

CONNECTIONS

March 2012 VOLUME 12, ISSUE 3

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Colon Cancer Screenings Save Lives! March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month



Did you know that colon cancer is 90% curable if found early? Or that 60% of deaths from colon cancer could be prevented if men and women 50 and older were screened regularly? Sadly:

- in the United States colorectal cancer (commonly referred to as colon cancer) will claim approximately 49,920 lives this year.
- 950 Nebraskans will be diagnosed with colon cancer this year, and 350 will die from the disease.

Both men and women are at risk for colon cancer. There are things you can do to avoid becoming a statistic. Personal risk varies, so your doctor can help you make informed decisions about when to begin testing and the most appropriate testing method for you. Although some people should be screened for colon cancer earlier (family history, certain genetic factors, smokers, etc.), doctors recommend, for those 50 years or older:

- Have a Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) yearly to detect blood in the stool from polyps (pre-cancerous growths).
- Have a colonoscopy every 10 years to look for polyps.
- Have polyps removed to prevent cancer from starting or spreading.

Further steps to prevent colorectal cancer are easily included in any lifestyle:

- Eat a diet containing fruits, vegetables and fiber.
- Move your body! Get active!
- If you smoke, find help and quit.

For more information about colon cancer detection and prevention, visit DHHS' "Stay in the Game" [Colon Cancer Screening program website](#).

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees.com>
DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

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Behavioral Health Division Director: Scot Adams, Ph.D.	Public Health Division Director/ Chief Medical Officer: Dr. Joann Schaefer
Children and Family Services Division Director: Thomas Pristow	Veterans' Homes Division Director: John Hilgert
Developmental Disabilities Division Director: Jodi Fenner	Chief Operating Officer: Matt Clough

Connections is published monthly for employees of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services by Communications & Legislative Services (CLS) in collaboration with the Graphics & Layout Unit in Support Services:

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Homepage Homeruns

DHHS Employee Website. . . For DHHS Employees, By DHHS Employees

Looking for information that only DHHS employees can see? Try the [DHHS employee website](#). We add new information and photos every day on the employee website, things that are relevant to you and the work you do here at DHHS.

Here are some recent posts on the DHHS employee website 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.

Competition is Heavy for the New "Lincoln Rocks" Award, Feb. 27, 2012

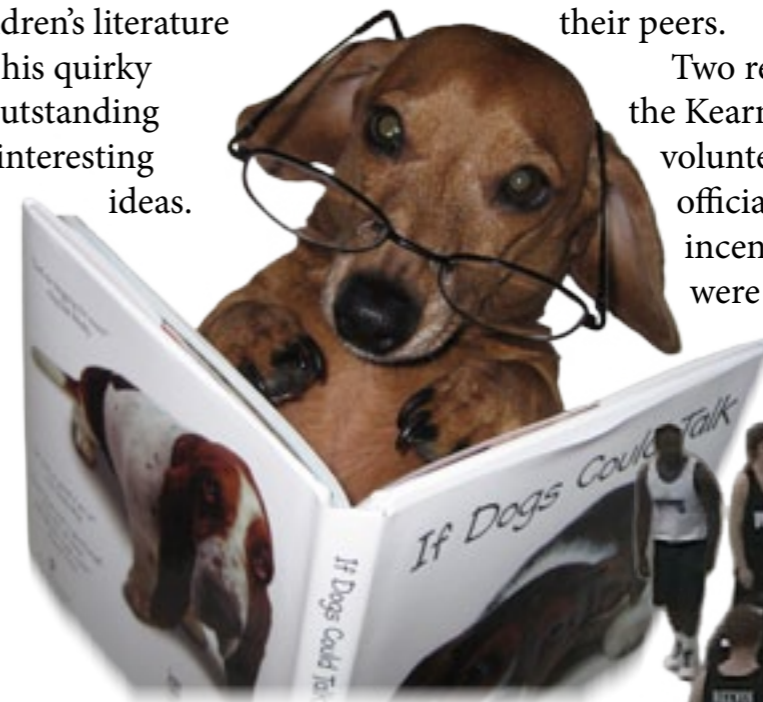
Jackie Shewey and Eric Moorehead are pictured in today's "Box" holding the new "Lincoln Rocks" award. Jackie and Eric are being recognized as the top performers of the week in the Lincoln Customer Service Center.



