

Connections

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL
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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

May 2010
VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1



The Memorial Wall at the [Western Nebraska Veterans' Home](#) at Scottsbluff stands as a permanent tribute to contributions of all members who have died. See page 6 for more.

Photo: Jerry Crisp

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DHHS now on and

You can follow DHHS at <http://twitter.com/NebraskaDHHS>

DHHS in the News Update. . .

Here are a few headlines of news releases recently issued by Communications & Legislative Services about DHHS programs. You can read and subscribe to all DHHS news releases from the DHHS [Newsroom](#). You can also listen to [sound bites](#) issued with releases.

Go to [DHHS In The News](#) on the Employee Home Page for links to *Omaha World-Herald* and *Lincoln Journal Star* articles updated daily involving DHHS programs and services.

[Small Conversations About Not Drinking Can Make a Big Impression on Children](#) April 15, 2010

[Health and Human Services and Project Harmony Work Together to Protect Children](#) April 2, 2010

[Stress Happens: Rethink Your Reaction](#) April 2, 2010

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

make the connection . . .

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DHHS Employee Website: www2.dhhs.ne.gov

DHHS System Advocate: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at diana.duran@nebraska.gov

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

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

How COOL is your POOL?



This summer, the DHHS [Comprehensive Cancer Control Program](#) is partnering with 15 health departments across Nebraska to put the POOL COOL program into action. It's well documented that protection from the sun could prevent about 90% of all skin cancer cases, and children and adolescents are most at risk for overexposure to the sun due to the frequency of spending time outdoors!

POOL COOL is a sun safety education program designed for use at outdoor swimming pools. The program's main goal is to increase awareness, motivation and sun protection practices among children ages 5 to 10, their parents, caregivers, aquatic staff and other pool users. Research has shown that pools that implement the POOL COOL program have a more protected pool environment, and that both parents and children increased sun protection behaviors—wearing sunscreen, putting on a hat, etc. Lifeguards and aquatic staff involved with POOL COOL have also been shown to reduce sunburn incidences.

This summer, look for POOL COOL at your local pool!

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

By Kerry Winterer
CEO

This spring I've taken to the road to tell the Department's story. I've been welcomed with open arms by a variety of groups and I've found that people are interested in who we are and what we do.

I've traveled from Omaha to North Platte and plan to get farther west as the summer opens up.

These speaking engagements offer a wide range of opportunities. I've met with groups as diverse as Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs, the League of Women Voters, and the Estate Planning Council.

Ideally, I get 30 minutes or more to go through my presentation and answer good questions from the audience. On other days, I might wind up with only 10-15 minutes; however, even on those days, I believe the crowd has learned something new about the important work we do.

My usual presentation includes a short summary of our scope, including the public dollars and number of programs for which we are responsible (over 900 state statutes guide our work) and a description of the divisions and their responsibilities.

Since coming to the Department, I have been impressed with the level of commitment and dedication our employees have to their jobs, and I always share this with the audience. I like to describe our employees as mission-driven and helping people live better lives every day. I believe it's important that the people we all



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

work for know you're committed and dedicated to your work and that your work affects real people.

The good news is that people are clearly interested in what I have to say. They are impressed with our scope and the number of lives we touch, and they appreciate the opportunity to learn

"I believe it's important that the people we all work for know you're committed and dedicated to your work."

about the Department beyond what's often covered in the news.

I especially like the opportunity to take questions, and I try to allow as much time as possible for this. These questions are often pretty basic, such as what division has responsibility for a particular program. Often questions are driven by a recent news item or

because we're connected to that community in some way. For example, in Norfolk and Hastings I've been asked about the Regional Centers, and in towns with local offices I'm often asked about ACCESSNebraska.

We don't stop with connecting just with that audience. I try to fit in at least one stop with media, whether it's a local radio station or a meeting with the newspaper editor so they, too, hear good news about the Department.

We also use Twitter to get news out about these speaking opportunities. Whenever I'm on the road, Communications adds a tweet to our Twitter page letting our near-470 subscribers know where I've been.

