

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services teammates closer together

Social Distancing No Impediment to Hiring at DHHS

Hiring actually increased at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) during the COVID-19 outbreak.

From March 16 to mid-June, HR's talent acquisition team onboarded 497 new teammates, according to Holly Socha, senior talent acquisition partner. During the same period last year, 438 were hired.

The increased hiring came at a time when many companies have stopped hiring completely and despite the talent acquisition team

working from home since April.

That home deployment happened in two waves. Socha was part of the first wave, in mid-March. The second wave, a month later, included associates.

Getting that many people set up to work from home took some doing. Some people began using a state laptop and some began using their own equipment, but all 10 recruiters needed to be able to connect to the WebEx conferencing software.

Socha said the recruiter

initiates the interview and introduces the hiring team for the role being recruited for. The candidate doesn't have to have software of their own. As long as they have a computer, an Internet connection and a webcam, the interview can happen.

"We knew we would need to purchase certificates for some people, so they could facilitate interviews. It was a huge adjustment," Socha said.

[\(article continues on page 2\)](#)

Often Considered the 'Voice of DHHS,' Mike Wight Closes Out 48 Years

What are we going to do without his resonate baritone? Public Information Officer and audio/visual expert Mike Wight's last day with the state was May 15.

The day was the right-hand bookend of a career that spanned 48 years.

Mike Wight's first job right out of college was funded by a grant administered through the old state health department. The grant's goal was to help find jobs for servicemen and women returning from Vietnam. He said military personnel weren't considered for medical jobs, even if that had been their role in the military.

The role was a lot like that of a salesman, Mike said, helping them get into school where they could channel that experience into a peacetime role.

"That was March of 1972," he said, seated in the production studio on the third floor of the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln, which had been his domain as long as it has existed. "I've been here 48 years last March. March 13. Thirteen has always been my lucky number."

His degree was in art education, which he put to work when the

[\(article continues on page 3\)](#)

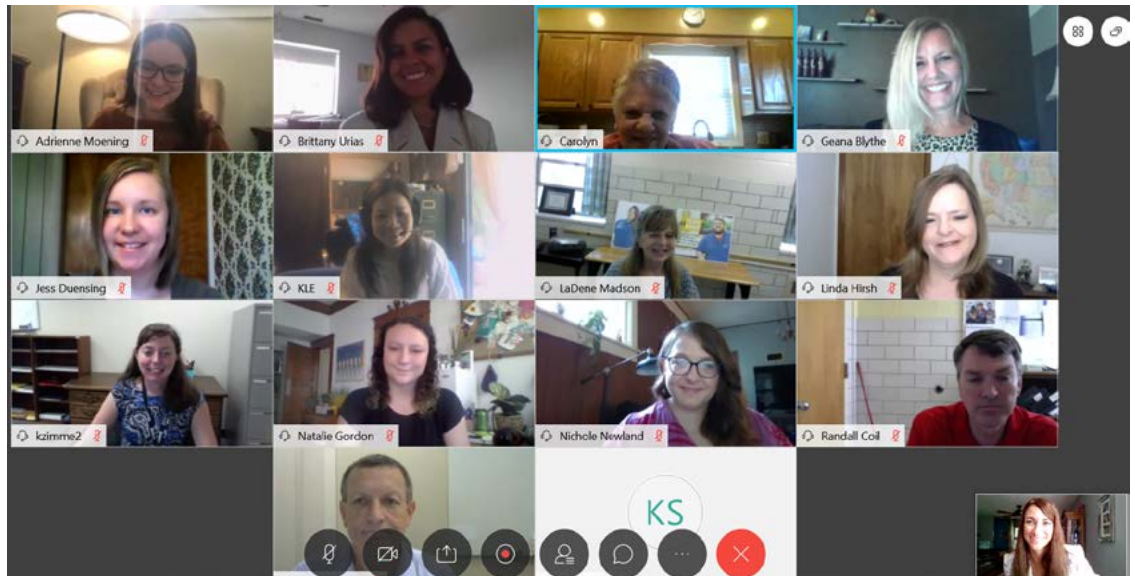


Mike Wight

Social Distancing No Impediment to Hiring at DHHS (continued from page 1)

In addition, like all teams at DHHS, they have continued to maintain a daily huddle.

Socha said the team is transitioning back to work, having learned a valuable lesson about the commitment and cohesion of the group.



