

CONNECTIONS

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together



Crisp, Clean and No Caffeine –

Nebraska is Home of the Best Tasting Rural Water in U.S.

By Marla Augustine

Nebraska is home of the best-tasting rural water in the nation, according to the Great American Water Taste Test sponsored by the National Rural Water Association last month in Washington, D.C.

Curtis, a southwest Nebraska town, beat out 36 other municipalities to win the gold. A panel of blindfolded judges determined the winner based on clarity, bouquet and taste.

Population 935, Curtis gets its water from two deep wells drilled into the High Plains aquifer, one of the largest freshwater aquifers in the world.

The aquifer is the single most important source of water in the Great Plains region of the United States, which covers eight states

and provides a large portion of all the water for residential, industrial, and agricultural use.

The aquifer provides water to virtually all public water systems located in the western two-thirds of the state, said **Jack Daniel**, administrator of the DHHS Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health.

The Division of Public Health's Public Water System Program administers the state's regulations governing public water systems.

Maximum contaminant levels (MCL) are set for 87 contaminants according to the Safe Drinking Water Act. In 2012 only eight of these contaminants were found in quantities above the MCL.

If a system exceeds an MCL, it is required to take corrective action to lower the level. Levels of substances below the MCL are not considered to

be harmful to health.

How does a water system know what's in its water? Systems are required to test. For example, nitrate tests are required to be done at least annually for all public water systems. The DHHS Environmental Health Laboratory tests samples that are sent in by public water system operators.

The Division of Public Health licenses more than 3,000 public water operators of various levels.

"Water operators are the ones who make sure that our water is safe to drink," Daniel said. "They work with staff here at the Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health to coordinate testing and to make any corrective actions that are needed."

The best-tasting and safest drinking water is the result.



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[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 Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[Let Me Tell You a Thing or Two About Snow, Feb. 3](#)



Cathy Garbers, Services Coordinator for the Aged & Disabled Waiver program, works for the Northeast Nebraska Area Agency on Aging in Norfolk, one of many DHHS partnerships around the state. Cathy sent this picture to us saying,

“This is my two-year-old grandson, Rowan, explaining to “Meow” that this is snow!” The picture was taken in Lincoln in December 2013 by Cathy’s daughter, Emma Kucera. Cathy said that the photo cheers her up every time she sees how the cat is looking at Rowan as though he knows everything about everything.

[ENVH Receives National Excellence in Action Award, Feb. 18](#)

The Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home (ENVH) in Bellevue is one of four veterans homes in the entire country to receive the Excellence in Action award from the National Research Corporation. The honor recognizes long-term care and senior living organizations that achieve the highest level of satisfaction among residents.



“Providing an exceptional living environment and outstanding service to America’s veterans is our mission,” said **Jeff Smith**, ENVH administrator. “I am pleased with the award and with its national recognition to the staff’s commitment to exceptional customer service.”

[Popular Polar Plunge Raises Money for Special Olympics Nebraska, March 4](#)

Earning a picture with this Polar Bear required a daring task ahead as **Amir Azimi** (Administrator, Support Services) and his son, Cameron, found out March 1 at Holmes Lake in Lincoln.



More than 200 people participated in Lincoln’s annual Polar Plunge to raise money for Special Olympics Nebraska. This was Lincoln’s 10th annual Polar Plunge, and, at a chilly 6 degrees, it was the coldest yet.

Cameron asked Amir to participate in the plunge as a father/son bonding experience. Amir’s coworkers in Support Services wanted to see Amir participate as well and collected enough money for his entry fee. In support of the event, Amir’s thoughtful coworkers also threw him a “go jump in the lake – good luck” party on Friday, complete with a polar bear cake. **Kris Azimi**, Amir’s spouse and IT Business Systems Analyst in Medicaid & Long-term Care, joined in on the fun, as well.

The Polar Plunge is a popular fund-raiser in Lincoln and participants raised approximately \$38,000 for Special Olympics Nebraska. DHHS Business Analyst **Joe Skorupa** also participated in this event helping to make it successful.

