

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

November 2009
VOLUME 9, ISSUE 10



What does DHHS have to do with refueling a stratotanker? Read on to find out.

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DHHS now on

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 the DHHS Intranet home page, and click on "[DHHS In The News](#)" for links to Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal Star articles updated daily involving DHHS programs and services.

[Antibiotics Don't Help with the Flu](#) October 5

[Lincoln Regional Center Successfully Passes Surveys](#) October 6

[DHHS Making Progress in Finding Permanent Homes for Children Who Are State Ward](#) October 13

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

H1N1 Update: Pregnant women should get vaccinated

Pregnant women should receive the novel H1N1 influenza vaccine, according to the state's Chief Medical Officer, **Dr. Joann Schaefer**.

Getting vaccinated is important because pregnant women are more likely to suffer serious health problems from this new flu. Compared to people in general who get H1N1, pregnant women with H1N1 are more likely to be admitted to hospitals and have more serious illness.

Pregnant women may be more likely to become seriously ill because their immune systems are suppressed during pregnancy. Also, as the baby develops, it presses upward toward the lungs and decreases a woman's lung capacity.

When a pregnant woman gets a flu shot, it can protect both her and her baby. Vaccination provides protection to the newborn when it arrives because, if the mother had a flu shot while pregnant, the baby has some of the mother's antibodies. Breastfeeding is good, too, because breast milk may provide some immunity.

A new mother should get vaccinated to protect her newborn. Parents, caretakers of infants under 6 months of age and siblings should get vaccinated to prevent transmission to the baby.

Many women wonder if vaccine is safe. Dr. Schaefer says the H1N1 flu vaccine is made the same way seasonal flu vaccine is made, and the seasonal flu shot has been given safely to millions of pregnant women. It's important for a pregnant women to receive both.

Getting vaccinated is the best thing a pregnant woman can do to avoid getting the flu, Dr. Schaefer says. For more information: visit <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/H1N1Flu/>.

make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Web site: <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov>

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@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.

The Good Life

A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans we serve

By CEO Kerry Winterer

I want to take this opportunity to provide some basic information about the Special Legislative Session and what it means for the Department of Health and Human Services.

Governor Heineman convened the Special Session to address an anticipated \$334 million shortfall in state revenue for the 2009-2011 biennium. He identified four areas: across-the-board reductions, general fund transfers, specific reductions, and agency savings. The Governor's budget recommendations can be found at <http://www.budget.state.ne.us/>.

Accomplishing our budget reductions won't be easy, but no one division, office or facility has to go it alone. We'll meet this challenge by working together, keeping in mind our mission to help people live better lives through our programs and services.

The across-the-board reductions to DHHS consist of 2.5% in the current fiscal year (\$2,988,268) and 5.0% in the following year (\$6,077,955). The Governor's recommendations exempted certain programs from these reductions, including Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, Behavioral Health Aid, Developmental Disabilities Aid, Health Aid, Aid to Aging Programs, Juvenile Services Aid and Child Welfare services, and the ten DHHS 24-hour facilities.

As I testified before the Appropriations Committee on November 10, we have already identified some areas for our general fund across-the-board reductions. We're working diligently to find the additional areas necessary to meet our goals.

We've focused on administration and operations and have spared aid programs. We're carefully reviewing every vacant or soon-to-be-vacant position and eliminating those we determine are not absolutely necessary to carry out the responsibilities of the Department. In some cases, this will mean adding to the duties of existing staff. We continue to review current contracts to determine which ones can be reduced or eliminated. We'll look at consolidating local offices to reduce overhead and operating expenses, and we'll further reduce travel expenditures to include only what is absolutely necessary.

In our planning over the past weeks, we've considered the priorities of several Department initiatives and taken into account priorities identified by the Legislature in recent sessions. Therefore, we have chosen not to include children's behavioral health activities associated with LB 603 and ACCESSNebraska modernization efforts in our reductions.



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

Included in the Governor's recommendations were four specific across-the-board reductions in cash fund appropriations. Tobacco Prevention program reductions will mean providing fewer grants to community agencies for tobacco prevention programs and will reduce the amounts of those grants. The Medical Student Assistance Program reductions will mean providing fewer loans to medical students and/or reducing the amount of loans. Public Health Administration reductions will result in not filling some vacancies and converting salaries to federal grant funds where possible. Cancer Research Aid reductions will mean fewer funds distributed to the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Creighton University Medical Center, or the Eppley Cancer Research Center.

