
- Community Health Nurses
- Training Coordinators
- Licensed Practical Nurse
- Nurse Investigators
- Facility Surveyors
- Nurse Director
- Program Reviewers
- Nurse Consultants
- Nurse Supervisor
- Program Managers
- School Nurses
- Health Section Administrators

To all DHHS nurses too numerous to list here who serve their fellow Nebraskans in so many ways, please accept our sincere thanks and admiration!

Entrepreneurship at work at BSDC

By Jerry Crisp

There's a creative streak in Sheridan Industries, the small business on the BSDC campus that seeks to develop vocational skills of Center citizens and market their products and services. A couple of examples illustrate that point.

Generally considered the "resident artist," **David Courtney's** sketches adorn walls in several spots across campus. Now he is creating drawings that could grace an 18-month 2010 calendar.

Twenty years ago, David illustrated another calendar of mainly campus scenes, and there has been talk of doing another ever since. **Dan Sikyta**, Community Employment Coordinator with Sheridan Industries, suggested that the current project should focus on historical sites throughout Gage County.

"I just thought, if David's drawings depicted scenes significant for citizens of Gage County, that might make the new calendar more marketable," Sikyta explains.



(Above) David Courtney sketches a Gage County historical site for a 2010 calendar; (Below L-R) David with **Cindy** and **Gary Frerichs**, owners of a pet supply business that markets David's Pet First Aid kit, and BSDC Community Employment Coordinator **Dan Sikyta**.

Some of the Gage County scenes that David will draw for the calendar project include an early settler's cabin at Homestead National Monument four miles west of Beatrice, Hotel Paddock in downtown Beatrice, the Wymore train station, a stone barn at Filley, Adams State Bank and the Rice Hospital at Odell.

Sikyta also arranged with the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce to help sell and market the calendars David illustrates.

"The Gage County Fair in July would also be a great place to launch David's calendar," says Sikyta. "I hope the calendar does very well for his sake, of course, but even if not, he just enjoys doing it. Whenever he talks about it, he just can't seem to quit smiling."

But illustrating calendars is not the only business venture in which this enterprising entrepreneur is engaged. David also purchases, packages and sells his "Pet First Aid Kits." Priced at \$43.50, the kit of 16 items includes a thermometer,



Photos: Jerry Crisp

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Entrepreneurship: (continued from page 8)

suture scissor, quick clot, antibiotic ointment, gauze pads and rolls, all in a nylon case.

Nancy Sedlacek, the Center's Vocational Services Coordinator, asked **Gary and Cindy Frerichs**, owners of Pup's Pet Supplies in Beatrice, to market David's kit through their Web site at <http://www.pupspetsupply.com/pProductDetails.php?id=1634>. The Frerichs take no profit from the venture.

Another enterprising entrepreneur on campus is **Johnny Knight**, who recently started a canine waste removal operation. He has five customers at the moment and hopes to add many more, such as pet owners who might be ill, incapacitated or just willing to pay someone to clean up after their pets for them.

That's a niche Johnny hopes to fill to help keep the community clean and make a little extra money in the process. His equipment includes a "pooper scooper," small rake and a bucket. Asked if he minds doing this kind of work, Johnny says, "Not as long as they pay me!"

David and Johnny aren't the only Center citizens who work off-campus jobs. Forty-four clients deliver newspapers and provide lawn care services.

Sikyta hopes to encourage additional off-campus employment opportunities through the BSDC Job



KNIGHT ON A CRUSADE

Photo: Jerry Crisp

Armed with the proper tools of his trade, Johnny Knight ventures forth on a mission to cleanse the environment of doggie doo-doo.

everyone should have an opportunity for meaningful employment. We assist those individuals who work with us, building skills for potential employment that suit their personal interest and preferences."

It's said that American ingenuity is what made this nation an economic power and will restore it to greatness again, and that same creative impulse is alive and well at BSDC.

Club. Job Clubs are an Internet job-finding network and mutual support group, and he has just completed facilitating one six-week session.