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



Kerry Winterer, DHHS CEO

Constant Commitment to Excellence

About a year ago we made a promise to offer a new “Serving People with Excellence” training to all DHHS employees. **Matt Clough**, Chief Operating Officer, and others from Human Resources and Development developed DHHS’ “Serving People with Excellence” curriculum. “Champions” were chosen and trained, and through a grassroots’ effort, these employees offered training to their coworkers.

Employees new to DHHS continue to participate in “Serving People with Excellence” training during new employee orientation.

Giving people great customer service is an ongoing promise at DHHS to keep improving work processes for ourselves and the people we serve.

How do we keep improving? By encouraging others, by using DHHS’ mission, [values and core competencies](#) to guide our thoughts and actions, and by learning how to overcome challenges we sometimes face at work.

Here are some helpful words of advice from Matt Clough and the others who brought you “Serving People with Excellence” training. This message is about overcoming challenges and being responsible for our own actions.

We are each responsible for our actions and our reactions – all of them. We are responsible for our thoughts and behavior, whether deliberate or unintentional. Responsible people makes mistakes, but when they do, they take responsibility and make things right.

How do you become a more responsible person?

- **Be accountable.** If your kids are feisty, your partner unreasonable, your coworker unbearable, you are always responsible for how you respond. Your behavior is under

your control.

- **Stop blaming.** When you stop pointing the finger, you have control over yourself. Don’t let someone else’s behavior control yours.
- **Acknowledge what happened.** When you acknowledge, “Yes, I forgot to call when I said I would,” you eliminate the need to make up excuses. “I messed up” is the responsible three-word sentence, and when followed with “How can I make it up to you?” it makes people willing to forgive. Your humility opens the door for integrity and earns respect.
- **Accentuate the positive.** Move through your day with a positive attitude. Have you ever noticed that people who don’t take responsibility for their own behavior are negative and cynical? Anything that goes wrong is always that other person’s fault. They’re perpetual victims. When you take responsibility for having the life you want, you switch your focus from what went wrong to what went right.
- **See yourself clearly.** Taking responsibility means acknowledging both your weaknesses and strengths. It means acknowledging all that is wonderful about you. A responsible person does not dismiss his or her own achievements. Responsible people know their good and positive qualities and have a complete picture

of themselves. A responsible person continues to grow emotionally.

- **Say “thank you.”** Accept praise graciously. When someone acknowledges you, say, “thank you.” When someone is kind, the responsible response is a sincere “thank you.”

Nobody is perfect, so mistakes happen. When we take responsibility for those mistakes and make things right, we demonstrate the important values and core competencies that DHHS is built on. Correcting and learning from those mistakes is another way of serving people with excellence and helping people live better lives.

Got a story to share about a positive impact you’ve seen from your coworkers? Share it through the employee bulletin board or email Matt Clough, Mary Osborne, Angela Weis and/or Wendy Walgrave. These employees continue to share ideas and notes of encouragement to the “Serving People with Excellence” trainers and would appreciate hearing your stories and suggestions that help improve DHHS and the office culture and environment.

“We don’t choose people as friends because we like them, but because we like ourselves better when in their company.” Unknown

Are You Easy To Be Around?

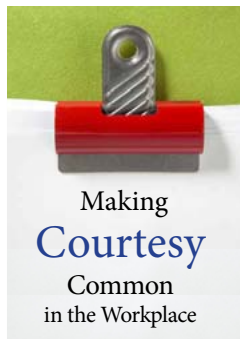
By Richard Metler,
Human Resources and Development

Think about people in your corner of DHHS around whom other folks naturally gravitate: when there’s work to be done or when socializing in the break room. You might be one of these people.

There’s no mystery here. People who are easy to be around share contagious qualities that others admire and want to model.

Listed below are some common traits.

