

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

November 2008
VOLUME 8, ISSUE 11



What's all the hugging about? Turn page to find out!



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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.

[Eisenhauer Joins DHHS as New Administrator of Norfolk Veteran's](#)

[Home](#) October 1

[DHHS Begins Flue Surveillance - Time to Get Your Flu Shot](#) October 3

[Tenth Instance of Safe Haven Law Occurred on October 13](#) October 13

[Health and Human Services Hosts Public Forum on Foster Care](#) October 22

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 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

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EOE/AA/ADA

About the Cover:

Employees of the Children and Family Services Division returned from a 3-week stint issuing disaster food stamp relief to victims of the recent Gulf Coast hurricanes and flooding on October 2. Although departing in a dreary downpour, they returned to sunny smiles and happy hugs in Lincoln.

On hand to offer a warm welcome were CEO **Chris Peterson**, Children and Family Services Policy Section administrator **Todd Reckling**, Economic Assistance Administrator **Mike Harris**, Food Stamp Program administrator **Trish Bergman** and many others.

Learn more about the returnees' experiences in their own words on page 4!

From the CEO



By Christine Peterson
Chief Executive Officer,
Nebraska Department of Health and
Human Services

In late October, the Division Directors and I had a wonderful opportunity to share the Department's important work with the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee.

The opportunity came during the public hearing on Legislative Resolution 363, which was introduced last spring by the Health and Human Services Committee. Its purpose was to review and examine the powers and duties of, and funding for, the Department.

The public hearing was held on October 23 and 24. Over those two full days, we reported on "everything you might want to know" about the Department.

The process offered a great opportunity for the Directors to work closely with their staff over several weeks to compile information and transform it into a meaningful window

into our work. It provided a real feeling of accomplishment – for efforts we've completed and others we've just begun.

For example, did you know that the Department is tasked with over 900 statutory responsibilities, powers and duties? While we didn't touch on each and every one, we did provide a listing of them all in a handout.

After I provided an introduction and an overarching agenda, each Division Director outlined and provided details about their budget, programs and services, numbers of people served, their priorities, progress on activities, and challenges. Our [presentation](#), nearing 130 PowerPoint slides, chronicled those facts over the two days.

It was our hope that this information would bring to life the important work done by DHHS employees each and every day, because that is the work that touches the lives of Nebraskans.

For example, every person in our state is touched by public health, from the water we drink to the health care professionals who are licensed to care for us.

Thousands more receive care through our ten 24-hour facilities – Regional Centers, Veterans Homes, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers, and the Beatrice State Developmental Center.

And hundreds of thousands more after that receive many different kinds of human services from us in communities from border to border. Whether it's community services for people with developmental disabilities, food stamps, Aid to Dependent Children, child welfare, child support or Medicaid, DHHS is there to lend a hand.

Even though the Department is large and numbers about 5,800 staff, we don't serve alone. You – DHHS employees – also work with our partners across many varied professions. They include, but certainly aren't limited to, area agencies on aging, mental health regions, health care and child care providers, foster parents, local health departments, stakeholders and advocates.

I'm very proud of the work you do on behalf of, and for, Nebraskans, and I hope that each of you are proud of your work, too.

Through this presentation, it was clear that our work is varied and that it is important. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the role you play in making Nebraska a better place to live and, for many, the part you play in helping them live better lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Happy Homecoming!

Here's what returning Children & Family Services employees had to say about their experiences providing disaster food stamp relief to hurricane victims on the Gulf Coast:

“It was a wonderful and rewarding experience with a few humorous moments. We wore now-famous blue vests...One lady asked me if they were bulletproof, and another wanted to know why we were wearing life jackets.

Everyone was so kind and appreciative and couldn't thank us enough. Everyone was amazed that we came all the way from Nebraska to help them. People even stopped us on the streets and in restaurants to thank us.

For the last part of our tour, we were in the Algiers Parish and stopped at a McDonald's every day for breakfast, where we were warmly welcomed by the local coffee club. One of the elderly gentlemen had been stationed at the Lincoln Air Force base in 1945 and shared fond memories of Nebraska.

Assisting Louisiana in their time of need was a truly rewarding and memorable experience.”