They are the first employees to earn this new award. Jackie and Eric are also on the ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center Team who worked the second to the highest number of phone calls and work tasks in the entire state last week. As part of the award recognition process, Jackie and Eric will have the honor of being the first people to sign the rock. The award will then travel from employee to employee every week picking up signatures along the way.

Go, Dog, Go! Read Across America Day Honors Dr. Seuss' Birthday, March 2, 2012

Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) changed children's literature forever with his quirky characters, outstanding rhymes and interesting childhood ideas. His enormously popular books, encouraging children to read—all by themselves, are used in schools and libraries throughout the world. In honor of his birthday, March 2, is Read Across America Day, a day created by the National Education Association to encourage and motivate children and teens to read. NEA's Read Across



America day is now in its thirteenth year. Encourage the children and teens in your life to pick up a book and read.

What's the Hoopla About? YRTC-K's Annual All-Stars Game, March 8, 2012

March Madness started a little early in Nebraska. The Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney (YRTC-K) hosted its annual All-Star basketball game on Feb. 24. This was the 34th year for this all-star event. One youth from each youth group was selected to be on the All-Star Team. Selection wasn't based on skill. The youth selected showed team work and sportsmanship qualities above and beyond their peers.

Two referees from the Kearney community volunteered their time to officiate the big game. It was incentive for the youth who were selected, and an event that the youth and staff at the facility enjoy yearly.



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



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

This month we welcome a new director for the Division of Children and Family Services. **Thomas Pristow** started on March 21, moving to Nebraska from Mineral, Virginia.

You can read more about Thomas on page 7 of this newsletter, but I want to tell you a little here about the process we used to find him, and he us.

When the director's position came open last fall we advertised locally and nationally to find the best candidates for the job.

We didn't hurry to hire someone. This is a critically important position, and we wanted to find the right person and the right fit for the agency.

We publicized the position extensively both formally and informally. We advertised in six newspapers and posted the position on five job-related websites, such as careerbuilder.com, and the websites of two child welfare-related organizations. We networked with over 20 additional child welfare/juvenile services-related organizations across the country and made over 30 personal contacts with child welfare/

juvenile services leaders in Nebraska and other states, explaining the position and asking them for names of possible candidates as well as asking them to promote the position.

The good news is there was a lot of interest. We accepted applications throughout the process, in the end totaling 203 applications from across the country. A team reviewed them all and identified 11 candidates for telephone interviews. Of those, we invited five candidates to interview in person.

We took our time, opened the process and found a very well-qualified director in Thomas.

The interview team included four people from DHHS and one non-DHHS child welfare professional. In addition, each candidate who came to Lincoln met with additional people including a group of community stakeholders and a state senator.

We took our time, opened the process and found a very well-qualified director in Thomas, who learned about the position on the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) website.

Please welcome Thomas when you see and meet him.

Thanks to Scot for double duty

When the CFS director position became open I asked **Scot Adams**, director of the Division of Behavioral Health, to take on additional responsibilities as interim director for CFS. Scot was willing and took on the job with gusto. This has been a busy time for CFS with the legislative focus on child welfare and juvenile services reform, as well as the attention given to ACCESSNebraska during the transition to and opening of the four Customer Service Centers.

Scot worked with a passion and has done an excellent job. I want to take this opportunity to thank him, and to thank Division of Behavioral Health employees for sharing him. My guess is that Scot won't completely step away, but will instead find opportunities for the two divisions to partner. Thank you, Scot!



Scot Adams

Photo: Bill Wiley

Positive Ways to Communicate are Within Everyone's Reach



Jim Erwin, Christian Heritage leads a "Within My Reach" training session with Danielle Arnold, Christian Heritage, co-facilitating. This session was called "Common but Ineffective ways to Complain." Sounds like an interesting topic for all of us!

By Dianna Seiffert

- "Thank you! I really take what you guys share with us and use it!"
- "I am so happy and amazed about how much you guys care and try to make a difference. Thanks."
- "It was a good learning experience."
- "I like how you guys open up and talk about real stuff."

These are just a few of the comments from youth attending recent "Within My Reach" workshops at the Youth and

Rehabilitation Treatment Center in Geneva. Positive relationship building, conflict resolution skills and effective listening and communicating techniques are common themes addressed throughout the eight-week workshop series.