And that works both ways: After a speaking engagement with the Hastings Noon Kiwanis Club on April 29, someone with the Hastings Museum put out a tweet: "Heard a great talk today from Kerry Winterer, CEO of @NebraskaDHHS. Thanks for coming to Hastings!" I was happy to see that someone else wanted to tweet about us.

There are many facets to being the CEO of an organization as large and diverse as the Department of Health and Human Services, and being an ambassador –

talking with the public about who we are and what we do – is a part of the job that I thoroughly enjoy.

P.S. And do you want to know another highlight when I'm traveling? It's having the opportunity to stop by a local office or one of our 24-hour facilities to meet and talk with Department employees!

Walk in My Shoes



Dr. Schaefer shadows **Michelle Hood**, immunization registry coordinator, as part of “Walk in My Shoes,” a new Division of Public Health effort. *Photo: Bill Wiley*

By *Marla Augustine*

Walk a mile in my shoes... my moccasins... my Sketchers.

The [Division of Public Health](#) has introduced a new way of finding out what employees’ jobs are like.

Dr. Joann Schaefer and the DPH administrators are spending time shadowing employees to learn in more detail what they do. The idea came from a DPH employee on a survey about communication.

“Administrators don’t always get the opportunity to see how things work on the ground,” said Dr. Schaefer. “Walking a mile in their employees’ shoes, so to speak, gives them a new level of understanding about both the staff member and the program.”

Volunteer employees have hosted Dr. Schaefer and other administrators to

show them what their daily lives at work are like.

So far, Dr. Schaefer has shadowed **Jane Green** from [Every Woman Matters](#), **Michelle Hood** and **April Varga** in the [Immunization Program](#), and **Lei Zhang** in the Public Health Support Unit.

“I learned a lot. I better understand what Jane, Michelle, April and Lei do and how they fit into the big picture,” Dr. Schaefer said. “I came away with new knowledge that can help me do my job better.”

It was a good experience for the shadowees as well as the shadower.

“I thought the shadowing went very well,” said Jane Green, community health nurse in EWM. “I appreciated Dr. Schaefer’s suggestions and feedback. We were both surprised by how fast the time went.”

Jackie Miller, DPH Chief Administrator, and other administrators have also walked in employees’ shoes.

Dr. Miller has shadowed Jackie Fairbanks and several others from [Vital Records](#).

“I was amazed by their multi-tasking,” she said.

She also shadowed Michelle Hood to learn about the Immunization Registry.

Ming Qu has shadowed April Varga. **Sue Semerena** has shadowed **Jeff Hoffman** of the [Newborn Hearing Program](#). **Dr. Joseph Acierno**, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, shadowed **Barbara Ludwig**, program manager of the Immunization Program. It’s catching on.

Dr. Acierno is looking for more opportunities to shadow someone in the [Public Water Supply Program](#) and maybe to go out on a facility survey with someone in Licensure.

The people in the trenches, or on the front lines, have a lot to teach those who are in charge of administering their programs, Dr. Schaefer said.

“Shadowing an employee is one tool in the tool kit of a good manager,” she said. “It gives you an appreciation of what other people do. You get to share ideas and see all the talent that our division has. It helps you to think outside the box.”

Dr. Schaefer is seeking more volunteers to shadow. You can volunteer for other administrators as well by calling or talking to Jackie Miller, who is coordinating the effort.

“Whoever suggested the shadowing project on the survey—kudos to you because it has been a fantastic experience,” said Dr. Schaefer.

On Dr. Joann Schaefer’s office door are these words: “What you do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” *-Goethe*

Meet Matt Clough

By Jerry Crisp

Matt Clough, DHHS's Chief Operating Officer (COO), has lived in several states but considers himself a Nebraskan. He has lived in Omaha since 1977, where he and wife Carol, to whom he's been married for 31 years, have raised three sons.

"We love Nebraska," Matt says. "It's a terrific place to raise a family."