In addition to across-the-board reductions, the Governor recommended specific appropriation reductions. For the Department, these include specific reductions in the divisions of Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Children and Family Services, Public Health, and Developmental Disabilities. Detailed information about these can be found on pages 29-30 of the Governor's Budget Recommendations through the link at <http://www.budget.state.ne.us/>.

There will also be general fund transfers impacting the Tobacco Prevention and Control Cash Fund and the False Medicaid Claims Fund. These are described on page 33 of the Governor's Budget Recommendations.

State Senators made few changes to the Governor's recommendations for DHHS. They voted to reinstate a portion of the provider rate increases eliminated in the proposal and to take funds from the Developmental Disabilities waiting list.

As I mentioned before, we'll be successful in meeting these challenges by working together towards this goal. One of the things I pledged to do when I became CEO was to conduct a survey to measure employee attitudes and job satisfaction. Shortly after Thanksgiving, DHHS employees will be invited to respond to a survey called the Five Star Metric.

When I decided to conduct a survey, the Special Session was not on the horizon. But our choice to conduct this survey now during times of budget cuts is deliberate, since keeping a positive work outlook will be a challenge during these times. The survey will allow us to gather helpful information about employee attitudes and job satisfaction at an important time. When the survey is released, I invite your participation by providing your honest feedback to the questions.

I want to thank you, in advance, for helping DHHS meet these challenges.

Competitive games allow veterans at Bellevue home to show fighting spirit still thrives



John Hilgert, Director of the DHHS Division of Veterans' Homes, was on hand to present a bronze medal for "Ladder Golf" and a silver medal for the Ambulatory Obstacle Course to ENVH member **Ken Todd**. A bit like horseshoes, ladder golf presents a free standing target at which the participant throws an 8-inch long rope with golf balls attached on each end. The idea is to get the rope to wrap around the bars on the target.

Photos: Patti Howe

ENVH member **Charles Shimerdla** looks well pleased with his silver medal finish in the Electric Wheelchair Obstacle Course. In addition to the ambulatory and electric wheelchair obstacle course, there were also medals awarded for a manual wheelchair obstacle course.



LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

Veterans' Games held on September 25th at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home (ENVH) at Bellevue offered opportunities for veterans to show that they can still shine brightly. The event included competitions ranging from bocce ball to horseshoes and checkers and was a collaboration among ENVH, the Great Plains Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Omaha Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Nebraska SMP project earns national award



SMP Project Director **Madhavi Bhadbhade** (L) with State Long-Term Care Ombudsman **Patty Pierson**

Photo: Jerry Crisp

Nebraska SMP earned an outstanding performance award for highest dollar amount referred for further action at the 2009 National SMP conference in Washington, D.C. The SMP project is a federally-funded project comprised of staff and volunteers who help individuals identify and report possible Medicare and Medicaid fraud, error or waste and offer tips on safeguarding against scams.

Nebraska SMP referred \$1,146,270 during FY 2009— the highest in the nation. Nebraska SMP is a project of the federal Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, and is housed in the

State Unit of Aging within the DHHS Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care.

Patty Pierson, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, says that major cases referred for action include a durable medical equipment provider using high-powered sales tactics to sell its product to seniors. The case resulted in a criminal judgment of restitution of almost \$300,000 to Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance companies.

Another case involved an ongoing investigation of possible Social Security fraud and Medicaid client and provider frauds totaling more than \$626,000 occurring over a decade.

“Fraud, errors, waste and abuses by providers on Medicare and Medicaid programs do occur in our state,” Pierson says. “What is most rewarding is when beneficiaries realize savings in their health care costs or when SMP efforts result in savings to those federal programs.”

“We also developed a Medicaid tip sheet outlining ways Medicaid beneficiaries can protect their benefits and collaborated with the Program Integrity Unit in mailing it to several hundred clients with their monthly explanation of benefits,” says **Madhavi Bhadbhade**, the new SMP Project Director.

For more information on the SMP Program, call 1-800-942-7830 or go to www.dhhs.ne.gov/smp.

Editor’s Note: “SMP,” formerly known as Senior Medicare Patrol, no longer uses the acronym.

Public Information Officers earn national honors

Four Public Information Officers (PIOs) in the Communications & Legislative Services section earned awards for their efforts from the National Public Health Information Coalition.