The workshops are being offered as part of a unique partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Christian Heritage. The goal is to have 120 girls at Geneva and 100 boys at Kearney participate in the workshop series annually.

"Within My Reach" workshop participants engage in small

group discussions and role-playing activities on some very interesting topics like:

- The four communication "danger" signs of escalation, invalidation (put downs), withdrawal (or avoidance), and negative interpretations;
- The importance of having a strong foundation for a relationship based on commitment, friendship and shared values;
- "Deciding" on major transitions in life, not "sliding" into them; and

- How to appropriately complain using "XYZ Statements." X = The effect on you or how you felt. Y = What the other person did (or does). Z = the situation where this happened or happens.

Workshop participants are shown video clips and taught positive ways to interact and communicate. They learn skills and tools to help make current and future relationships safe, healthy and long-term.

"After reviewing comments from the youth, it is obvious they really enjoyed and appreciated these workshop sessions," said Terri Nutzman, Juvenile Services Administrator. "One comment in particular keeps running through my mind... 'they were real.' It is so important in working with youth, that we are real, open and honest. When staff members share personal experiences they can make a real 'connection.' Thank you so much for providing these classes for the girls and boys."

Christian Heritage staff members and volunteers travel from Lincoln to present these workshops. They work with a foster care staff member who lives in Kearney and with a

YRTC staff member who co-facilitates.

Christian Heritage was founded in 1980 by Gregg and Lisa Nicklas. The couple moved to Lancaster County in 1980 where they became foster parents to teenagers. The following year they opened a home for eight teen boys, then a few years later, opened a home for adolescent girls. In 1987 the organization became a child-placing agency and began recruiting and training foster parents. Today Christian Heritage serves 125 foster children and has staff members working out of offices in Omaha, Lincoln and Kearney.

Although Christian Heritage contracts with DHHS for other services, they have not received any state or federal funding to conduct these workshops. "This isn't about money," said Gregg Nicklas, Co-CEO, Christian Heritage. "This is about giving these kids the skills and tools they need to make positive relationship decisions."

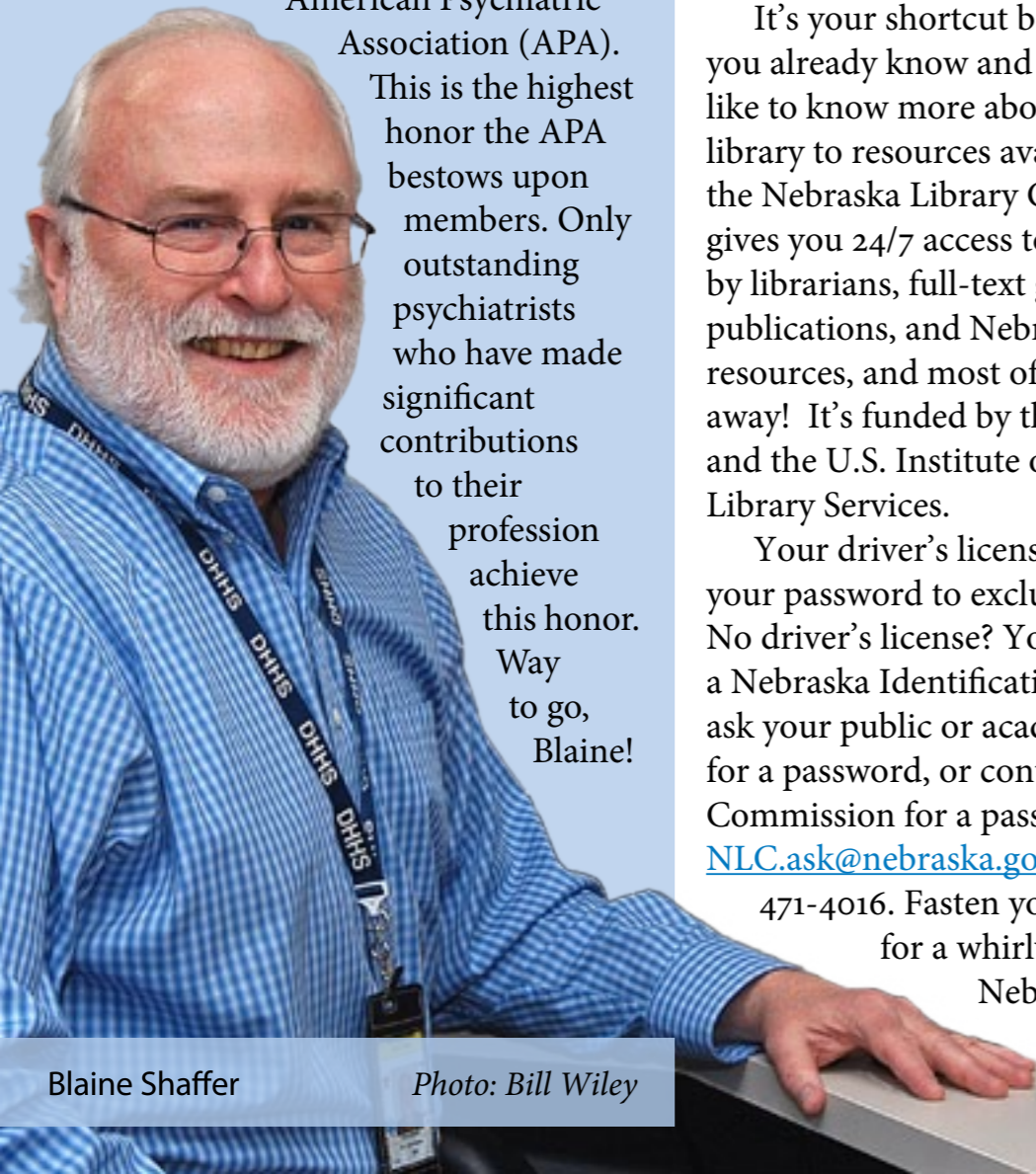
"Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to share this life-impacting material with the girls in Geneva and the boys in Kearney," Nicklas said.