The Cloughs also have a 2-year-old granddaughter and a one-week old grandson.

Matt says that **Operations** plays a unique role in our organization by providing the human resources and financial and support services that are critical to helping more than 200,000 Nebraskans live better lives.

"Operations impacts literally everything that's done within DHHS," says Clough. "Asking ourselves 'How will what I am about to do help people live better lives' will help us all to set aside any differing priorities and serve our common mission more effectively."

Clough's experience in bringing diverse forces together to work toward



Matt Clough, Chief Operating Officer

Photo: Bill Wiley

a common goal comes from previous work in such places as Afghanistan and Burundi.

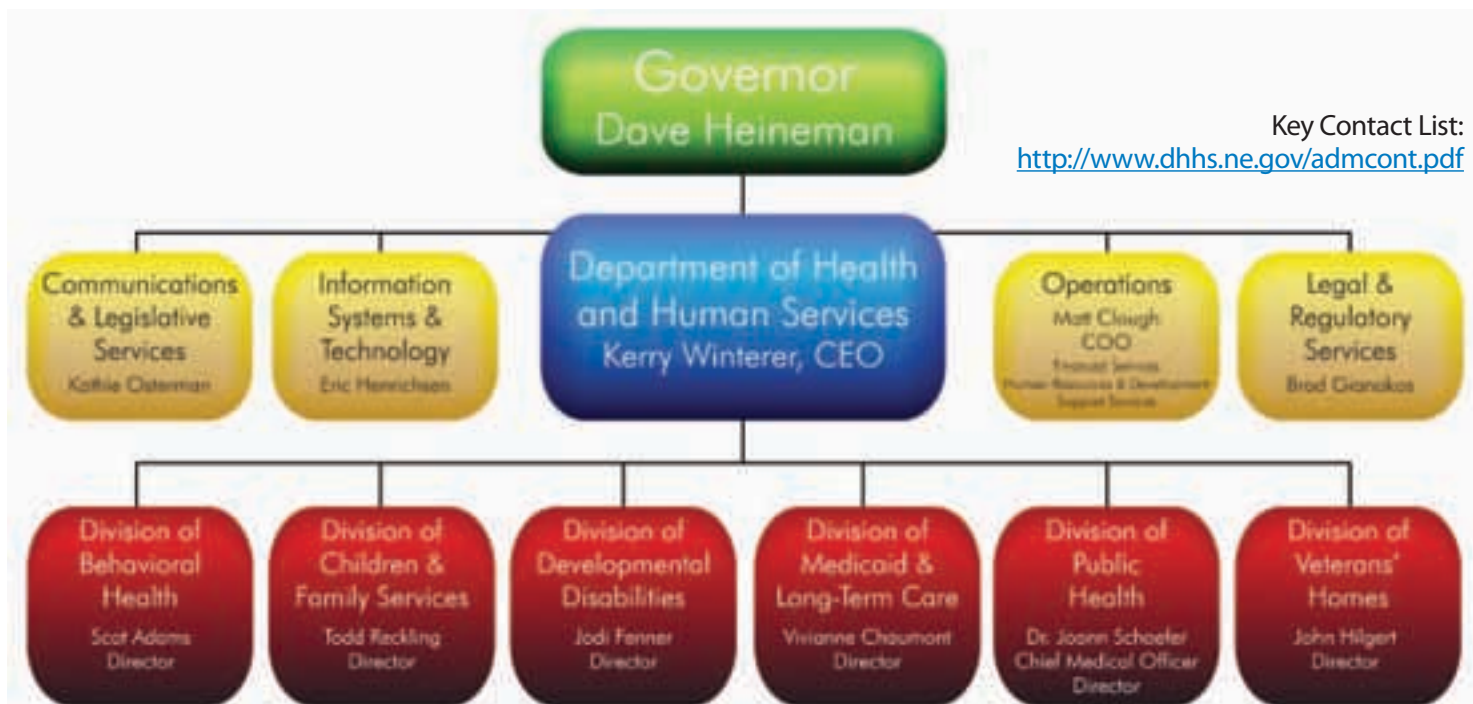
One of the smallest countries in Africa bordered on the north by Rwanda, Burundi has been torn for

years by civil war between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. While there attending a meeting of government, military and police officials, Matt heard a Tutsi general and a Hutu officer describe their attempts on each other's life but end on a dramatically different note.