Margaret Ahola - Crete

“ It was a rewarding experience, and I doubt any of us will forget some of the stories we heard from clients who are still bouncing back from Hurricane Katrina, let alone Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

My most amusing experience was issuing an EBT card to a gentleman who was the absolute spitting image of the actor, Samuel L. Jackson. I was speechless as the client sat down in front of me! He started laughing and said that he knew he looked a lot like Jackson but that he thought I looked a lot like Vice President Dick Cheney (which I'm often told).

Just about everyone we helped thanked us for coming to New Orleans and helping them!”

Dave Loguda - Omaha

“The trip to New Orleans is one I'll never forget. The customers were very kind and thankful for our service. Most of them were humbled and awed by the fact that we came all the way from Nebraska to help them.

A woman stopped by our table at the food court on the River Walk one day and thanked us over and over. I cannot even begin to put into words what she expressed in appreciation. She said she now knew their city and state had not been forgotten by the rest of the country. Wow!

I also think I have now seen, in person, the largest cockroach ever. It was so big it could not fit in the crack between the sidewalk and a building. I think a young boy could probably use it for a skateboard.

I never thought I could experience so many emotions in one trip. We worked hard, long days but I received so much more than I gave. I don't think I'll ever have the privilege to repay their generosity.”

Dalene Krebs - Lincoln

“The people of Louisiana were so grateful. They were amazed that Nebraska cared enough to deploy a team to help them. Over and over, the people of Louisiana said, ‘Tell Nebraska thanks!’ I appreciated the opportunity to represent Nebraska state employees.”

Cynthia Hartley - Lincoln

“Your Midwest work ethic is driving us crazy!” — something a Louisiana worker told me during a conversation about how we Nebraska folks show up early in the morning and work into the night with a smile on our faces and an appreciation and enthusiasm for the mission we’re on.”

Stacy Brown - Chadron

“What an incredible opportunity the thirteen of us were given when we were chosen to assist with disaster relief in New Orleans — without a doubt, a top-five life experience for me. I was completely humbled by the genuine opportunity of gratitude and praise we received from those we went to help. Many, upon learning we were from Nebraska, seemed overjoyed and amazed that we would come all that way to lend a hand.

We met many remarkable people during our journey. To hear their incredible stories touched our hearts, particularly from those who lived through and continue to struggle from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The resiliency and determination of this community was amazing. We also had the opportunity to see areas of St. Bernard’s Parish and the Lower Ninth Ward. Large sections of these communities remain devastated from Katrina. To see people still living in FEMA trailers tucked into neighborhoods that appear to be all but forgotten is unimaginable.

We also found some time to enjoy the rich culture and good food New Orleans is known for. As the city continues to rebuild, it is without doubt that those who remain love their city.

On a lighter note, we found a daily chuckle or two from the many comments and questions from the curious about those now-almost-infamous blue vests we were asked to wear. Some of the more memorable include:

‘Why do you glow in the dark?’...‘Do you also work at Wal-Mart?’...and my personal favorite, ‘So do they make you wear those things when you’re at your office back in Nebraska?’”

John Butler - Lincoln

“One of the things that will remain with me is the devastation that still exists from Katrina. Until you actually see the damage and destruction, it’s hard to comprehend.

Also I met some of the nicest people from surrounding areas who came to help with the disaster relief. I felt that if I lived in Louisiana, they would be life-long friends. It was an experience that was very rewarding and will never be forgotten.

Also, getting to know fellow workers from the Nebraska was GREAT!”

Margie Hoffman - York

“I really enjoyed being able to go to Louisiana and help people there. I really feel like we made a difference.

I was telling my husband, **Tom**, who’s from Texas, how polite everyone is. My husband always tells people “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma’am,” and now I know where he gets it from. It’s the Southern upbringing. I don’t think I ever heard so many “Yes, ma’ams” and “No, ma’ams” and “Have a blessed day” in my entire life. I really felt appreciated.”

Sonia Diaz - Omaha

While in Louisiana, DHHS employees worked 10 to 12 hours a day and even stayed an extra week when asked. DHHS employees in Louisiana estimate that from September 9th through September 23rd, at one location alone, more than 80,000 households were served. That just goes to show how dedicated these workers really are.

Todd Landry

Director

Department of Health and Human Services
Children and Family Services Division

“We met many remarkable people during our journey. To hear their incredible stories touched our hearts, particularly from those who lived through and continue to struggle from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina..”



