



Diversity@Work

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< WWW.DIVERSITY.HR.VA.GOV/CA/DAW.HTM >

Calling All VA Leaders!

Leadership VA (LVA) is a VA-wide corporate leadership development program that cultivates high-performing leaders for a 21st century VA. Any VA employee who occupies a non-temporary, full-time position at or above grade GS-13 and equivalent Title 38 levels (including Veterans Canteen Service employees) is eligible to apply. Title 38 equivalency to GS-13 for purposes of qualifying for LVA are defined by VA occupation as: Nurse-Grade IV; Physician; Dentist; Podiatrist- Intermediate; Optometrist -Intermediate; Chiropractor-Intermediate; and Physician Assistant-Chief.

In keeping with VA's strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, all eligible employees are encouraged to apply, regardless of race, gender, religion, ethnicity/national origin, or disability. Supervisors are also urged to reach out to all segments of their workforce, especially to qualified individuals with disabilities, and members of diverse populations who have been historically underrepresented in leadership positions, such as women and minorities, and encourage them to apply. **[Continued on page 12.]**

Coffey's Keynotes

On behalf of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), I wish all of our VA family a happy and healthy New Year! ODI thanks all of our partners and stakeholders for your commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. I ask that we redouble our efforts in 2011 to establishing a diverse VA workforce and an inclusive VA work environment to best serve our Nation's Veterans. It is only with our combined efforts that VA can be a leader in creating and sustaining a high-performing workforce that leverages diversity and empowers all employees to achieve superior results. **[Continued on page 2.]**

BOOKMARKS

ADVANCE
<<http://vaww.va.gov/ADVANCE>>

BLACKS IN GOVERNMENT
<www.bignet.org>

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN INDIAN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES
<www.saige.org>

THE KING CENTER
<www.thekingcenter.org>

VA'S AFRICAN AMERICAN PROGRAM
<www.diversity.hr.va.gov/spi/programs/africanamerican.htm>

Diversity organizations can be found on the ODI Web site:
<www.diversity.hr.va.gov/org>

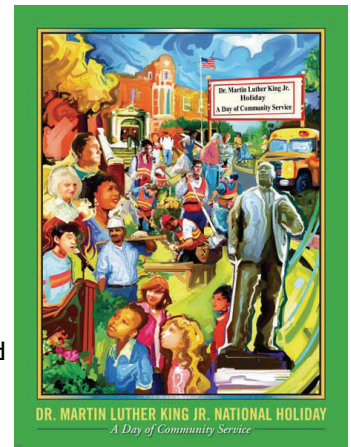
Celebrate!

VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 82nd birthday anniversary on January 15 (observed as a Federal holiday on January 17) and National African American History Month, observed in February.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S BIRTHDAY

The late Dr. King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, and became the world's best-known advocate of the civil rights movement. Dr. King once said that we all have to decide whether we "will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness." Life's most persistent and nagging question, he said, is: "What are you doing for others?"

Annually, on this day we commemorate Dr. King's great dream of a vibrant, multiracial nation united in justice, peace and reconciliation. We are called to honor the life and contributions of America's greatest champion of racial justice and equality—the leader who not only dreamed of a color-blind society, but who also led a movement that achieved historic reforms to help make the dreams reality. **[Continued on page 8.]**



DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL HOLIDAY
A Day of Community Service

Coffey's Keynotes (cont. from page 1)



As you may have heard, President Obama recently signed legislation ending the U.S. military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. With this momentous legislation, our Nation has taken another historic step toward eradicating discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and respecting the dignity of all human beings. We in VA have been proactive in this area by including sexual orientation as one of the protected categories in the Secretary's annual EEO, Diversity, and No FEAR Policy Statement. In doing so, VA employees are enabled to work free from discrimination and reprisal so they can deliver the outstanding service our Nation's Veterans deserve.

I'd also like to remind you that applications for Leadership VA (LVA) 2011 are now being accepted. LVA is a VA-wide corporate leadership development program that cultivates high-performing leaders for a 21st century VA. We must ensure that this program reaches a diverse pool of applicants as those who are chosen for LVA may be the future senior leaders of our organization. For more information, please read the article that begins on **Page 1**.