"When both said, 'In spite of what has happened, I forgive you in my heart,' I had living proof that even in the most severe of differences, people can come together," says Clough.

Differing perspectives among DHHS employees might not involve life-and-death struggles but require the same kind of coming together that Clough has witnessed throughout the world.

"As an executive, entrepreneur and humanitarian, I have lived my life with the hope of making a difference in the lives of people," says Clough. "DHHS offers the opportunity to work together as part of a mission that is far bigger than any one of us, and I am proud to be part of this team."



Veterans' Homes honor a member's passing in special ways



The Memorial Wall at the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home at Scottsbluff stands as a permanent tribute to the contributions of all members who have died.

Photo: Jerry Crisp

By Jerry Crisp

When veterans die at one of the four DHHS-operated Veterans' Homes in Scottsbluff, Norfolk, Grand Island and Bellevue, various traditions are observed to mark their passing. All four Homes, for example, hold public memorial services where "Taps" might be played and bells rung after reading the name of each departed member, along with many other opportunities to celebrate their lives and pay final respects.

All four Homes, for example, initially announce a member's passing by placing flags and flowers inside or outside the room of a deceased member and sending cards or signature sheets to the member's family. The [Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home](#) places these memorials in the unique Town Square around which the facility, like a small community, is built. This memorial includes a placard identifying

the veteran, small U.S. flag, a flag representing the member's branch of service, and battery-operated candle.

While all four Homes post the names of deceased members in a prominent place like the lobby or reception area, the [Western Nebraska Veterans Home](#) at Scottsbluff erected a large exterior memorial wall in 1992 to honor all deceased members who lived at the facility. The wall stands atop a grassy rise leading down to the facility pond.

In addition to announcing a member's passing with a small memorial in their reception area, the [Norfolk Veterans' Home](#) observed a unique tradition of planting a tree at the facility. Tree roots placed into the ground were intertwined with slips of paper bearing the names of members who died during the previous year. According to this tradition, their memories do not fade but grow with the passing years and are forever part of the facility.

In a similar spirit, the [Grand Island Veterans Home](#) donates memorial money for a deceased member to the Arbor Day Foundation to have ten trees planted and registered in one of our national forests. This can be seen as a living tribute and lasting monument to contributions veterans have made to both their state and their nation.

"Gone are the days when a deceased member was taken out the back way so as not to attract notice," says **John Hilgert**, Director of the [Division of Veterans Homes](#). "Now they came in the front door and leave the same way in keeping with all of the dignity and respect they so richly deserve."

With variations that make traditions at each Home special, all of these observances of a member's passing continue a down payment on a debt that can never be fully repaid for sacrifices these men and women have made to ensure freedoms we all enjoy.

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.



Front Liner **Tracy Carpenter**

Photo: Lindsey Eads

By Jerry Crisp

Every youth at the [Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney](#) (YRTC-K) within the [Division of Children & Family Services](#) shares one goal—to go home to family and freedom. No one knows that better than Staff Assistant **Tracy Carpenter**. She's the person who gives the youth the good news about when they're leaving on parole and heading to family and home.

When youth report to the front office to see Mrs. Carpenter, they know they're getting good news—that all the planning the team has done is now reality and they're ready to integrate back into the community. She recalls one youth in particular whom

she greeted with the question, "When do you want to leave here?" When he replied with a blank stare, she said, "Would tomorrow be soon enough?"

"Am I getting punked?" he asked with a mixture of suspicion and hesitant hope.