DHHS Webmaster **Greg Votava** earned a gold award for developing the H1N1 website. **Bill Wiley** and **Dianna Seiffert** teamed for a gold medal for the 2008 DHHS Annual Report. **Jerry Crisp** received a silver award for *Connections*, the DHHS employee newsletter, and a bronze for the *Sower* newsletter published by the DHHS Division of Developmental Disabilities.

Those producing the Annual Report and newsletters want to share credit with Graphic Designers **Judy Barker**, supervisor **Maisun Allahiq** and former Designer **Nathan Putens** in Support Services for their contributions. All four PIOs also agreed that these recognitions would not be possible without strong administrative support and ongoing contributions from DHHS employees, who provide the input and success stories that make all of these products possible.



Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Hogg earns lifetime achievement award

Carolyn Hogg received the 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award in October from the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association. She is a Child Support Enforcement (CSE) Operations Specialist within the Division of Children and Family Services.

Hogg's nominators call her the "creme de la creme" when it comes to handling the duties of the Child Support Central Registry involving 1,600 to 2,100 interstate cases each year. They cite her organizational skills and meticulous attention to detail.

"She reviews each incoming case thoroughly, and a lot of times will find issues that may hinder the processing of the case," says one nominator. "If it takes a phone call to the other state or the Nebraska caseworker, this is the extra mile Carolyn is willing to go to ensure a good interstate referral is forwarded to CSE offices."

Hogg has often been the only worker assigned to Central Registry and was mainly responsible for training new workers to share those duties. She is considered the "go to person" in



Carolyn Hogg with **Todd Reckling**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services, at an award celebration in Lincoln *Photo: Kristal Millstead*

children and families of our state," says another co-worker. "I'm extremely proud and honored to have employees like Carolyn Hogg represent the Division of Children and Family Services so well," adds Director **Todd Reckling**.

the DHHS Central Office and has the additional unofficial designation as "Office Grammarian."

"There haven't been many Child Support contracts, cooperative agreements or policy memos that have left Central Office without being proofread by Carolyn," says another nominator. "If Spell-Check operated at Carolyn's level, our lives would be a bit easier."

One CSE administrator was reported as commenting that 'Carolyn can find a typo or grammatical error faster than he could find a pizza.'

Hogg's co-workers say that she plugs away at a stack of cases each day as if it were the only case she had to do that day.

"Carolyn has always done her job well and gone the extra mile for

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!

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.



Syd Reinarz

Photo: Jerry Crisp

By Jerry Crisp

Syd Reinarz is a man on a mission — a mission to do all he can to ensure that people needing benefits get them and at the same time that no dollars are spent that shouldn't be. Syd is a Payment Reviewer in the Hospital Unit of the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care.

Besides screening Share of Cost forms and applying payments, much of what Syd does involves responding to client and provider questions about the program and the forms themselves, solving problems so that applications are expedited.

"I see my job partly as clarifying a process that can be intimidating," Syd explains. "If I can make the process easier for the customer, it also makes it easier for me and my co-workers. That's a win/win situation for all."

People also sometimes harbor mistaken notions about Medicaid.

"If they have the impression that Medicaid is going to pay for everything, I try to correct that," Syd explains. "If clients are on the Share of Cost program, they are responsible for a certain amount of their medical expenses. As well, I also advise them that Medicare or any other insurance they might have will pay first, then the client, with Medicaid picking up the remainder."

Just as he works hard to see that customers get everything they are eligible for, Syd works equally hard to ensure that no providers are paid more than the amount to which they're entitled.

"When there is more than one source of payment involved, it can sometimes get confusing for the billing departments and clients," Syd says. "Part of my job is to make sure claims are paid by the right sources."

What keeps Syd plowing through the stack of mail that greets him every morning and responding to phone calls most of the day is knowing that what he does makes a tangible difference in customer's lives.

"If I don't do my job right, people won't receive the benefits they deserve," he says, "and if I am able to help people receive medical care they need, then I know I'm making a difference that really matters."

Syd believes that his commitment to customer service has roots in the almost 20 years he spent in retail work.

"Being a manager in an antique shop meant that everything I did was designed around customer service, and that experience helps me now," says Syd. "I liked working in retail, but I love the work I do now."

Those roots flowered in his current position, where he says he can do very little single-handedly.

"Of course, I could do nothing without the helpful advice and active assistance from a great team of co-workers," says Syd. "I draw on their wealth of experience almost daily to help keep me up-to-date on any policy changes and help me do my job better."