Dear **Nebraska DHHS:**

You and others involved in the flood and hurricane preparation, response and recovery have done an amazing job. Once again, you make us all proud to be part of this Agency and its critical mission to help others. You more than rose to the occasion, going above and beyond to help those in need, and so many lives are better as a result.

Kate Houston
Deputy Under-Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture

Dear **Christine Peterson:**

I would like to personally thank you for sending your staff to help our agency in the recent aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. I would also like to commend your Nebraska DHHS staff who volunteered. It was not easy for them to be away from their families, but they were a tremendous support to our agency in the delivery of emergency services to the citizens of Louisiana.

...Your staff worked 14 hour days/7 days a week...At present, we have taken 166,754 applications for disaster Food Stamp applications. Total applications statewide currently number 600,456 for Hurricane Gustav and 6,418 applications for Texas and Louisiana residents affected by Hurricane Ike. It was a great boost to the morale of our staff to know they were supported by other states across the nation.

I would also like to thank **Mike Harris**, Manager, Economic Assistance and Child Support Enforcement Unit, for working with us on the logistics necessary to send your staff to Louisiana.

Again, thanks do not seem sufficient. It was truly an honor to work with such dedicated employees from your disaster team.

Debra Nance
OFS Team Lead/FS Services Manager
Department of Social Services,
Division of Information Services
State of Louisiana

“Once again, you make us all proud to be part of this Agency and it’s critical mission to help others. You more than rose to the occasion, going above and beyond to help those in need...”





Caption: DHHS employees back home from the Gulf Coast. From left to right: **Margie Hoffman** (York); **Mickey Kotlarz** (Omaha); **John Butler** (Lincoln); **Stacy Brown** (Chadron); **Josue Cabral** (Omaha); **Sonia Diaz** (Omaha); **Crickett Phelps** (Dakota City); **Donna Hajek** (North Platte); **Cynthia Hartley** (Lincoln); **Dalene Krebs** (Lincoln); **Sheila Loguda** (Omaha); **David Loguda** (Omaha); and **Margaret Ahola** (Crete). *Photo: Jerry Crisp*

“Your staff worked 14 hour days / 7 days a week...At present, we have taken 166,754 applications for disaster Food Stamp applications.”



Helping people live better lives

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



Recruiting foster parents

The DHHS North Platte office hosted an activity at the Lincoln County Fair to encourage folks to consider becoming foster parents. The theme was “It’s Best to Share Your Nest—Become A Foster Parent!” To underscore the point, Resource Developer **Paula Farias** (at right) helped children create Cheerio birdfeeders.

“This offered a great opportunity to reach potential adoptive families and highlight our DHHS office with a positive community activity,” said Resource Developer **Laura Davis**. “As a result, we’ve developed partnerships that have opened up other community opportunities to get our recruitment message across.”

Photo: Laura Davis



Foster parent appreciation

Panhandle Resource Developers (RD) and some Child & Family Services Specialists hosted a foster parent appreciation day in September at the Riverside Zoo in Scottsbluff. Eighty foster parents, children and biological parents enjoyed the occasion. The RD group arranged for free admissions, all the cookies and ice cream people could eat, and gift bags of donated toys for the kids, all donated by community partners.

“Our Resource Developers put a lot of time and effort into this event, and it showed,” said Nathan Busch, Children & Family Services Administrator for the Western Service Area.

Shown from left to right: Western Service Area staffer members **Lynn Fitzgibbon**, **Josie Carlson** (in front), (behind) **Katherine Rieken**, **Karen Boysen**, **LeAnn Laurent** and **Natalie Dyer** (not pictured, **Jean Duncan**)

Photo: Nathan Busch

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.

It's that time again...



Don't want the flu? Get your flu shot, says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health.

"The flu is nothing to mess around with," she said. "Anyone who doesn't want to get the flu and doesn't want to transmit it to their family members should get vaccinated or receive FluMist."

It takes about two weeks after receiving an immunization before immunity is fully developed.

It's difficult to predict when cases will start popping up. Sometimes it's as early as November. Generally it's in December. The peak time occurs in February or March.

If you don't like shots, FluMist is a nasal spray available for those who are healthy and between two and 49 years of age.