Another method is the Entrepreneur Club, by which Sikyta brings business speakers from the community to campus to talk with clients.

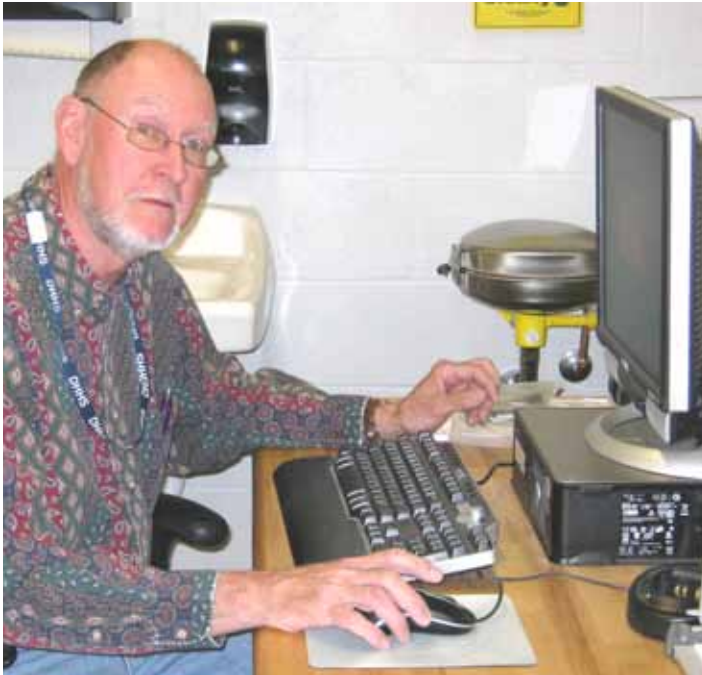
"I hope that having people come to talk about or show what they do might trigger some ideas," says Sikyta. "Topics have included scrapbooking and leather crafts, and we even had someone from the Chamber of Commerce."

Other Vocational Department members working to create job opportunities for BSDC clients are **Lois Oden**, coordinating on-campus employment, and **James Bush**, who procures contracts.

"For the past 22 years at Sheridan Industries, "Our Business is People," says Nancy Sedlacek. "We believe that

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.**



(Left): Dennis Fickel checks his e-mail for work orders, but picks up many requests for his services just walking through hallways at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home.



(Right & below): Spackling and sanding are among a host of other skills that make Dennis Fickel an asset to the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, but he regards opportunities for companionship as one of his chief rewards.

Photos: Sean Patrick

By Jerry Crisp

On the job for little more than a year, **Dennis Fickel** has already found himself on the front lines of service delivery. Fickel is a Facility Maintenance Specialist at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home (ENVH) at Bellevue.

"I'm never bored, always busy, and need to stay on top of things or I'll get way behind in 24 hours or less," he says. Asked to describe his duties and responsibilities, he said "everything!"

Fickel is a self-described jack-of-all-trades who might start his day as a carpenter, soon switch to electrical work, maybe do some plumbing in the afternoon and end his day as a landscaper for 46 flower beds and 200 trees on the facility grounds.

"The key is being ready and able to switch directions at a moment's notice," says Fickel. "It's a sort of start-stop process where I might be working on fixing a lamp or hanging a picture and suddenly get called away on some higher priority. If somebody is looking for a routine and orderly job, this wouldn't be it!"

This jack-of-all-trades comes by that name easily. Before joining the ENVH team, Fickel was the department manager at a home improvement store in Omaha and owned his own home improvement company in Omaha and Council Bluffs.

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Photo: Sean Patrick

Dennis Fickel: (continued from page 10)

Perhaps the only routine part of Fickel's day is to check the facility's "Wanderguard" system. Members at risk of wandering off wear bracelets containing a microchip that transmits a signal when one of them comes within five feet of an exit door. The door then locks automatically for 30 seconds.