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards
Shaffer Earns Distinguished Life Fellow Award

Dr. Blaine Shaffer, Chief Clinical Officer in the Division of Behavioral Health, has been awarded the status of Distinguished Life Fellow by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

This is the highest honor the APA bestows upon members. Only outstanding psychiatrists who have made significant contributions to their profession achieve this honor. Way to go, Blaine!



Blaine Shaffer

Photo: Bill Wiley

NebraskAccess — An Entire Library of Resources at Your Fingertips



By Delores Feeken-Schmidt

Have you heard about [NebraskAccess](#)? It's your shortcut between information you already know and what you would like to know more about... a desktop library to resources available through the Nebraska Library Commission. It gives you 24/7 access to websites selected by librarians, full-text government publications, and Nebraska historical resources, and most of it is a mouse-click away! It's funded by the State of Nebraska and the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Your driver's license number is your password to exclusive databases. No driver's license? You can also use a Nebraska Identification number or ask your public or academic library for a password, or contact the Library Commission for a password by emailing NLC.ask@nebraska.gov or calling 402-471-4016. Fasten your seat belt for a whirlwind tour of NebraskAccess.

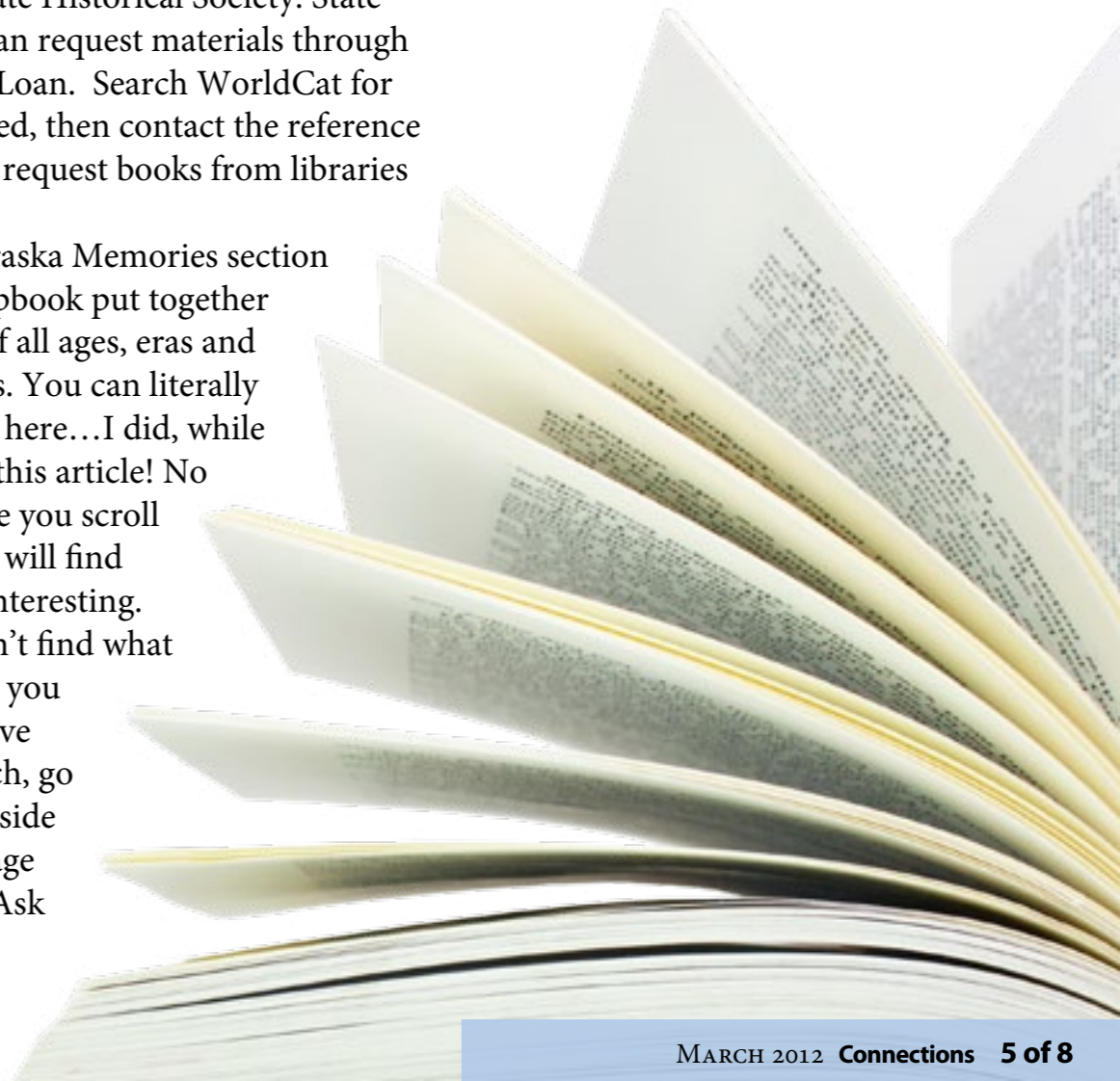
On the Home Page you'll find a comprehensive index of general interest topics, State Government Publications, and a wealth of information from the Nebraska State Historical Society. State employees can request materials through Interlibrary Loan. Search WorldCat for what you need, then contact the reference librarians to request books from libraries worldwide.

The Nebraska Memories section is like a scrapbook put together by citizens of all ages, eras and backgrounds. You can literally spend hours here...I did, while researching this article! No matter where you scroll or click, you will find something interesting.