The flu is spread by respiratory droplets through the air. If someone sneezes or coughs into their hands, they can spread the virus to surfaces like door handles and phones. So, cough into your elbow to prevent spreading the virus, and don't forget to wash your hands or use hand gel.

Cold weather causes people to congregate indoors, causing more transmission. Holidays, which bring families and friends together, usually give the number of flu cases a boost.

"When people get together, they can spread the flu," says Dr. Schaefer. "Don't feel you're being a hero by coming to work sick. Some of your co-workers could be in one of the high-risk groups."



The symptoms of the flu include a fever, sore throat, chills, fatigue, cough, headache and muscles aches.

"You'll feel like you've been hit by a truck," Dr. Schaefer says. "You'll be knocked out for about a week. I've had patients say they have never been so sick in their lives."

If you do come down with the flu, don't ask your doctor for antibiotics, which won't help with viral illnesses. Using antibiotics unnecessarily can lead to antibiotic resistance, according to Dr. Schaefer. Asking your physician for an antiviral in the first 48 to 72 hours can mitigate the symptoms.

On average, about 226,000 people are hospitalized each year, with 36,000 deaths.

Who should get the flu shot?

- ◆ All children aged 6 months-18 years
- ◆ All people aged 50 years and older
- ◆ Adults with chronic illnesses (like diabetes, heart, kidney or liver disease)
- ◆ Adults and children with compromised immune systems (like patients treated with chemotherapy or taking drugs for HIV)
- ◆ Adults and children with respiratory disorders (like asthma)
- ◆ Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- ◆ Pregnant women
- ◆ Health care workers
- ◆ Household members at risk of complications

For more information about the flu, go to www.dhhs.ne.gov/flu.

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.

Lady with a Lamp

By Jerry Crisp

“Lady with a Lamp” conjures an image of lighting a path not only for oneself but for others—an image that describes what **Kathy Karsting** does as School and Health Program Manager in Lifespan Health Services in the Division of Public Health. She was



Kathy Karsting Photo: Jerry Crisp

previously health services supervisor for Lincoln Public Schools for eight years and has been with DHHS for the last two years. Kathy has been a nurse for 25 years, most of it in community health settings.

“School health is an area where one person can really make a difference in the well-being of children,” she says.

Kathy has been making a difference in the lives of children and families most of her life. A Peace Corps Volunteer in the Solomon Islands and a medical officer for the Peace Corps in Guinea, West Africa, Kathy has encountered children, women, and families in leafy huts, primitive hospitals, church basements, mobile vans and schools.

“These are the faces that populate the vision of my purpose in life,” Kathy explains.

This vision first took form when Kathy, fresh out of college, became a hospice volunteer.

“I looked across the room to see the hospice nurse on duty. Professional and smart, yet so kind and so specific in the ways she helped the patient. I thought: I could do that. I haven’t ever looked back. Nursing is my niche.”

“My main job with DHHS now is to provide consultation and training services to enhance the health and educational success of all Nebraska children,” she explains. “About half my time goes to answering questions, providing resources and information,

to school administrators and school nurses - and sometimes parents and advocates - trying to meet the needs of children with medical issues at school. It’s very important to me, and to others, that I am equipped with theoretically sound, evidence-based, and factually-accurate information for those in need. My job represents a belief that schools have much to do with the health and wellbeing of our children, and there are ways I can help support their efforts to really make a difference.”

“Perhaps my deepest satisfaction comes in providing consultation involving children with special health needs at school, particularly when families themselves contact me” Kathy says. “Helping a child with special needs enter school, encouraging and empowering an often beleaguered family, and helping the school build its capacity to provide needed care and services and welcome the child into education all seem like time well spent to me.”

The other half of her time is devoted to developing or delivering training for school health personnel and promoting childhood health, such as preventing childhood obesity and diabetes, preventing teen suicide, and controlling communicable disease. When possible, Kathy likes working on early childhood and preschool topics.

“Early childhood really is the ‘canary’ of school health. How well health, development, and safety needs are met during infancy and early childhood has a lot to do with the child’s needs in a school environment.”

Kathy currently co-leads a project to develop strategies and systems for health consultation for child care providers.

“In these efforts, I have opportunities to collaborate with others, both within DHHS and in the community,” Kathy says. “My audiences are folks who train and supervise others in their local areas, so needed information really circulates.”