Interactions like this are one of the chief rewards of Tracy's work. Once a youth earns release, Tracy works with the Juvenile Service Officers (JSOs) and

**"What does every youth at YRTC-Kearney strive to achieve?
We all strive to get home to family and freedom."**

Service Coordinators (SCs) to have the youth leave YRTC-K within 14 days if they are returning home, or within 30 days if they are to go to an out-of-home placement. This is to ensure that the

identified services are in place for the youth and their family.

Far from just a message-bearer, Tracy helps to make these moments happen for boys committed to YRTC-K. She does that by coordinating face-to-face visits among 70 DHHS JSOs and 80 SCs, as well as telephone and video conferences.

When youth are ready, she also coordinates travel arrangements, release documentation, and Conditions of Liberty the youth must sign. She also works with attorneys on revocation hearings, liaisons with JSOs and SCs, and trains new YRTC-K receptionists.

Tracy describes a typical day as "hectic" and "hitting on all eight cylinders just to keep up."

Another recent challenge for Tracy has been editing a new facility newsletter, the "YRTC-K Times," for both youth and staff members, but that has its rewards, too.

"For one thing, most of the articles are contributed by youth, teachers and staff, and that helps keep the content relevant and readable," says Tracy.

"More importantly, many youth come to the facility thinking they're all alone, but when they read articles by others with the same feelings and thoughts they may be experiencing, then they feel less alone."

"Tracy is the employee all supervisors want—a reliable self-starter who's always on top of things," says **Rosalie McCurry**, Tracy's supervisor. "She also cross-trains with me and completes my

work when I go on leave so that when I return, I can pick up where I left off."

"Tracy is always willing to step up and assist with any task," says YRTC-K administrator **Jana Peterson**. "She is a valuable asset to YRTC-K staff and the youth we serve."

Legislative Update

The 2010 Legislative Session is over. Since this was the second year of the biennial session, if bills didn't pass, they will not carry over to next year. Here's an update on the bills introduced at the Departments' request during the two years of this legislative biennium.

By *Bryson Bartels*
Legislative Coordinator

2009 Carryover Bills

- LB 319, introduced by **Senator Mike Flood**, changes provisions relating to child care reimbursement. This bill was indefinitely postponed (killed) by the Health and Human Services Committee.
- LB 341, introduced by **Senator Tanya Cook**, allows nurse practitioners to dispense tuberculosis drugs. LB 341 did not advance from General File.
- LB 38, introduced by Senator Flood, changes assault provisions of DHHS employees in regional centers and YRTCs by people in the agency's care. LB 38 stayed in the Judiciary Committee and did not advance this year. LB 38 language was included in this year's LB 771, also introduced by Senator Flood. The only provision adopted in LB 771 impacting DHHS employees relates to assaults of DHHS employees who work with sex offenders in the regional centers.