Top (from left): Adrienne Moening, Talent Acquisition Associate; Brittany Urias, Talent Acquisition Manager; Carolyn Brown, Talent Acquisition Clerk; and Geana Blythe, Senior Talent Acquisition Partner. Middle (from left): Jess Duensing, Talent Acquisition Partner; Katie Le, Talent Acquisition Associate; LaDene Madsen, Talent Acquisition Associate Supervisor; and Linda Hirsh; Talent Acquisition Associate. Bottom (from left): Katie Zimmer, Talent Acquisition Partner; Natalie Gordon, Talent Acquisition Partner; Nichole Newland, Talent Acquisition Partner; and Randy Coil; Talent Acquisition Partner. Bottom (from left): Troy Brennan, Talent Acquisition Deputy Director; and Kim Santora, Talent Acquisition Partner. Far bottom right: Holly Socha, Senior Talent Acquisition Partner

Beware 'Tailgaters' Following You into Secure Areas

According to DHHS Central Operations and Materiel Services, DHHS experienced an uptick in the general public finding their way into secure areas of state offices. It is believed that these individuals used a practice called "tailgating" to gain access. Tailgating is when a person follows another closely enough that a secure door is held open for him or her, or in the case of the handicapped-access door opener, remains open long enough to enter.

Teammates are warned to resist the polite gesture of holding the door open for an individual following them and to only use the handicapped door-opening button

when in genuine need of help or in order to avoid possible infection.

Regulations around ingress and egress at DHHS offices is explained in Page 7 of the new DHHS Office Standards guide:

"Individuals who have not been issued a DHHS identification card must check in with the receptionist and obtain a visitors badge, sign in, be escorted at all times by authorized personnel, and sign out prior to exiting the premises. ... Secure entrances must remain locked and closed at all times. Such doors shall not be propped open. Automatic door openers on secure doors shall

only be utilized when necessary, and once you have entered, you must visually ensure that unauthorized individuals have not entered through the secured door behind you and that the door has been securely closed. ... If an individual in a secure area does not possess a DHHS-issued identification card, and is not being escorted by authorized personnel, you must immediately investigate and if needed, call the State Patrol or local police authorities to investigate. Disregarding this policy may be cause for disciplinary action, which could result in termination."

Hiring

Wight

Tailgaters

Beasley

McCarthy

Photos

grant expired after four years. Then, he became an audio-visual specialist, designing and making large signs and cardboard displays for the state fair and for other purposes.

“This was before computers,” he said. “Well, they had mainframe computers, but not desktop machines like we have now, so this was all by hand.”

He managed the health department’s storehouse of audio-visual equipment and the “film library,” which, he stressed, was really on film. Each film needed to be cleaned when it was returned.

His next role was as a community health educator, which was similar to the work of today’s Public Information Officer (PIO).

“And one of the larger things I managed was the Hall of Health at the State Fair in Lincoln, which in later years became a food court,” he said. “Different nonprofits would sublet the space from us.”

When it became a food court, he got his wife’s pizza company a spot.

“I had a little bit of a pull at the time, I guess.”



PIO Mike Wight horses around with Molly the Mosquito.

The Voice of DHHS

Mike had long been the voice of DHHS, appearing on phone messages and on the airwaves in Public Service Announcements. That started in the mid to late 1980s, he said.

“It’s hard to remember when you start and stop anything,” he added, with a laugh.

Outside of DHHS, he did other voiceover work as a sideline, too, giving voice to projects based as far away as Canada.

Service During 13 State Emergencies

More importantly, Mike served during 13 officially declared state emergencies in support of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). He began that work by supporting the Radiological Health Section within the Division of Public Health, which monitors the safety of Nebraska’s nuclear power plants.

“I’ve been doing that for a long time,” he said. “I’m usually the first one that NEMA would call.”

Drawing closer to the present, his job title changed to PIO in the early 1990s, and in the late 1990s, the Nebraska State Department of Health became the Health and Human Services System and then the Department of Health and Human Services.

Going Forward

If I don’t find something to do I’ll be in trouble with my wife, Mike said.

He’s not certain how he’ll spend his time. While he is very handy, able to build structures large and small, that sort of work doesn’t entice him. He would hunt, he said,



but wondered if he would enjoy the physical side of it anymore.

“I might fish,” he said. “I don’t like eating it, but I like catching them, and fish are easy to give away.”

Whatever he does, he said he plans to enjoy his time. But that’s not to say he won’t miss some things about the job.

“I’ll miss the audio work and the emergency work,” he said. “Over the many years I’ve worked for state government, I’ve gained many friends and lost a few among my co-workers. But all of those friendships are what I will miss most in retirement. I was blessed with a good group of fellow workers my entire career. They were what made going to work every day enjoyable.

“I do worry though that a few weeks after I retire I’ll get in my car to drive to the N. 84th Street carwash and somehow find myself trying to get into the state parking garage. Just sayin’.”

If Mike should ever return to the NSOB, he’ll certainly be welcome here.

Director of CFS ‘Buzzing’ with Excitement

Stephanie Beasley’s first day as director of the Division of Children and Family Services was Feb. 24, and, five months later, she’s feeling completely at home.