An alarm then sounds at the nurse's station and the reception desk. The nurse's station has closed circuit cameras for their areas, and the reception desk has closed circuit cameras for all exit doors.

"This system isn't designed to keep people prisoner but to ensure the safety of those who might wander off," Fickel explains. "Our facility is on the outskirts of Bellevue and surrounded by cornfields, woods and creeks. While members who wander off aren't a big problem, we want to make sure that no member is ever injured or lost to an avoidable accident."

Dennis shares quality time with Robert Early, a WW II vet who served in the 10th Armored Division in Germany, earning a Purple Heart and the Silver Star. Here, Early shows Fickel a beer wagon he made from a kit. Fickel made the wooden platform it sits on. Early has also assembled several puzzles that he glues onto a cardboard backing, for which Fickel makes a wooden frame. Several of these are on display throughout the facility.

Such a hectic and highly responsible job is not without its rewards.

"I might always be busy, but I never do any busy work," Fickel says. "You always know that everything you do from installing a counter top or fixing a lamp to enhancing the landscape is relevant to making people's lives better."

On top of that, Fickel appreciates the opportunity to develop relationships.

"I work with three co-workers on the day shift, and even though we all have assigned duties, if one of us is overwhelmed, the rest of the team steps in and helps out."

"You also get to know the members on a first-name basis when installing shelves or fixing a broken appliance in their rooms or wheeling them to dinner," Fickel says. "You get to learn not only about their military service experiences but about their lives and

families so that they're not just people you serve but your friends."

Fickel recounts escorting a member to breakfast one morning, when she suddenly stopped her wheelchair and asked to be helped to her feet.

"Seems she noticed that her skirt had slipped slightly above her knees, and she felt it just wasn't 'proper' for gentlemen to see a woman her age in such a state," Fickel recalls. "That might seem a small thing to most folks today, but it was a big deal to her."

Fickel found this anecdote not just amusing but also endearing, offering a glimpse into the values of an earlier era that endure into the present day.

"Dennis is a true professional in every sense of the word," says his supervisor, **Tom Blacketer**. "He is one of my team's greatest assets, and I'm proud to have him as an employee and friend."

August observance

Child Support Awareness Month



Children deserve emotional and financial support from both parents. There are a lot of parents who provide that support willingly. Unfortunately, some parents have to turn to child support enforcement to get the court-ordered financial support they so desperately need.

In August, DHHS promotes Child Support Awareness Month. It's a time to recognize the parents who willingly provide financial support to

their children and also a time to raise awareness to the work we do in helping children get the court-ordered support they deserve.

DHHS child support enforcement uses several tools to help collect child support. One such tool, highlighted in a recent news release, is intercepting tax refunds.

DHHS intercepted more than \$13.4 million in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2008 in tax refunds of parents who owed

child support but hadn't paid. The \$13.4 million is a 50% increase over FFY 2007, when \$8.7 million was collected through intercepts.

Even though in FFY 2008 Nebraska's child support collections totaled \$196.6 million, there's still work to do. To learn more about DHHS' child support enforcement program, visit our Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov/cse/cseindex.htm.

Good Things Are Happening!

Finalized adoptions of children who were state wards increased by 92.6%, going from 297 adoptions in 2003 to 572 adoptions in 2008.

Efforts to increase adoptions continue because every child deserves a loving home!



Nebraska received federal Adoption Incentive Bonuses in 2005, 2006 and 2007 and may also be eligible for 2008.

In their own words

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

Dear **Cortney Lichti** (Counselor, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center, Geneva):

Congratulations on receiving national recognition from the American Correctional Association! Your development of the "Mothers and Babies Program" at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Geneva (YRTC-G) is a very useful tool for helping our young people be better parents by providing them with important information such as caring for a new baby or sick child.

Your care and concern for our youth and their children makes you a great asset to the State of Nebraska. Thank you for all your hard work; a giving spirit will take you far.