If you can't find what you need, or you just don't have time to search, go the far right side of the webpage to the link "Ask a Librarian." You'll find

contact information for the friendly reference librarians at the Library Commission who will be happy to help you. Really, they will be. Reference librarians love to look things up.

To find out more and enjoy all the information at your fingertips, visit NebraskAccess—the gateway to free services for ALL Nebraskans.



Community Support Specialists Help Make ACCESSNebraska ACCESSible to All

Have you had the chance to meet our Community Support Specialists? They provide the critical link between DHHS, local community partners, and people applying for economic assistance benefits through ACCESSNebraska.

There are eight Community Support Specialists located in DHHS offices across the state. These eight staff members provide information and answer questions about economic assistance programs to DHHS' Community Partners. Community Partners are organizations which provide internet access and other types of assistance to people applying for benefits online through ACCESSNebraska. Currently, DHHS works with over 600 Community Partners.

Community Support Specialists continually work to bring new Community Partners on board. They spend time developing and presenting informational presentations for prospective and current Community Partners. They also develop and

distribute brochures and handouts specific to ACCESSNebraska. Since June 2010, Community Support Specialists have completed 262 presentations, reached 6,039 individuals and have received 5,067 calls from Community Partners.

Applying for economic assistance benefits online has a lot of advantages. Access to the internet is vital, though, so Community Support Specialists maintain a database of information on the ACCESSNebraska website so people will know where to find computers that they can use to apply for benefits.