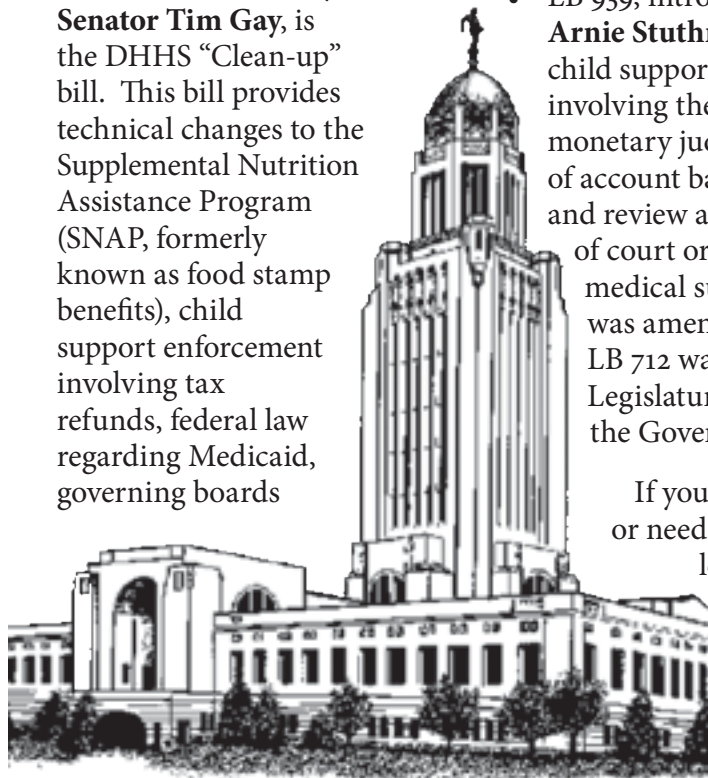
2010 Bills

- LB 698, introduced by **Senator LeRoy Loudon**, repeals the Managed Care Program Premium Tax. This bill was passed into law March 3, 2010, and signed by the Governor.
- LB 737, introduced by **Senator Russ Karpisek**, adds the position of Nursing Director to the list of non-classified positions for DHHS and the Department of Corrections. This bill was indefinitely postponed.
- LB 849, introduced by **Senator Tim Gay**, is the DHHS "Clean-up" bill. This bill provides technical changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamp benefits), child support enforcement involving tax refunds, federal law regarding Medicaid, governing boards

relating to developmental disabilities, and hearing officers in the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Other bills were amended into LB 849 relating to radiography, pharmacy and optometry practice, training in Alzheimer's Special Care, medical records, discontinuance of utility services, licensure of children's day health services and the Nebraska Center for Nursing. LB 849 was passed by the Legislature Reading and approved by the Governor.

- LB 939, introduced by **Senator Arnie Stuthman**, changes child support enforcement laws involving the collection of other monetary judgments, disclosure of account balances to DHHS and review and modification of court orders for child and medical support. LB 939 was amended into LB 712. LB 712 was passed by the Legislature and approved by the Governor.

If you have any questions or need information on legislation, please contact me at 471-0541 or bryson.bartels@nebraska.gov.



Grand Island offices help make community healthier



ENHANCING MINORITY HEALTH

DHHS offices contributed to the Multicultural Coalition's Minority Health Fair in Grand Island on March 29. DHHS provided information about early developmental learning guides and DHHS services in both English and Spanish and offered child care activities so that parents could participate in screenings.

Breast exams and blood pressure and cholesterol screenings were provided in order to detect health problems early so that they can be addressed before more expensive treatments are needed. Twenty-two separate organizations also shared healthy living tips, and local merchants provided fruits and other healthy snacks.

Shown from left to right are **Katia Valencia, Mariam Ali, and Leticia Torres.**

Photo: Teresa Rivera



EASTER EXTRAVAGANZA HELPS ALLEVIATE HUNGER

Four hundred Easter baskets were up for bid at a silent auction in Grand Island's Conestoga Mall on March 29 with a goal of raising \$20,000. All proceeds benefitted Project Hunger, with a portion going to fund the Gap program through DHHS.

Gap aids the working poor who find themselves short of money for necessities. The program provides food vouchers that DHHS then distributes to those families.

Project Hunger has established accounts at local grocery stores that allow people to redeem those vouchers.

Individuals, businesses, schools and others donate merchandise for the baskets that are entered into a friendly competition for best girl's basket, best boy's, best women's, best men's and others. Donated items include golf bags and putters, tool kits, croquet sets, board games, necklaces, DVDs

and skateboards with helmet and knee and elbow pads.

Shown are a partial group from the South Pine office of those who donated or participated in putting together Easter baskets with an award for "Best Female Theme." From left to right, **Juanita Briseno, Kay Schenck, Pat Durbin, Katia Valencia, Bev Enderle, Trenton Waite, Judy Bliss and Sonia Gutierrez.**

Photo: Yolanda Nuncio

In their own words

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

Dear **Mary McHugh** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Columbus office):

I will be starting another new job in March that pays \$10 per hour, and now between three new jobs, I know I will not be eligible for any assistance. I appreciate all your hard work and help during these hard times.

I've got to try to do this on my own now. You have been a great case worker, and I thank you.