According to Medicaid Office Manager **Jean Jochum**, "Syd is a very hard working, dedicated individual. He cares about people and excels at his job."

De-mystifying the process, expediting benefits while remaining cost-conscious, and putting customers first is all part of a day's work for Syd Reinarz. At the core of his commitment to customer service lies a strong sense of empathy.

"I treat clients and billers like I would want to be treated," Syd says. "That tends to provide a pretty reliable guide."

As Syd Reinarz and many other DHHS front liners have learned, that Golden Rule lies at the heart of what is meant by the term, customer service.

New ACCESSNebraska feature gives clients ability to report changes on-line

By Dianna Seiffert

We all know that applying for benefits on-line is quick and easy through ACCESSNebraska. Now there's a new feature that lets clients report changes on-line, as well.

When clients move or get new jobs, they need to report those changes to their caseworker. Before ACCESSNebraska's on-line report changes option, clients had to personally call or meet with their caseworkers to report those changes. Now clients can use any computer with Internet access – at home, at the library, at many community agencies such as senior centers, etc. – to make the changes themselves.



Changing information on-line is quick and easy. Changes are reported immediately, during office hours or after. ...whenever it's convenient for the client. There's less chance for errors or lost work, and it's a real timesaver for clients and caseworkers alike.

New clients are being told about the report changes feature when they're approved for assistance. Caseworkers

should tell their existing clients about this new on-line feature whenever the opportunity presents itself.

ACCESSNebraska's Web services (on-line application and screening tool) have been a great way for customers to submit applications. Since Sept. 30, 2008, over 50,000 applications have been received on-line at www.ACCESSNebraska.ne.gov/.

Over 70% of those applications have been submitted by clients from their homes or from the homes or work of family and friends. Over 30% have come in after traditional business hours.

If you have any questions about ACCESSNebraska, employee Intranet pages dedicated to the project may have the answer. Visit <http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov/> and search for ACCESSNebraska.

December Observance National Hand Washing Month



Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, like the novel H1N1 flu. The most important thing that you can do to keep from getting sick is to wash your hands.

By washing your hands you wash away germs that you have picked up from other people or from contaminated surfaces. One of the most common ways people catch a cold or the flu is by rubbing their nose, eyes or mouth after their hands have been contaminated.

In addition to H1N1 or colds, some pretty serious diseases -- like hepatitis A -- can easily be prevented if people make a habit of washing their hands.

Town Hall meetings generate peer support interest



By Carol Coussons de Reyes
Administrator, Office of Consumer Affairs,
Division of Behavioral Health

We were very pleased with the participation at recent town hall meetings, which focused on getting ideas on creating and improving peer support for people with mental illness or addiction challenges. Peer support is people in recovery mentoring others in wellness and recovery through mutual sharing of stories and experiences.

The town hall meetings were sponsored by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors to give folks an opportunity to learn more about peer support and the mechanisms that will support this workforce for the long haul. The first statewide training took place last month.

Meetings were held in Lincoln, Norfolk, Hastings, Scottsbluff, North Platte, Omaha, and at Omaha's Ponca Tribe facility. Approximately 50 people attended the Omaha presentations and 20 to 30 people at each of the other sites.

The energy and enthusiasm of the response was overwhelming. People really enjoyed the guest speakers, **Charles Willis** of the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network and **Heather Peck** of VOCAL Virginia and kept saying they wanted more similar opportunities in the future.

It was just amazing how folks at some of the sites could connect so closely to their story of addiction, mental health issues, and homelessness by watching a video of the Lincoln presentation. One participant was so enthused that he has now started his own business.

We received so many awesome ideas from folks and appreciate everyone's participation!

The audience feedback will guide all of our planning in regard to the Peer Support Workforce and networking people utilizing our services in Nebraska.

Carol Coussons de Reyes with Charles Willis Photo: Carlton Speighton

Good Things Are Happening!

A representative of the Australian Ministry of Social Development has asked permission to use DHHS videos warning about the shaken baby syndrome—"Never Shake A Baby" and "You Have the Power"—as models for their own. Other

videos produced by Communications & Legislative Services have also earned a gold and two silver awards, and two gold and a silver for radio ads, from the National Public Health Information Coalition.

True tributes to quality DHHS in-house productions that get important messages across and save big bucks!

Stimulus money benefits Hastings Regional Center



HRC Food Director **Lisa Sedlak** with new food bar purchased with ARRA stimulus funds

Photo: Cheri Delay

By Jerry Crisp

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) has benefitted DHHS and its customers and clients in various ways.