Kathy’s most recent “train-the-trainer” efforts took her to Beatrice, Ogallala, Columbus and Burwell, where she instructed 55 people in first aid and emergency response skills and medication administration. She also publishes a newsletter for community health nurses, educators, and advocates, whose telling title is “Lamplighter.” This lady with a lamp has made a career of lighting a path for others to provide the most appropriate and effective care and services possible for generations to come.

Learn more at www.dhhs.ne.gov/schoolhealth.

Reducing Infant Mortality



Governor Dave Heineman proclaims September Infant Mortality Awareness Month, flanked by **Doris Lassiter** (left), Director of the Sarpy County Minority Health Partnership, and **Raponzil Drake**, PhD, Administrator of the Office of Minority Health and Health Equity within the Division of Public Health.

Infant mortality rates are affected by many factors, including the lack of prenatal care, maternal smoking, SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), death caused by co-sleeping and substance abuse. Public officials at federal, state and local levels have been working together with health care providers and other concerned Nebraskans to help expectant mothers and fathers protect the lives of their unborn children through proper nutrition and early prenatal care.

One of the ten Lifespan Health Services priorities is to “reduce rates of infant mortality, especially racial/ethnic disparities.” In 2006, a law was passed establishing new requirements for hospitals, birth centers and other medical facilities that discharge a newborn child to show parents a video and give them written materials on the dangers of shaking a baby and SIDS.

DHHS developed these informational videos and brochures as resources for consistent messages in Shaken Baby Syndrome and SIDS. The [video](#) can be viewed and [brochures](#) can be downloaded for duplication. The videos and brochures are available in both English and Spanish. *Photo courtesy of the Governor's office*



Way to Go

Statewide and National recognitions, honors and awards.

Chris Hanus, Alisha Smith earn “Everyday Heroes” recognitions

Chris Hanus and **Alisha Smith** have been named “Everyday Heroes” by the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. Hanus is Child Welfare Unit Administrator within the Division of Children & Family Services, and Smith is a case coordinator with the Integrated Care Coordination Unit in the DHHS Scottsbluff/Gering offices.

Hanus was honored “for her leadership, vision and always caring about kids.” Smith was recognized for having “gone above and beyond the call of duty to keep kids safe.”

The Nebraska Alliance presents annual statewide “Everyday Heroes” awards to those who consistently put children first, make significant contributions to team work for children and inspire others in their work.

The awards were presented by Lt. Governor **Rick Sheehy** at the “Children Need Everyday Heroes” conference on September 23-24 in Kearney.



Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy presents “Everyday Heroes” awards to Alisha Smith (at left) and Chris Hanus.
Photo: Gene Klein

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!

Wellness Words: Think HEALTH

Keep a positive mental outlook! There’s a connection between living well and healthfully and having a cheerful outlook on life. Do things you like to give you positive thoughts. Take a bubble bath, pet your dog, listen to music, watch a funny movie.

You can’t be unhappy when you’re smiling or singing!

Dr. Joann Schaefer

Worth Considering

Research shows that you have a greater impact on people by how you listen than by what you say.

Steven W. Vannoy

December Observances

December 2008

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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

National Hand Washing Week (1st week in December)

Dirty hands put everyone at risk of catching the flu, colds and other viruses, according to **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer. Viruses may be on everything you touch—door knobs, keyboards, toilet handles, food, dishes, etc. The viruses are transmitted when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

Hand washing doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness and protecting your health. Proper hand washing:

- Wet your hands with warm, running water and lather with soap well (or use hand gel if soap and water aren't available).
- Rub your hands vigorously together for 20 seconds (singing the Happy Birthday song twice is long enough). Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel. Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

For What It's Worth

Anonymous tips from co-workers you might be able to use

OK, maybe NOT the best way to deal with telemarketers but awfully tempting anyway!

When a magazine subscription or window salesman calls your home for the fourth time in as many months, an episode of the former



“**Jerry Seinfeld**” series offered a hint as to what we might want to say: “Look, I'm real busy right now, but if you'll give me your phone number, I'd be glad to call you back later.”

If they give us their phone number, then we've pulled off a minor miracle, and if they refuse, then they'll at least know how we feel!

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

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT!