A Grateful Former Client

Dear **Lavonne Hansen** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Grand Island office):

With warm thanks for the wonderful things you do and the special person you are.

Thank you for helping me take care of my children and making the experience of dealing with assistance easy and hassle-free. I truly appreciate it, and God bless.

A Grateful Client

Dear **Bernice Russell** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Sidney office):

Thank you for the kind letter about my missing check. I got the check a few days after I received your letter.

It's so great to open up my bedroom and sleep in a cozy, warm bed. I have you to thank for this extra comfort, and I am so grateful to you. Thanks for caring!

A Grateful Service Recipient

In their own words

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

[EDITOR'S NOTE: In forwarding the following note to **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health, Administrator of Licensing **Helen Meeks** said, "**Suzette Moeller** is a great employee whose work helps puts us on the map as being the best in the region...She truly is a gem!"]

Dear **Paul Shumate** (CMS/MC):

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Suzette Moeller (Staff Assistant, Health Licensure & Investigations, Division of Public Health, Lincoln) for her generous use of time and talents to assist us in the monumental task of migrating the CLIA outline data system. Because of her help, we reached a significant milestone in our redesign project.

Suzette's willingness to volunteer and take time from her busy schedule to assist us was commendable! She offered valuable input during biweekly conference calls by reviewing countless screen mockups and critiquing technical system requirements. We could always rely on her valuable comments.

Carol Zeller
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
CLIA Data Team

Dear **Lesa Schaller** (Eligibility Technician, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office):

I thank you very much for the energy assistance you gave me. Many, many, many thanks!

An Appreciative Client

Dear **Stacy Schenk** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Wayne office):

Thanks for all you have done for our family. It means so much that words just can't describe.

God bless, and thanks for working in the job that you do. You do it so well!

A Grateful Service Recipient

Please send letters from satisfied customers via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

A love story for all ages

By Jerry Crisp

Lynn Cox is a romantic who lives at the Norfolk Veterans' Home. Serving for three years in the Air Corps during WWII as a bombardier on a B-29, he saw action on Pacific islands like Guam, Tinian and Okinawa. Lynn came home by way of Japan but had good reason to come home safely.

Lynn met his future wife, **LaVaun** ("Vaun"), on a blind date and married her just before shipping out a few months later. They were married for 57 years.

Lynn is a romantic because a short time before his wife died in 2002, he wrote a poem titled "My Blind Date" and gave it to her as a Christmas



Lt. Lynn and LaVaun Cox in 1945.