Funds provided to stabilize such programs as Medicaid, the foster care program and adoption program have totaled over \$149 million of which over \$112 million have been spent.

For services, \$29 million were awarded, with \$7 million expended. Services include a wide range of DHHS programs that include immunization, the Emergency Food Assistance program, SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), homelessness prevention, child support enforcement, and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

The grand total of both stabilization efforts and services is \$179 million awarded with \$119 million spent.

Some ARRA funding that benefits DHHS clients comes through other state agencies. An example is \$2,100 awarded to the Hastings Regional Center (HRC) to purchase a food bar. The grant was applied for by **Lisa Sedlak**, Food Service Director at HRC.

“I’ve never applied for a grant before,” Sedlak says. “It was exciting to be able to provide equipment that makes our meal service safer and even more appealing for client and easier for staff.”

The new food bar has a tray rack on both sides where people can place their tray while choosing food items. It also has two drop-down end

shelves for plates and eating utensils and storage and is on wheels, which makes it easy to move from place to place.

In February 2009, \$100,000,000 was appropriated through ARRA for equipment in the National School Lunch Program. HRC provides services to adolescent male youth, including schooling.

The Nebraska Department of Education reviewed the applications. Of the 145 Nebraska School Districts requesting funds, only 50% were awarded grant funds for items like dishwashers, ovens, refrigerators, freezers and food bars.

Amounts listed here are accurate as of October 31, 2009. For monthly updates on DHHS recovery funds, visit <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/recovery/>.

Disaster relief group reunites a year later



TOGETHER AGAIN!

Seated (L-R): **Sheila Loguda** (Omaha), **Margie Hoffman** (York), **Margaret Ahola** (Crete); Behind (L-R): **John Butler** (Lincoln), **Stacy Brown** (Chadron), and **Mickey Kotlarz**, **Josue Cabral** and **Dave Loguda** (all from Omaha). Not attending were **Donna Hajek**, **Dalene Krebs**, **Sonia Diaz**, **Crickett Phelps** and **Cynthia Hartley**.

Photo: Dave Loguda

The group of 13 stalwarts that were among the first in the nation to respond to Louisiana's plea for help in processing disaster food stamps (now called SNAP) for victims of hurricanes and flooding made all DHHS employees proud. One year later, they gathered at **Margie Hoffman's** home in York for a reunion.

"When you spend three weeks with people, as we did in New Orleans, you become more than just co-workers," says Margie.

"It was great to see everyone," says Margaret Ahola. "We reminisced about New Orleans and all agreed that we would volunteer again."

"It's amazing what a bond there is after participating in something like disaster assistance," says **Sheila Loguda**. "Getting back together was like we'd never been apart at all."

"We had a great time visiting and remembering all of the hard work and *long* hours we put in New Orleans," says **Dave Loguda**. "That was a great experience for all of us, not to mention all of that red beans and rice! No crawfish or alligator this time, but next time Key West, Florida, floods, I'd volunteer again."

"We developed a strong bond with others from across Nebraska we would not ever have met without the trip, and I would do it again in a heartbeat," says **Mickey Kotlarz**. "It's hard to understand the bond we created during the three weeks in Louisiana. We kind of became a family."

"A year later, I still consider our journey a top-five life experience," says **John Butler**, "I'm honored to have shared it with such a magnificent group of people."

"I had one of the best experiences with this group," says **Josue Cabral**, "and I'm still waiting for the call to go back and experience another adventure."

"The Louisiana trip was a defining moment in each of our lives and affected us on a very deep level," says **Stacy Brown**. "The friendships made and the memories will be a part of each of us forever."

Interested in reviewing DHHS participation in last year's Louisiana disaster relief effort?

You'll find stories of their departure and homecoming on the front covers of and inside *Connections'* October and November 2008 issues at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/Connections>

Wellness Words: *Personal Preparedness*

Brrr-rutal. That's how bad Nebraska winters can be. Planning ahead can help you and your family weather the worst this winter. Here's how to get started.

For you and your family, think "warmth." In Nebraska we've lost power and heat during ice and snow storms before, so be prepared *now*.

- Stock an emergency supply kit full of warm clothing for each family member including jackets or coats, hats and gloves, and sturdy shoes. Have a sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person, too.

If there is a storm:

- Stay indoors and dress warmly.
- Listen to the radio or television to get the latest information.