Community Partners are listed by city, county and service area on [this website](#).

The list shows the different levels of service that each Community Partner provides, too. For example, some organizations provide a computer while others only hand out written materials. Some help people log on to ACCESSNebraska while others offer support in completing the application.

Since these Community Support Specialists are located across the state, it's important for them to get together to talk about what's working in their communities, what people are saying about ACCESSNebraska, etc. The group holds a conference call once a month and meets in Lincoln once a quarter to discuss these and many other topics.

Community Partners will contact the Community Support Specialists when one of their client's is having difficulty using the website or getting through the phone system. The Community Support Specialists will assist people in completing the application, provide them with a paper application and/or assist them with the phone system. Community Support Specialists will also investigate specific cases when Community Partners are concerned one of their clients have lost benefits or have not yet been approved for benefits.

The link between DHHS, Community Partners and the people who apply for benefits online is an important one. In January, 2012, alone, 16,077 applications for economic assistance benefits were received at DHHS. Of those applications, 67% came in electronically through ACCESSNebraska with a whopping 39.2% of those received during non-business hours.

Tired of the Gamble? There is Hope.

By Marla Augustine

Many people enjoy gambling once in a while, whether it's a casual bet on a football game or playing poker with friends. Most people who gamble don't have a problem. There are some, however, who lose control. If you are one who always thinks about gambling, lies about it and spends money on gambling that is needed for other things, then you may have a problem.

The [Gamblers Assistance Program](#) in the Division of Behavioral Health is responsible for the oversight and coordination of the publicly-funded problem gambling prevention and treatment service delivery system in Nebraska.

The [2010-2011 annual report](#) of the Gamblers Assistance Program shows that consumers receiving counseling services were on average 44 years old. Of these consumers, lottery was indicated as the preferred gambling activity for women; for men, betting on sports. The most frequent gambling activities reported were casinos, lottery, keno and sports.

Signs of Compulsive Gambling:

- Increase in time spent gambling
- Working up special occasions for gambling (canceling other plans)
- Exaggerated display of money and other possessions
- Gambling when there is a crisis
- Frequent absences from home and work
- Withdrawal from family
- Diversion of family funds

The Division supports the Problem Gambling Helpline, which handled over 2,000 calls during the last fiscal year, providing information, crisis intervention and referral services to people negatively impacted by gambling. The Helpline, available 24/7, is 1-800-GAMBLER or 1-800-426-2437. The Employee Assistance Program is also a good resource for assistance, or, try Gamblers Anonymous at www.gamblersanonymous.org.



(From left) **Darla Berger, ESA, Darniece Amos, ESA, Melissa Kratky, ESA, Mary Barrett, CSA, Stacy Schenk, NSA, Rajeana Harris, SESA, Shelly Witt, WSA and Maxcine Jackson, ESA** Photo: Deb Steidley



Pristow Shares His Vision for Children and Family Services and the People We Serve

By Russ Reno

Want to know what motivates **Thomas Pristow**, the new director of Children and Family Services? One only needs to look to an article about Bushido that he wrote as an accomplished martial artist. He concluded the article stating that the quest in that discipline is pushing through the boundaries of mediocrity while striving to attain the concept of “the more I know, the more that I know that I know nothing.” It’s a matter of gaining knowledge throughout life.

That article says a lot about Pristow. He points out that students beginning martial arts training typically focus on physical movement. While that’s important, the ability to redirect a verbal attack is a more evolved skill requiring the ability to develop insight into one’s

own behavior and the capacity to adjust and evolve.

Pristow holds black belts in Jujutsu, Aikido, Iaido, Ko Budo and Judo.

It’s not surprising that the discipline required by the martial arts has made an impression on his work life. He has summarized his expectations as director of Children and Family Services in five points, with the last one permeating the other four:

1. We deliver the best service in the country;
2. Staff and supervisors are supported and have a say in how they do their job;
3. We have programs that work and we know why;
4. We pay our bills on time and come in on-budget; and
5. We treat each other, our families and children, with respect, kindness and compassion.

“My biggest job, and that of

all CFS supervisors, is to get employees excited about coming to work each morning,” Pristow said. “That’s why the fifth point is so critical to our success internally as well as with our children, families and community partners.”