- Quiet Confidence—Not a boastful pretense, but a calm dignity that grows from self-respect.
- Sincerity and Warmth—For example, when they ask, “How are you doing today?” they mean it. They genuinely care about how you’re doing today.
- Humility—They openly acknowledge and learn from mistakes. Their self-esteem is not threatened by admitting weaknesses or asking coworkers for assistance.
- Open Inquirers—They seek the truth. They are concerned with learning what is right and not concerned with being right. They listen for understanding.
- Consistent Positive Regard Toward Others—They are kind and respectful when you are present, and do not gossip about you when you are absent. They lift other people up, and do not permit themselves to be pulled down.



- Avoid Finding Fault in People—They focus on finding solutions to problems, rather than finding people to blame. They do not hold grudges, and are quick to move forward from mistakes.
- Live in the Here and Now—They learn from the past and prepare for the future, but are focused on the present.
- Rejoice in Common Courtesies—‘Please,’ ‘May I...?’, ‘Thank you,’ ‘You’re welcome.’ They say these words because doing so respects you and ennobles them.

Finally, people as described above understand that these traits cannot be taken for granted, but must be practiced daily.

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Email your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your idea in a future column.

New QuitNow App: Another Resource to Help Tobacco Users Quit for Good

By Monica Pribil,
Program Coordinator, Tobacco Free Nebraska

Tobacco users who are ready to quit now have another tool available to them. The [Nebraska Tobacco Quitline](#) has launched the QuitNow mobile app that will support tobacco users through their entire quit process ...from setting a quit date to identifying reasons for quitting to conquering cravings.

To boost motivation, the app also tracks money saved and days added back to a person’s life. Since the app is downloaded to a person’s smartphone or tablet, it can provide around-the-clock support. For those who prefer more traditional support – the Nebraska Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW provides free and confidential support to Nebraskans on a 24/7 basis as well.



Have you seen [Tobacco Free Nebraska’s Facebook page](#)? There are additional resources and support available including weekly “Quit Tip Tuesday” ideas and inspirational quotes throughout. Check us out!

To access all services available via the Quitline, visit <http://QuitNow.ne.gov>.

“Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher.” Oprah Winfrey

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

GNDHA Names Barbara Pearson Advocate of the Year

Congratulations, **Barbara Pearson**, on being chosen Advocate of the Year by the Greater Nebraska Component of the Nebraska Dental Hygienists Association. The Greater Nebraska Dental Hygienists Association announced Barbara's name at a meeting in February in Kearney. By receiving this award, Barbara is a nominee for consideration to receive an award at the state level.

Barbara is a Health Program Manager in DHHS' Health Promotion unit in the Division of Public Health. Among other duties, Barbara works on the federal Preventive Health & Health Services Block Grant and serves as facilitator for Nebraska's Preventive Health Advisory Committee. Congratulations, Barbara, for earning this award.

Jennifer Humphrey: We Appreciate All You Do for Children and Families

Jennifer Humphrey, Children and Family Services Specialist, Columbus office, is the first recipient of the Northern Service Area's "Making a Difference" award. Northern Service Area (NSA) administrators created the "Making a Difference" award as a way to recognize CFS Specialists across the area. Many offices in NSA already recognize employees, on a monthly or quarterly basis, with their own awards. Now, supervisors send in the



names of these award-winning employees to the NSA administrators who then choose an employee for "Making a Difference" in the lives of children and families.

Jennifer has worked in DHHS' Columbus office for a little more than a year. She received the office's "Rock Star" award in January. In her nomination letter, **Kristin DeWispelare**, Children and Family Services Specialist Supervisor and Jennifer's supervisor, lists many reasons why Jennifer should be chosen for the new "Making a Difference" award.

Kristin said when Jennifer takes assignment of an Intake, she starts right away and gets a lot done in a timely, efficient manner. Jennifer is also the go-to person for trainees. She almost always has a new worker with her when she meets with clients and is always teaching them.