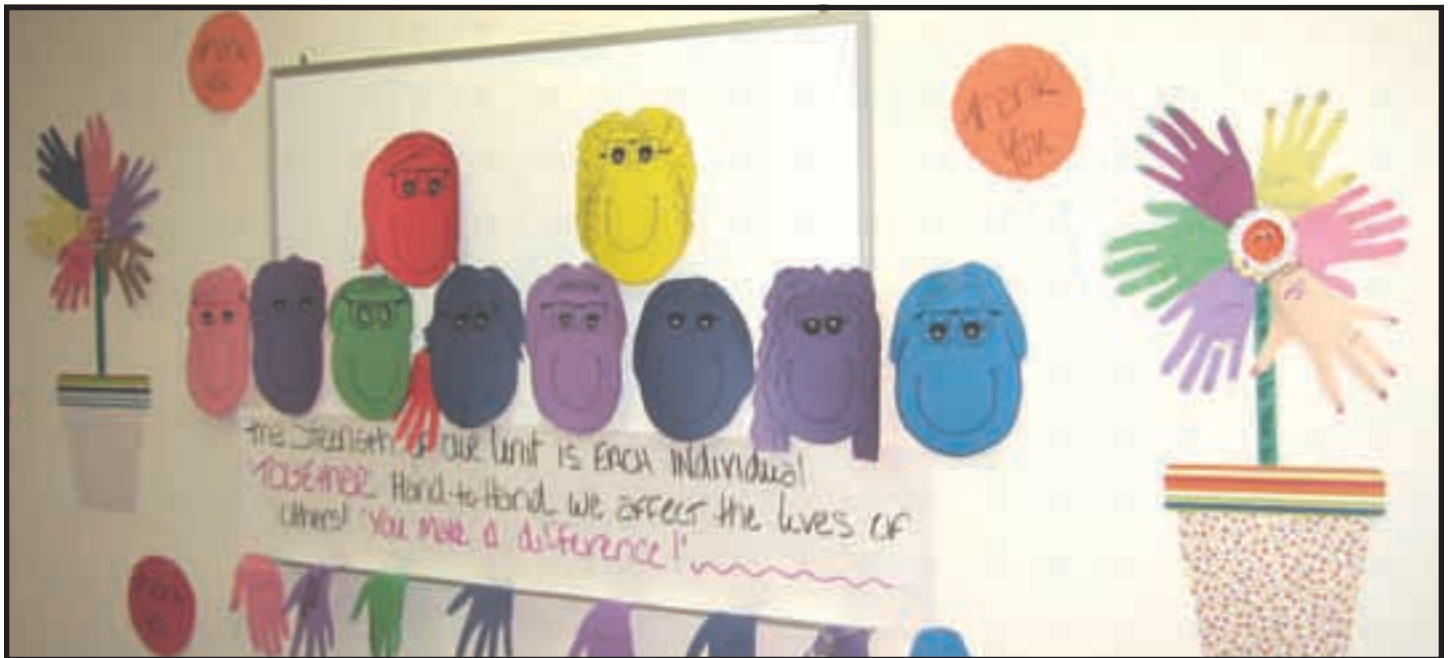
present. When he gave her the poem, he got down on one knee and proposed again. She accepted.

After presenting his poem and proposal, he sang her their favorite song, "The More I See You." A snippet of the lyrics say...

*Can you imagine
How much I'll love you
The more I see you
As years go by?
The only one for me can only be you.
My arms won't free you;
My heart won't try.*

As Lynn Cox's love story shows, romantics don't need to be young. They only need to love enough to last a lifetime and beyond.

Heads & Hands Together



Staff members throughout the [Licensure Unit](#) in the State Office Building in Lincoln made heads and hands for this display to celebrate their close working relationship. The "flower pots" on either side were also made from "hands."

To pay tribute to their contributions, administrators inscribed this message on the display: "The strength of our

Unit is each individual...TOGETHER. Hand-to-hand, we affect the lives of others! YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"

Licensure Administrator **Helen Meeks** and other administrators also paid tribute to approximately 50 support staff by serving brunch.

Photo: Claire Titus

Helping feed hungry children



(Left) Some of the donated food that found its way into children's hungry stomachs

(Below) From left, team leaders **Kathy Krueger** and **Kristi Chapman** with their team's 1st and 2nd-place prizes.

Photos: Sue Petersen

During the school year, the Food Bank "BackPack" program sends nutritional food-filled backpacks home from school with more than 1,000 children each week who would otherwise go hungry over the weekend. Many children rely on school breakfasts and lunches for their most nutritious meals, in some cases lunch being the only meal of the day.

Many DHHS employees filled backpacks to help hungry children return to school on Mondays ready to learn. One of these groups from the Investigations unit within the Division of Public Health held a contest with two teams, the goal being to find out which team could fill their backpacks with the most food.



Team leaders **Kathy Krueger** and **Kristi Chapman** rallied 20 troops and gathered nearly 200 food items. First-place prize winners enjoyed a pineapple cake, while the 2nd-place team had to settle for a strawberry cake, although that doesn't sound like they suffered too much.

All of this was just one small part of a much larger effort. The grand total collected for the 2010 food drive was \$5,009—a 40% increase over last year. Since every donated dollar purchases \$6.50 worth of food, the Lincoln Food Bank could buy \$32,558 worth of food to serve hungry people in southeast Nebraska—thanks in part to DHHS employees who don't just help people live better lives because it's their job.