Speaking of training, did you know that diversity and inclusion training is one of the many services that ODI offers? With the direction of Iris Cooper, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Acquisition, we recently partnered with the Office of Resolution Management to deliver training in diversity and inclusion, conflict resolution, and equal employment opportunity to all of Ms. Cooper's employees through 2011. We commend Ms. Cooper for her initiative and we look forward to partnering with you, too. Contact James Blockwood, ODI training program manager, by e-mail at <James.Blockwood@va.gov> or John Fuller for ODI consultant services by e-mail at <John.Fuller2@va.gov> for more information on how ODI can help you meet your training needs.

Finally, I want to remind you that on September 7, 2010, the Secretary established a two percent hiring goal for individuals with targeted disabilities (targeted disabilities include blindness, deafness, missing limbs, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, missing limbs, mental illness, developmental disabilities, convulsive disorders, and dwarfism). For every 50 new hires, it is expected that at least one will have a targeted disability. Progress will be reported to the Secretary on a quarterly basis.

Thank you for your commitment. Working collaboratively with you—the highly-dedicated employees, managers, and stakeholders of VA—we will seize the challenges and opportunities to create and sustain a diverse and inclusive workplace that best serves our Nation's most precious assets—our Veterans.

Here's to a year full of exciting possibilities!

~Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

Aspiring Leaders Program

VALU has recently announced the call for nominations for VA's Aspiring Leaders Program, with a deadline for applications of January 14, 2011. The program is open to GS 9-12 employees directly assigned to VA Central Office (VACO). These employees may either be located in the DC metro area or field-based, but must be directly assigned to VACO. Many employees have inquired as to why the program would be limited to VACO employees and you should know that there is a strategic reason for doing so. The Aspiring Leaders Program was developed to fill a critical gap in leadership development at this grade level in VACO. VHA and VBA have ongoing leadership development programs (LEAD) for this target audience, and it was never the intent of VALU to compete for candidates with these Administration-specific programs, but to provide a comparable experience for CO employees. To open the limited number of slots to employees across VA would not allow VALU to meet its goal of designing a program to fill the void for this type of training in VACO. [**Continued on page 12.**]

Field Notes

CLEVELAND VAMC EMPLOYMENT HANDBOOK

To increase the number of local applicants who are people with disabilities, a group at the Cleveland VA Medical Center (VAMC) recently produced a document entitled “Community Agency Partnership Handbook: Applying for Federal Employment with the Cleveland VA Medical Center.” The group recognized that applicants and nonprofit community agencies that provide employment services to people with disabilities are sometimes unfamiliar with VA’s hiring processes. This handbook walks readers through the application process and includes a step by step illustrated guide for using the USAJOBS Web site.

This special handbook project, developed to provide guidance as well as to be used as a reference for ongoing use, focused on educating community agencies within the service area to empower them to better assist people with disabilities in applying for Federal employment with the Cleveland VAMC. At the end of fiscal year 2009, 1.37 percent of the permanent Cleveland VAMC permanent workforce had targeted disabilities. By August 2010, this number had grown to 1.62 percent, as twelve people with targeted disabilities were newly employed.

Congratulations to the Cleveland VAMC! To read another field success story, see **Page 8**.

VACO Notes

LAST CALL FOR VA’S ANNUAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSIONS

ODI is accepting final submissions for VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for fiscal year 2010. The purpose of the report is to chronicle the Department’s progress toward realizing the goals of VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan (<www.diversity.hr.va.gov/docs/strat.pdf>), in alignment with VA’s strategic plan for 2010–2014.

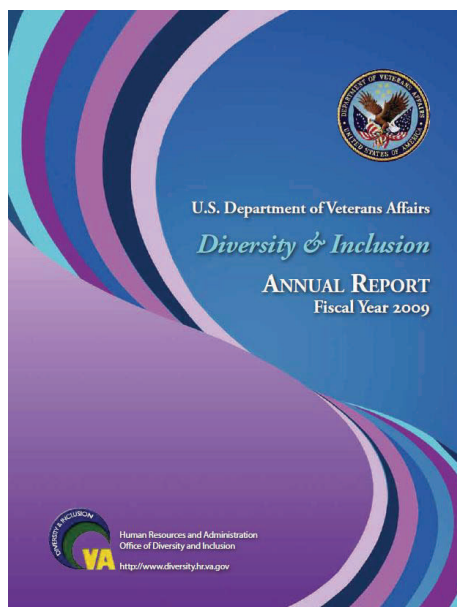
The Annual Report will provide a comprehensive view of the state of the agency with respect to diversity and inclusion. As in the fiscal year 2009 Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report, relevant responsibilities, activities, and accomplishments will be identified for each administration, organization, and office within VA. A copy of the 2009 report is available on the internet at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/docs/09DIRep.pdf>.