One of his first steps in that direction will be visits with staff across the state, starting with statewide travels to meet employees.

Those will be followed by monthly meetings with a few invited employees. “The agenda for the monthly meetings will be determined by employees,” he said. “I want to know what employees are thinking, and I will respond to their questions. In my experience, strong communications build trust and greater understanding of our direction.”

In addition, Pristow said he will send employees an email every Friday with information about the past week’s activities, what’s coming up and other information that may assist employees to gain a perspective helpful in their jobs. Pristow developed these means of communication in his previous positions in a for-profit hospital, a council on alcoholism, and as an administrator and clinical director for a residential treatment

program for boys before joining the Vermont Department for Children and Families for 15 years as a regional and district director. Since then, he’s been a deputy director for city human services and a director for both city and county departments of human services.

He said he is excited to hold this job at this specific time because it’s clear that change is expected. “Managing the status quo isn’t what energizes me, and I believe this is a time of great opportunity. One of my strengths is developing change within systems.”

Families Matter, CFS’ initiative to reform Nebraska’s child welfare and juvenile services, is showing the beginning of positive changes, Pristow noted. And, he finds social work most meaningful when it impacts the future social skills and resiliency of kids.

“That should be the core of what we do because it makes a difference,” he said. “These are skills that will stay with kids forever, and that should be a priority for us.”

For the past 18 years, much of his work in human services involved redesigning and realigning services. “This experience is why I’m here. I see myself as a change agent and I’m not averse to taking calculated risks to get to where we need to be. I expect to be able to base my decisions on strong, accurate facts and data, and I know that building relationships within and outside the department with stakeholders and others is essential.”



Thomas Pristow, the new director of Children and Family Services.

Photo: Bill Wiley

In Gratitude

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

Julie Luedtke, Health Program Manager, Newborn Screening and Genetics, received high praise from Dr. Phil Farrell, Wisconsin, one of the world's leading experts on cystic fibrosis and newborn screening for CF.

"Please thank **Karen Eveans**, (Community Health Educator, Lincoln), for her excellent work with the Clinical Laboratory Standards Institute workgroup." (The CLSI workgroup that Karen participated in developed important guidelines for screening newborns for cystic fibrosis.)

Julie said Dr. Farrell was very impressed and appreciative. She said she told him Nebraska's mean age of diagnosis, and he thought Nebraska might be the best in the nation!

Julie added that, "We have an outstanding team including the screening laboratory, our follow-up staff here in Public Health (Karen Eveans and **Krystal Baumert**), and the people working at the CF Center who make screening in Nebraska so successful."

Ruth Grosse (Business Analyst, Children and Family Services),

I always enjoy listening to you speak, as I always pick up one or two items I did not know or thought I knew, but was mistaken. Thank you for all of your effort in this and all the things you do!

A Training Participant

Vijay Dewan (Psychiatric Director, Lincoln Regional Center),

I rotated at LRC with you in March of last year and just wanted to email you and say hello. I always hear students talking about how much they enjoyed the psych rotation at LRC, and I always tell students who still need to schedule their psychiatry rotation to request LRC in Lincoln, Nebraska, since I had such a wonderful experience when I was there.

A Grateful Medical Student

Editor's Note: The above letter came from an American University of Antigua (AUA) medical student. AUA has a contract with LRC to provide six-week psychiatry rotations to their medical students. This has been in place since January 2011. Lectures are provided by LRC psychiatrists who the students also follow to learn about psychiatry. The students complete an exam at the end of their rotation and earn credits toward their medical degree.

Linda Harral (Aged & Disabled Waiver Services Coordinator, Children and Family Services),

I want to thank you and the staff at DHHS for the time and care you gave to reviewing my daughter's case for the upcoming year. After my daughter was injured, we knew that we only had 18 months on COBRA, which led to a lot of stress and financial hardship. This waiver program has saved our family from significant financial problems, allowed my husband and I the ability to work, and gave our child a safe environment to be cared for while we work. Also, because of the waiver program, we have been able to stay self-employed, allowing us to have the flexibility to give our child the extra care and time that she needs. This program has given her a chance to possibly live an independent life someday— which will always be our ultimate goal. I think that it is important for you and your team to know that this has significantly impacted our life for the better, and for that we will always be thankful.

A Grateful Parent

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services mission:
Helping people live better lives.