For one thing Nebraska isn’t far from her native state.

“I was born and raised in Indiana. I’m a Hoosier, but I’m looking forward to attending my first Cornhusker football game. At least the colors are the same,” Beasley said, providing yet another reason to be at ease. “I understand it’s a real experience.”

She’s already had some direct experience with the University at Nebraska-Lincoln. The agricultural department has worked to find a landowner who can provide acreage and clover for her bees.

That’s right. Director Beasley is an amateur beekeeper. Her father, who passed away a little more than a year ago, was a hobbyist beekeeper. She took up the pursuit then to honor his memory. Before the move, she gave away the bee hives she had. She said she’s working with a local company to get new ones.

“I don’t sell any of the honey. Like he did, I’ll just give it away. I’m learning every day. I just enjoy it.”

Beasley is mother to three grown children. No word if they’re interested in beekeeping. Her daughter has finished her Master’s Degree and is a therapist living in Los Angeles working with the homeless.

One of her sons is studying at Indiana University, majoring in biology. The other studies at Purdue University, pursuing mechanical engineering. She said they give him a hard time of it, being a Boilermaker rather than a Hoosier.

“I am adapting well to Nebraska,” she said. “I really enjoy the area and feel at home. Everyone has been incredibly welcoming. I enjoy the Midwest, and I’m enamored by Lincoln. I love the walkability.”

And her work has begun in earnest.

“I really am just excited to be here,” she said. “I am excited by the investment I see in doing the right things for children and families. The team here is phenomenal.”

“Stephanie is a real find for us,” said CEO Dannette R. Smith. “She has the compassion, energy and a depth of knowledge needed to do this work.”

Beasley is a graduate of Indiana University, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and Sociology and her Master of Social Work. She began her career in child welfare providing direct services to children and families in Indiana.

During her tenure with Indiana Department of Child Services, she oversaw programs for Independent Living, Foster Care, Special Needs Adoptions, Policy, Quality



Stephanie Beasley comes to Nebraska from Indiana, where she had begun keeping bees in honor of her late father’s hobby. She plans to continue in Nebraska.

Assurance and was lead for the Indiana Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). She later served as the Director of Child Welfare for Marion County (Indianapolis) and then was the Deputy Director for Field Operations, leading the provision of child welfare services in 92 counties.

“I’m so fortunate to find a place that feels like home,” Beasley said. “It’s a state full of people who care.”



Hiring

Wight

Tailgaters

Beasley

McCarthy

Photos

McCarthy Heads up Medicaid Expansion Education



Lots of things have changed in five months in addition to COVID-19. Anne McCarthy and her husband, Mike, are expecting a daughter in September.

This story was drafted from two interviews with Anne McCarthy, one in February and one in July:

Anne McCarthy is used to high-pressure situations, but her role leading education efforts around Medicaid expansion has ramifications on many in Nebraska.

Medicaid expansion is set to roll out Oct. 1, with the online application process starting Aug. 1.

When she agreed to take on the role last November, she had no idea of the twists and turns the project would take because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. By February 2020, the training plan had been developed and needed only to be approved by the Centers Medicare

and Medicaid Services (CMS) and other relevant stakeholders before implementation. However, COVID-19 meant that the education had to be approached in a slightly different way.

“We had to change everything,” she said.

Eight modules were created for online delivery. Each of these might take five to 15 minutes to complete. Two in-classroom pieces were completed, each three hours long. All of these parts required extensive support materials, such as handouts and training guidance and evaluation. In addition, the modules were offered in many different formats.

Training began in March with

pre-implementation modules. In May, implementation modules began, and in-person (and via Webex) components started in June.

“When training is done, we’ll do follow up,” she continued. “Did we accomplish everything we set out to do and do people need refreshers? Training will be ongoing for some time.”

“I’ll really be relieved when the first of the expansion is in practice,” she added. It was everyone on the team. The training team has really outdone itself.”

Her role leading Medicaid expansion training is her third role at DHHS, where she’s worked since 2012.

“I feel like I’m a good example of how the state will allow you to use your skills however you can,” she said. “I say to new employees that we’re a team of more than 4,500 people and any interest that you have you can pursue that at DHHS.”

Her acting supervisor in Learning and Development Brittnay Rieflin agrees.

“Anne she had so many talents that we weren’t tapping into,” she said. “She looks forward to using the skills she learned in her previous roles, along with the skills she’s continued to hone as a trainer, to meet the exciting challenges ahead.”

“Everyone should love their job and their team as much as I do,” McCarthy continued. “I really can’t imagine working any place else but DHHS, because I’ve come from some work environments that haven’t been the best.”