"Jennifer continues to provide excellent service to children and families in our area," said Kristin. "She has recently assessed two very complicated cases. I witnessed Jennifer be extremely compassionate with these families and going above and beyond to contact non-custodial parents to engage them from the beginning of the case. Because Jennifer started in Ongoing case management, she truly understands how to engage families from her first contact with them. A Guardian-ad-litem on one of her cases commented that he has never seen any CFSS make so many reasonable efforts in the first week of a case before and he attributed the success of the case thus far to Jenny's hard work. She is truly making a difference!"



Editor's Note: Keep posting monthly and quarterly employee awards on the bulletin board. It's fun and inspiring to read about our coworkers and the great work they continue to do.

Jana Peterson Elected Vice Chair of Executive Committee

Congratulations to **Jana Peterson**, Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney, who was recently elected to serve as Vice Chair on the Executive Committee of the Buffalo County Community Partners.

"As a board member, and now vice chair elect, I am especially excited to see the progression of the Public Health System in Buffalo County," Jana said. "We are currently in exciting times and have a lot of individuals of all ages who dedicate their time and volunteer to continue to make Buffalo County a better place to live for people of all ages."

The Buffalo County Community Partners' motto is "Building a Healthier Community," and its members continue to build community involvement in partnerships that makes Buffalo County stand out. The United Way was instrumental in the formation of Community Partners.

"2014 is going to be an exciting year for Community Partners, particularly as we continue to collaborate to develop a community health worker system in partnership with the healthcare organizations in Kearney and the area," said Past Chair Suzanne Brodine.

Thanks, Jana, for lending your leadership skills and talents to such an important cause—helping the citizens of Buffalo County get even healthier.



In Gratitude

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

Sometimes we paraphrase letters and/or shorten them slightly in order for us to include as many as possible.

Dear **Sarah Jameson** (Teacher, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney), and Boys,

Thank you so much for the visit and the candy treat. I enjoyed meeting the young men, and I enjoyed the candy cane. Thank you all for helping to make my Christmas a happy day, and I hope each of you had a good Christmas and a Happy New Year.

A Grateful Resident of a Local Assisted Living Facility

Dear **Danielle Beason** (Children and Family Services Specialist, Lincoln),

Thank you so much for being our guardian and case worker and for sticking up for our rights, protection and well-being. Without you, we would probably not be here in this courtroom getting adopted to a really amazing family who cares for our well-being, isn't afraid to tell us what we're doing wrong, and is willing to equip us for the future.

We want to thank you again for everything you have done for us.

Love, your 16- and 17-year-old "Girls"

Carrie Sayaloune (Social Services Worker, Chadron),

I just want to say thank you so much for providing great customer service to this family! I see that they called in and you had them complete their interview right away instead of having them wait for a letter or having them call the Customer Service Center. I just really appreciate that. I helped this family with their SNAP application and they were REALLY needing help with food. With five boys and both parents unemployed that can be a tough situation. I just want to say thank you! I know you guys don't hear it enough.

SNAP Outreach Coordinator, Lincoln

This thank you note is in response to the Norfolk Veterans Home's annual "From the Heart" party for members and their spouses.

To the **Staff at the Norfolk Veterans Home:**

Thank you so much for such a wonderful celebration. The meal was delicious and the entertainment was very enjoyable. The old songs brought back many memories for my husband and I and our dancing days. My husband even sang along on some of the songs, and that brought tears to my eyes. The decorations were beautiful!

Your employees—from the front desk, all the nurses, housekeeping and administration—are all top notch. They are all so caring and greet you every day with a smile.

I thank you for having such a wonderful facility and having such a place that our veterans can call "home."

Thank you from my heart.

From the Spouse of a Member at NVH

DHHS HELP DESK Staff Consistently Delivers Exceptional Service

I have called the HELP DESK for big things, and little things, called at all times of the day, and have never been disappointed with the quality of assistance I have received or the time it took to get my problem resolved. Staff are always polite, knowledgeable, and positive! The HELP DESK staff consistently delivers quality customer service! Thank you for enabling me to do my work! You are greatly appreciated!

**LeeAnne Cooper,
DHHS Program Coordinator, Lincoln**



The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:

Helping people live better lives.

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