Respectfully yours,

State Senator Colby Coash

District 27

Dear **Ann Long** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Kearney office):

I really appreciated the help from Health and Human Services that I have had for the last years when I had to have both knees replaced and some other minor surgeries. I am 86 years old, and my only resource is my Social Security check. I also have Medicaid that helps me with doctors and the hospital.

Thank you also for the Energy Assistance Program. I got a new and more powerful air conditioner to help cool my little house.

I would like you to share my appreciation with the Department. Many thanks to you again.

A Kearney Service Recipient

Dear **Kathy Gunderson**, Social Service Worker, DHHS North Platte office):

On behalf of all my family, we want to thank you for all your help in qualifying my mom for Medicaid. She is very happy in the assisted living facility where she now lives. There is a waiting list there, and we would have missed getting mom into that facility without your help!

I was really glad to get your note saying that you can continue handling my mom's case. Thank you so much for helping us in a difficult time.

A Satisfied Customer

Dear **Robert Furr** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Fremont office):

A couple of weeks ago, I met with Resource Developer **Maggie Fleming** regarding my home study to renew my foster care license. During the course of our conversation, I mentioned an IRS tax situation that I was dealing with regarding previous foster care payment. Maggie offered her assistance and was able to detect the error that triggered the issue, and she fixed it the same day!

I am writing to let you know how impressed I am with the professional and responsive service I received from Maggie. I think it's important to acknowledge the excellent customer service your staff is providing.

Tammy Herbert

Fremont, Nebraska

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.

Peregrine falcons call State Capitol Bldg home



Photo: Mike Wight

A bonded pair of peregrine falcons has nested at the State Capitol Building in Lincoln for four years. They are raising this year's brood of four chicks hatched on May 12 on the north side outside the 18th floor. To keep the new generation fed, the falcon parents have preyed on the local pigeon population.

According to **Thomas Kaspar** with the Office of the Capitol Commission, "I recall flocks of 10 or 20 pigeons flying around the top of the tower in the late 1970s, and you can imagine what the decks looked like. Pigeons largely avoid this site today, thanks to the peregrines."

Peregrines have been observed at the Capitol Building since 1990, and a nest box was installed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission the following year, although no nesting occurred. The first chick named "Pioneer" was successfully produced in 2005, and the same parents returned

(Above) **Joel Jorgensen** and **Melissa Santiago** from the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission briefly removed the most recent crop of chicks from their nest in June for identification branding.



Photo courtesy NE Game & Parks Commission

A peregrine parent tends its chick.

and raised another three chicks in 2006.

The following year, the pair produced four more chicks. This year, a second nest box was placed in the Capitol Building. The pair will have two choices for nesting this year, with the older nest being removed for 2010.

Birds of prey and about the size of crows, peregrines are found worldwide (except for Antarctica) and prefer steep cliffs and open space but have adapted to tall buildings and towers within cities. Falcons can achieve about 60 miles per hour in level flight and dive at speeds over 200 miles per hour, making them nature's fastest birds!

Peregrine falcons were listed as an endangered species in 1970, and by 1975, only 324 pairs were found in North

(continued on page 15)



Photo: Mike Wight

Just before returning to their nest and anxious parents, the four chicks lined up for a final portrait with major objections from only one.

To view the falcons on Webcam, stop by the State Capitol Rotunda or go to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Web site at <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/webcam/peregrine/default.asp>.

Falcons: (continued from page 14)

America, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. In 1999, peregrines were removed from that list as a result of conservation efforts, protection from the Endangered Species Act, and efforts like those at the State Capitol Building that seek to protect and promote the species. At that time, 1,650 pairs were found in North America, far exceeding the recovery goal of 631 pairs.

According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the continued success of the peregrine falcon is dependent on human commitment to responsible wildlife stewardship.

Special thanks for their assistance on this article to **Joel Jorgensen** with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; **Mark Tonjes**, State Capitol Manager; and **Craig Thelen**, DHHS Facility Engineer Assistant Manager.