[\(article continues on page 6\)](#)

Her Start was in Radio and Television

McCarthy studied broadcast production at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from 2004 to 2008. She was Anne Laughlin then, the second of the three children of Tim and Barbara Laughlin of Nelson, Nebraska, 40 minutes south of Hastings.

"I first wanted to be in radio," she said. "I worked at the college radio station for a couple years while I was studying and then I thought I needed more experience, which is how I got into TV."

In 2006, she took a part-time job at Channel 8, KLKN, as a part-time production assistant position.

"And it worked perfect, because the job was from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. I did a lot of things. I edited video, did the graphics and during the broadcast. I ran the audio board. And then I was able to go to class."

McCarthy also worked at UNL Printing Services "and then on the weekends, I was part of the cleaning crew in one of the residence halls there."

Because Channel 8 didn't have an open full-time position when she graduated, she did what so many "media migrants" have – moved to where the jobs are, specifically Midland, Texas. She was a producer at Channel 9 which boasted a coverage area from the southeast corner of New Mexico all the way down to the border.

She worked the overnight shift from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m., handling the writing and the research behind anything that aired.

Somehow she survived that for a little more than a year, at which time a weekend production assistant / director spot opened

up back home at Channel 8, where she started in February 2010, working the overnight and early morning shifts. She was there for more than two and a half years, during the move from standard definition to high, a major adjustment.

"The one thing about the morning show was that they didn't have an audio operator, so I had to do that, too," she said.

During the stretch, she also taught preschool three days a week from 1 to 5 p.m. and served as a public relations specialist for Complete Health Chiropractic.

"The broadcasting world doesn't pay the best. So all this time at college and my different jobs I'm working the overnight shift and doing part-time jobs," she said. "So that's like eight years."

Eight years of holding down several jobs and largely keeping the hours of an owl or coyote. Most of us couldn't do it.

"Man, it was fun," she said. "But I wanted a personal life," she said. "And I wanted a place, too, where I could grow, and that wasn't happening, either."

The Holidays were Huge

So, she started applying for jobs. The best interview was for DHHS's Learning and Development team staff assistant, someone who could organize learning materials and help design learning materials.

"I've always loved to speak and present. And they called me up and I came to this building to interview," she said, gesturing to Whitehall. "They offered me the job shortly after. It was much better – regular hours, state benefits. And the holidays! Holidays were

huge! In the news, you don't have holidays."

That was November 2012. Since then, she received two promotions. One that took her to Lincoln Regional Center as a trainer, in 2014, and then the most recent one, last November.

"As time passed, more and more of Anne's talents were recognized," her acting supervisor, Brittnay Rieflin, said. "Anne eventually started working with the studio equipment and producing training videos which harkened back to her days in broadcasting."

She's also been one of the new teammate Team-Up trainers. And for much of the time did Lean Six Sigma trainings.

"However, Operational Excellence has since taken that on," McCarthy added.

"I like the variety of what I'm asked to do," she said. "I try not to let myself get overwhelmed."

She said creating Medicaid training videos and coursework will probably take up her time until it's completed, however.

Now that she has just one job, she also has a life. And a husband, Mike, whom she met when she was in the news business. McCarthy said she enjoys yoga and has pets, a Boxer named DeeDee, which is 9 years old, and a cat, Gus, 11-years-old.

Not long after McCarthy was originally interviewed in February, she learned that she and Mike were expecting a daughter in late September.

"It's perfect timing," she said. "I should have more time by then."

DHHS Teammates Provide COVID-19 Information



Several DHHS teammates have participated in the Governor's COVID-19 briefings and Spanish language briefings and provided valuable information to Nebraskans.

Participating in public news outreach are, clockwise from top left, DHHS CEO Dannette R. Smith speaking at an NET television townhall; Zidarta Winfrey, Epidemiology Surveillance coordinator, speaking at a Spanish language news conference; Josie Rodriguez, Administrator of the Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity, at a Spanish language presser; Stephanie Beasley, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services; and (center photo) Dr. Gary Anthonie, DHHS Chief Medical Officer.

A Really Corny Photograph



Child Support Enforcement Worker Jean Roach sent Internal Communication this photo of her grandson, Collin Hubert Hawkins, playing in some of last fall's corn harvest.

Make the Connection...

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov

DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>

DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

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

Readers are invited to submit news, photos and story ideas to the editor via:

Telephone: (402) 471-6585 **Fax:** (402) 471-3996 **E-mail:** dhhs.pio@nebraska.gov

Interagency mail: Nebraska State Office Building, 3rd Floor

U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68509-5026

Communications Director:
Khalilah A. LeGrand, Ed.D.

Editor:
Dave Hudson

Graphics and Layout:
Judy Barker and Emily Bunch

Stay Connected:

facebook

twitter



Instagram

LinkedIn

YouTube