If you have to go out in bad weather:

- Dress warmly.
- Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Take frequent breaks if you have to shovel snow. Those with heart problems or who lead sedentary lifestyles, should be careful of over exertion and heart attacks.



Avoid traveling by car during a winter storm, but if you must travel:

- Tune into local weather reports. When the forecasters are predicting threatening weather, the best bet is to seek shelter and wait out the storm.
- The Nebraska Department of Roads provides up to the minute road conditions at <http://www.dor.state.ne.us/rca/index.htm>.
- Keep your car's gas tank full for emergency use and to keep the fuel lines from freezing.
- Travel during daylight and let someone know your destination and route.
- Have emergency supplies in the trunk.
- If you've got a cell phone, use it if you are stranded in your car during a blizzard. Make a call and wait for help to arrive. Stay with your car. Never try to walk to safety.

These tips and more can be found on the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency's Web site at <http://www.nema.ne.gov>. Click on "Ready for Winter Weather."

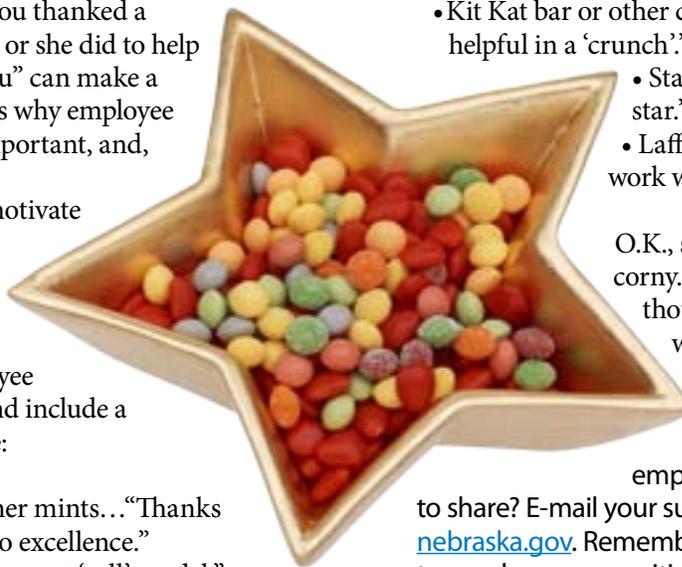
For additional information about personal preparedness, contact Public Information Officer **Dianna Seiffert** at (402) 471-1695 or dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Employee recognition tip: *Candy is dandy!*

When was the last time you thanked a co-worker for something he or she did to help out? Even a small "thank you" can make a big difference at work. That's why employee recognition activities are important, and, best of all, easy to do.

Here's a creative way to motivate that doesn't cost a lot. With lots of candy-filled holidays around the corner, think about using a sweet treat to boost employee morale. Give some candy and include a message of appreciation like:

- Peppermint Patties or other mints... "Thanks for your Commit 'mint' to excellence."
- Tootsie Roll... "For being a great 'roll' model."
- Mounds bar because "You deserve 'mounds' of appreciation."



- Kit Kat bar or other crunchy candy... "Thanks for being so helpful in a 'crunch'."
- Starburst because "You're a shining star."
- Laffy Taffy for being "So much fun to work with."

O.K., so maybe some of these ideas are a bit corny. Isn't it really the thought that counts, though? And the thought here is that we appreciate our co-workers and the work they do.

Got any other ideas for employee recognition that you'd like to share? E-mail your suggestions to: dhhs.recognition@nebraska.gov. Remember, DHHS has a Web site dedicated to employee recognition. It's on the Human Resources page under "recognition" at: www.dhhs.ne.gov/hur/recognition.

Two stories with heart

Always creative about finding ways to encourage youth it serves to follow a promising path, the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney (YRTC-K) launched the first annual “Nohtaram Dayz.” To help improve cardiovascular health, youth and staff members were offered an opportunity to participate in a marathon (“Nohtaram” is marathon spelled backwards). Each member of a group that walked or ran 26.2 miles during October received a T-shirt emblazoned with the activity’s theme— “Taking the right steps in the right direction.”

The right steps for enhanced heart and lung health—the right steps to emphasize the importance of



Photo courtesy of YRTC-K

Peterson and Recreation Manager **Dick Wetjen** for coordinating this activity,” says YRTC-K Administrator **Tim O’Dea**. “This type of fitness activity can build healthy habits that last a lifetime, and that’s what we’re all about.”

teamwork—and the right steps in the direction of a healthier, happier life.