Economic Assistance group helps people live better lives, too



Photo: Bill Davenport

(L-R) **Mike Kelly**, Economic Assistance Administrator **George Kahlandt**, **Roxy McCormick**, **Deb Frass**, **Anita Wood**, **Kerri Schuerman**, **Jessica Dean** and **Jeanie Harris**.

Employees in the Economic Assistance Policy Unit in Lincoln decided to help pets, as well as people, live better lives for their annual "Fun Day" fund-raiser for charity. The group of 200 has a long tradition of giving to others.

This time around they chose to contribute 380 pounds of animal food, supplies and treats to the Coalition for Pet Protection's (CPP) food pantry that was totally out of supplies with a waiting list. The CPP is a non-profit group whose mission is to help reduce pet overpopulation and increase adoptions and assistance for animal care.

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



Photo: Carol Coussons de Reyes

(L-R) **Paul Letcher**, DHHS Minority Health; **Linda Jensen**, NAMI NE President; **Dan Powers**, DHHS Behavioral Health; **Governor Heineman**; **Jocelyn Coles**, Center for Holistic Development; **Jim Hammitt** and **Jonah Deppe**, both with NAMI NE; **Lisa Alexander**, NAMI Lincoln; **Rachel Pinkerton**, NAMI NE; and **Tammy Fiala**, Central Nebraska NAMI.

Minority Mental Health Awareness

Governor Dave Heineman holds a proclamation he signed in June to enhance public awareness of mental illness, especially within minority communities. The Nebraska proclamation reflects a U. S. Senate resolution establishing a **Bebe Moore Campbell** National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month. Campbell was an advocate and best-selling author who wrote about mental illness and was motivated by a family member's struggles with mental illness.

"Mental illness affects one in four American families, and people in diverse communities are no exception," said **Dr. Raponzil Drake**, DHHS Minority Health and Health Equity Administrator. "Disparities in mental health care can prevent people from getting the help they need."

Honoring Volunteers

First Lady Sally Ganem presented each volunteer with an award and gift on April 23 when the Southeast Service Area (SESA) held its 4th annual volunteer recognition ceremony. Other speakers included **Todd Reckling**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services, and **Jeff Schmidt**, SESA Administrator. Shown is volunteer **Virginia Vice** (left) accepting her award from the First Lady.



Photo: Jamie Thornton

Last year, 144 volunteers donated 20,732 hours, and 29 interns gave 4,165 hours. Volunteers were recruited from the community and several agencies: Volunteer Partners, Vocational Rehabilitation, Experience Works, ARBOR, Region V Services, Services for the Visually Impaired and Workforce Development. Interns were recruited from the University of Nebraska, Wesleyan University, Southeast Community College, Kaplan University, Union College and Doane College.

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

“Defenders of Our Freedom” Parade



© Teri Rosario

“Standing Watch” shows the United States Coast Guard

patrolling New York Harbor with Coast Guard helicopters and small aircraft overhead. In the background are Lady Liberty and the skyline at the southern tip of Manhattan in the background.

Conspicuous by their very absence from that skyline are the World Trade Center Towers, brought down on September 11, 2001, by terrorists who prefer to write their views in the blood of innocent men, women and children.

Previous issues of this publication featured the first four paintings in the “Defenders of Our Freedom” collection by artist **Teri Rosario** that found a home at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home at Bellevue. Here’s the fifth: “Standing Watch.”

One change resulting from that horrific day was the reassignment of the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security, with the additional duties of military readiness, coastal sea control and port security and defense.

“Standing Watch” involved the artist, Teri Rosario, most personally because she was born and raised in Manhattan and watched the construction of the World Trade Center

Towers. When she later returned to the harbor, the range of emotions

she experienced as she watched gun boats patrol and protect the harbor of her hometown found their way into this painting.

“I guess that this painting is really my own personal thank you to the men and women of the United States Coast Guard,” says Rosario, “who put their lives on the line to protect the town I called home.”

Watch for the final painting in the “Defenders of Our Freedom” parade in the next issue of *Connections*!