According to the Reynolds Metal Company, enough aluminum is thrown away to rebuild our commercial air fleet 4 times a year, and recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a TV for 3 hours! In 2007, State of Nebraska employees recycled 79,649 pounds of tin cans and 8,123 pounds of aluminum cans.

What will YOU do with the next empty pop can —pitch it into the nearest wastebasket or garbage can?

OR...

***AT WORK**, deposit it in the nearest recycling container or ask your local recycling coordinator or office manager to provide one; **AT HOME**, save empty pop and food cans to take to the nearest recycling center!*



Another Happening!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



1960s celebs visit Grand Island Veterans' Home

(Above right) **Ginada Hostetler** (center), Administrator, welcomes "Janis Joplin" (Administrative Assistant **Joanne Badura**) and a hippie (Housekeeping Supervisor **Teri Engleman**) to the Grand Island Veterans' Home (GIVH).

(Above left) Another special guest from the past was "Bob Dylan" (Activity Assistant **Larry Molczyk**).

(Below) Other blasts from the past included "Goldie Hawn" (Activity Manager **Nancy Klimek** sporting a beret) and "Twiggy" (Social Worker Technician **Linda Marisch**, at far right). Even veteran **Mark Lewis** picked up a guitar and joined in the fun. To his left is **Rose Dixson**, Infrastructure Support Technician and GIVH Diversity Team member.

"While previous diversity activities focused on other countries, this year we decided to highlight various decades," explains **Jeri Thiede**, Administrative Assistant and GIVH Diversity Committee chairperson. "One GIVH member put together a DVD of clips from the **Ed Sullivan** TV show. We also served products introduced in the 60s, such as "Spaghetti-Os," "Tang" and "Doritos," and displayed photos and albums of the **Beatles**, **Rolling Stones**, **Dave Clark Five** and other popular singers from the 60s."

But the 1960s wasn't all fun and games. Among the DVD clips was footage of the **John F. Kennedy** assassination. Also on display was a piece of the Berlin Wall.

The always-creative GIVH diversity committee has featured other decades, as well, from the 1920s through the 1960s.

"Our ongoing theme has been that events and conditions each of us experience through the years help determine who we are and how we see the world," says Thiede. "Learning about the various decades helps us to all better understand each other." *Photos: Jeri Thiede*



In their own words

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

Dear **Angela Blaser** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Lake St. office, Omaha):

How do I say thank you for what you've done to help me and my family in our desperate time of need. I know you're an angel! You are the best. Bless you in your career!

An Omaha service recipient

To whom it may concern:

I would like to withdraw my application for Medicaid and Food Stamps because I am now receiving long-term disability and won't need these services. I would also like to thank **Marcy Thompson** (Social Service Worker, DHHS North Platte office) for being so compassionate and understanding. Not once did she make me feel like a second-class citizen. Thank you, Marcy, for a job well done.

A North Platte service recipient

Dear **Laurie Ziems** (Child & Family Services Specialist Supervisor, DHHS Kearney office):

We're truly grateful for all you did to keep us all together! My family will be back together at home where they belong, largely because of you. Thanks!

A Kearney service recipient

In their own words continued...

Dear **Eugene L. Kelly** (Attorney, DHHS Norfolk office):

I want to thank you and **Darlene Nordby** (Administrative Secretary, Legal Services, Child Support Enforcement, DHHS Norfolk office) for your time and consideration on my case. I know that there is a growing number of cases in Madison County, and sometimes it is easier to just do the numbers, toss to the side and do the next. The state wouldn't even have to get involved if absentee parents did the right thing on their own.

A Madison County customer

Dear **Vicki Bumgarner** (Health Licensing Coordinator, Lincoln):

I just received my medical (MD) licensing. I'm active duty military, about to deploy to Sinai, Egypt. I'm applying for a waiver of licensing fees. I've attached the latest copy of my military orders. If you need any additional information, please let me know.

Thank you to your entire office for making the process of applying for licensing relatively easy. Given my upcoming travels and the necessity for a licensed physician in country serving our troops, it's good to know you were there to help me out.

John Moffitt, MD
Captain, Medical Corps
U.S. Army Flight Surgeon

Dear **Kathie Osterman** (Administrator, Communications & Legislative Services, Lincoln):

You and your staff did a great job keeping the press notified of developments during the spate of drop-offs under the safe-haven law. It was impressive and appreciated.