One hundred twenty-eight youth earned t-shirts and all groups racked up a grand total of 444 miles to put participants on the right path toward a healthier lifestyle.

“My thanks to Facility Operating Officer **Jana**

Long and loyal service

Zeke, an 11-year-old purebred Beagle, poses with **Mary Mulligan** at a September reception celebrating a decade of volunteer service to Lincoln Regional Center (LRC) patients. Zeke spent his life making friends at LRC, St. Elizabeth’s Hospital and other places where friends are always needed and welcome.

Mary trained Zeke since he was a pup and certified him through Delta Society Pet Partners. He had to pass basic obedience and temperament tests, but Mary says he’s always been



Photo and information provided by Jeni Durfey

a gentle, good-natured companion.

“Everyone is equal in his eyes. He’s blind to many things people see. Zeke can give something only a dog can give—unconditional love.”

Mary’s biggest reward is making a difference in people’s lives.

At home, Zeke’s favorite pastimes are eating, napping and cuddling with Mary’s cats. If it’s all the same to you, he would prefer that final detail not be shared with dogs in anyone else’s home.

In their own words

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

Dear **Staff at the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home:**

I had the pleasure last month of spending some time at the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home (WNVH) to be part of my uncle Fred Schwabauer's 100th birthday celebration. Words can't express how truly impressed I am by everyone working at the Home or how kind and generous you all were in what you did for this special man's centennial celebration. The time you took and the effort you put forth were wonderful. You left everyone with the feeling that you think Fred is as special as we all do.

The Veterans' Home is a credit to Scottsbluff and the state of Nebraska.

The family of a WNVH member

Dear **Cindy Glynn** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office):

I want you to know that I appreciate your kindness, time and attention you have given me in dealing with my food stamps, Medicaid, etc. It is such a blessing and a relief to know that I have a caseworker who genuinely cares about her clients and that I'm not just another number.

God bless you.

An Omaha service recipient

Dear **Dian Schellenberg** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Fremont office):

If we could make the health insurance effective for July, that would be awesome, and then the premium would be covered. I'm out of everything and am worried about a third heart attack. I can't tell you how grateful I am. You are wonderful, so helpful, kind and non-judgmental. Tell your boss I think you more than deserve a big raise. THANK YOU!

A Fremont service recipient

Dear **Staff of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue:**

A message from an individual who has lived here for only a week! The message is for all of the good people of the area.

"If you have plans about going to heaven and you wonder what that's going to be like, and you would like to get a preview of what happens up there, become a resident of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home. You will see what heaven is all about, minus St. Peter."

A new ENVH member

In their own words

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

Dear **Rey Rodriguez** (Youth Counselor Supervisor, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney):

A big thank you to you and all of the young gentlemen who helped move the heavy stove from our depot to our archives garage. Your organization and efforts with the move are much appreciated!

Lyn Hoffman
Trails and Rails Museum
Kearney, Nebraska

Dear **Pat Gomon** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Beatrice office):

Thank you for everything you have done! You are a tremendous worker and wonderful person. I never had such thorough help with HHS before. I truly appreciate everything you do.

A Beatrice customer

Dear **Michelle Humlicek** (Health Licensing Specialist, Division of Public Health):

I just wanted to express my gratitude for all your help processing the license. You and Health Licensing Specialist Sue Kopera-Crumb were absolutely wonderful about answering all of our questions and processing Cathy's license so quickly so that she could report to work today.

Thanks again!

Jackie Kirby
Career Consultant
Medical Solutions
Omaha, Nebraska

Dear **Chet Hartwig** (Social Service Worker, Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Lincoln):

I really want to thank you for the Midline Clinic provided by the Medically Handicapped Children's Program. My son may not have the severe problems other children have but ALL of my questions were answered. That was a true blessing for us. I don't think doctors realize sometimes that we regular people are not doctors, yet we want to know the full story on our children.

A Lincoln area customer

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.

DHHS employee gets close-up look at aircraft refueling



Photo courtesy of Nebraska Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve



From the aft section of a KC-135 stratotanker, **Pat Anderson** got a close-up look at a refueling operation between two combat aircraft flying only yards apart — a vital part of our national preparedness. Pat is a Children and Family Services Supervisor in the DHHS Gering office.