Kevin O'Hanlon
Nebraska News Editor
The Associated Press
Omaha, 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.

Another Happening!

(Photo at Left) **Stepping Up to the Challenge: Ronda Newman**, administrator in Omaha with Children & Family Services for the Eastern Service Area (ESA), struts her stuff with 3-inch high heel sandals. Usually wearing flats, she donned this unusual footwear after the ESA Initial Assessment Team met her challenge to close cases.

"We held 'Work Late Nights,' and supervisors brought food for everyone who could stay late," explains Children & Family Services Specialist Supervisor **Tamera Keller**. "Ronda made the mistake of promising she would wear high heels when we reduce the backlog by several hundred. That's something for Ronda, who is 'Miss Casual' and says she hasn't worn a dress since 1990."

An olympic event followed, complete with a marathon, sprint and individual events. The marathon was for individuals and teams that closed the most cases over a 4-week period, and the sprint was for those that closed the most cases at the September 'Work Late Nights.' The "Super Sprinters" spearheaded by Papillion office supervisor **Stephanie Anderson** ran away with the team event, closing more than 160 cases. As a group, ESA closed over 477 cases.

ESA Administrator **Barry DeJong** and Children & Family Services Administrator **Camas Diaz** threw a pizza party for the Initial Assessment and Intake staff to celebrate. True to her promise, Ronda Newman strapped on the high heels.

The next friendly competition, the 'Turkey Trot,' plans to close several hundred more cases by mid-November. If that happens, Ronda has promised to wear a dress of the supervisors' choosing, along with the high heels.

"That fashion statement promises to be something to look forward to," says Keller, "and supervisors are already pondering something on the lacy, frilly side." *Photo: Tamera Keller*



(Below) **Ronda Newman** with ESA Initial Assessment supervisors: (front row left to right) **Stephanie Anderson, Diane Martig, Kari Pitt** and **Kris Kircher**; (back row l-r) **Shayne Schiermeister** and **Tamera Keller**

Photo: Rosa Valencia



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

Halloween at work day!



GHOUL OF MY DREAMS? (At left) **Andrea Clark** took advantage of Halloween day at work to display a ghoulish side. Never one to be outdone, **Lupe Hickey** (below) celebrated the holiday in the guise of “Quasimodo’s Wife.” It’s unknown if she shares any bell-ringing duties with her famous husband, the “Hunchback of Notre Dame,” or if any photos of the couple’s children might be available.

Both Clark and Hickey are Spanish/English Translators with Support Services in the State Office Building in Lincoln. When these co-workers wore this holiday garb to a local store over the lunch hour, a store clerk gasped when she saw Lupe’s face and screamed when she beheld Andrea’s grave apparition. Kinda’ hard to find fault with either reaction! *Photos: Carla Becker*



More Halloween at work day!



"AAAAAARGH!" (At left) Webmaster **Greg Votava** did his best impression of **Captain Jack Sparrow**, while **Dianna Seiffert** (below) donned pigtails and carried a coconut cooler to reveal her alter ego, **Maryann** from "Gilligan's Island"...and a secret wish to be castaway on a remote island with a few good books. Both are Public Information Officers with Communications & Legislative Services.

Just goes to show that the workplace be productive on around any holiday and still leave room for some good, clean fun. *Photos: Jerry Crisp*



Another Happening!



Special Birthday Request

Center citizen **Jay Swoboda** had a special request for decorating the ice cream cake celebrating his 55th birthday. Instead of asking for the usual "Happy Birthday" or a picture of his favorite activity or interest, Jay requested "God Bless BSDC, God Bless 408."

Both Jay's roommates at 408 State Avenue and folks across the BSDC campus were flattered by his sentiments.

Said Jay, "I really love my home a lot!" *Photo: Sue Clausen*

Calling the shots

Girls at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Geneva (YRTC-G) have officiated the youth community soccer league for several years. From six to eight girls call the shots on Saturday mornings, for which they earn \$5 per game. League play lasts six weeks.

"In addition to earning some extra spending money, putting the girls in a position of authority helps them gain self-confidence and gives them a sense of accomplishment," says Recreation Coordinator **Connie Reinsch**. "Besides that, it's just a lot of fun for everyone involved!"

Photo: Connie Reinsch