Pat was one of 23 Nebraska residents from 16 towns who took wing in July as part of the 2009 edition of the Nebraska Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) “Bosslift.” She was nominated to attend by one of her supervisees, ESGR member **Larry Nelson**, Children and Family Services Specialist in the DHHS Sidney office.

“Bosslift gives employers or supervisors an inside look at some of the facilities, equipment and fine work that members of our military do every

day,” explains Nelson, a member of the state ESGR committee who served on active duty and in the Army Reserve. “The more these folks know about the military, the better they understand exactly what their employees do when serving away from their civilian jobs.”

Participants boarded a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135 stratotanker for a trip to March Air Reserve Base in California. They spent two days touring military reserve component facilities and learning about the vital role Guard and Reserve soldiers play in defense of America.

“What I found most exciting was a tour of the Air Marine Operations Center in Riverside, California—part of Homeland Security,” Pat says.

“It’s absolutely amazing what they’re doing to patrol our borders and how they’re using the Predator to help keep drug traffic out of our county.”

Established in 1972, ESGR promotes cooperative understanding among Reserve component members and civilian employers and operates with a network of thousands of volunteers throughout the nation and Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.



What YRTC-Kearney does on a chili autumn day



SITTING IN JUDGMENT No, not the new judges for American Idol but arbiters of taste for a chili cook-off at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney. From left to right, Business Manager **Deb Eirich**, Youth Counselor Supervisor **Rey Rodriguez**, Facility Maintenance Specialist **Rich Hancock** and Training Coordinator **Dan Theobald**.

Photo: Jana Peterson

It was a tough call rating 10 pots of chili, but **Tony Kleidosty**, Principal of West Kearney High School took top honors in the hot

and spicy category, Licensed Mental Health Practitioner **Laura Bugay** earned recognition for the most creative entry, and Youth Counselors

Marv Carr and **Tom Swarm** earned awards for originality and “Best Overall,” respectively.

The difference between “most creative” and “most original”?

According to Facility Operating Officer **Jana Peterson** who coordinated the event, “The most creative chili included Fritos and a couple of secret ingredients, while the most original was just a nice mild chili.”

“It was a great day for chili,” reports Infrastructure Support Technician **Jolene Jarecki**, “because it was a chilly day, and a ‘lovely’ snowstorm came for a visit but melted away fairly soon.”

Those eating Principal Kleidosty’s hot and spicy brew failed to notice either the chill in the air or the snow on the ground.



A story worth remembering



CEO **Kerry Winterer** (L) with Norfolk Veterans' Home member **Elmer Unkel**

Photo: Linda Sparr

When DHHS CEO **Kerry Winterer** traveled around the state last month to talk with employees, he also had an opportunity to meet with clients like **Elmer Unkel**, a member of the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH). November—when we observe both Veterans' Day and Thanksgiving—is one of many special times to remember what veterans have done for all of us.

Shortly after his visit with Kerry Winterer, Elmer Unkel died, one of scores of members of the “Greatest Generation” lost every day nationwide. Stories like his remind us how thankful we should be for those men and women who sacrificed to ensure the freedoms we all enjoy. These stories also remind us of the privilege we enjoy in providing services for people like Elmer.

An Army Sergeant, Elmer shipped out in February 1945 for Oahu, Hawaii,

for one month's advanced infantry training. Then he was back on board headed to Okinawa.

“We landed in Okinawa in April to refill ranks of the 96th Infantry Division,” Elmer explains. “We moved to the battlefield in the second week of May.”

After only two days on the battlefield, Elmer was hit by shrapnel. One piece went through his steel helmet and hit the back of his head. Another went into muscle near his shoulder blade.

“By the grace of God, I am still here today,” says Elmer.

Evacuated by plane to a hospital on Guam, Elmer was awarded a Purple Heart, Victory Medal, Pacific Theater Ribbons and the Philippine Liberation Medal. He recalls receiving 121 shots of penicillin in 20 days during his two-

month hospital stay before returning to his outfit.

Allied forces regrouped for the invasion of Japan in the Philippines. His division was to be in the second wave, but on September 2nd, 1945, the war ended.

Elmer was sent to the Philippines for another year, where he contracted dysentery and ended up sick and disabled. He returned to the United States but didn't walk for three months. After five months of hospital care, he was discharged and returned home to a farm near Battle Creek, Nebraska, remaining there until 2003 when he moved to NVH.

“I was proud to serve my country,” says Elmer. “The experiences opened my eyes to the world, and I wouldn't trade them for a million bucks.”