Contact your representatives on the VA Diversity Council who are submitting information for their respective organizations for inclusion in the report. The roster can be found at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/council>. For guidance on preparing submissions due no later than January 14, 2011, contact Michael Morgan, ODI, by telephone at 202-461-4014 or by e-mail at <Michael.Morgan3@va.gov>.

NEW WORKFORCE ANALYSIS E-MAIL ADDRESS

ODI’s Workforce Analysis Team has established an e-mail account for everyone to submit their requests for ad hoc reporting and analysis. Instead of submitting a request to one member of the Workforce Analysis team, the use of this new e-mail account will allow all members of the team to access all requests periodically. This approach is expected to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in the tracking and management of each request.

The new Workforce Analysis e-mail address is <vacoworkforce@va.gov>. The team anticipates that requestors will notice an improvement in the response rate.



Policy Alerts

SICK LEAVE DEFINITION REVISIONS AND EXPANDED FMLA

VA Handbook 5011 is being revised to make the following changes:

- Provide that the minimum charge for military leave differs from charges for all other types of leave to correspond with policy contained in other areas of VA Handbook 5011;
- Provide that the 12 months of service required for family and medical leave do not have to be recent or consecutive;
- Update the definitions for family member for participation in the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program and for sick leave for general family care and bereavement purposes; and
- Provide up to 24 hours (three days) of leave without pay each leave year for expanded family and medical leave purposes.

MSPB DECISION INVALIDATES FEDERAL CAREER INTERN PROGRAM

Human Resources Management Letter (HRML) No. 05-10-07, dated December 16, 2010, provides guidance on the cessation of the use of the Federal Career Intern Program hiring authority in VA, as a result of a decision issued by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (Decision 2010 MSPB 213).

Individuals may direct questions to the staffing policy e-mail box at <Staffingpolicy059/vaco@va.gov>.

These policies will be updated on VA's Office of Human Resources Management intranet Web site.

TELEWORK UPDATES

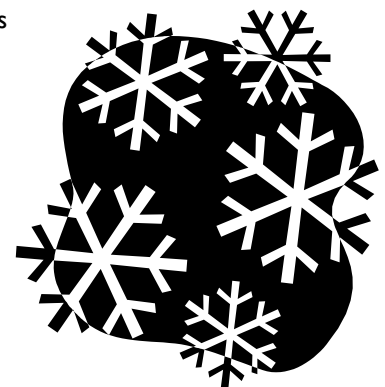
On December 15, 2010, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director John Berry announced new status definitions for inclement weather. The new definitions incorporate "unscheduled telework," or the ability for Federal employees to work from home on non-scheduled telework days. OPM now has five options to consider:

1. The Federal Government is open.
2. The Federal Government is open with the option for unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework.
3. The Federal Government is open with a delayed arrival, with option for unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework.
4. The Federal Government will open with an early departure.
5. Federal offices are closed to the public.

Passage of the Telework Enhancement Act on November 18, 2010, permitted this change. The act requires Federal agencies to establish telework policies and to designate a senior official to oversee the work option. VA's response is forthcoming.

While they are considering the Federal inclement weather policy, managers can also identify reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Managers can consider ensuring that employees with disabilities understand (when possible) that they may request a telework agreement which can be used during severe weather. Snow, ice, and/or strong winds can pose dangers to employees who have mobility impairments, for example, even when the Federal government is open for business. When the work can be done from home, a telework policy is an option which allows these employees to continue working. These decisions should be made on a case by case basis.

If a manager has questions regarding reasonable accommodations, contact Christy Compton by e-mail at <Christy.Compton@va.gov>.



Compliance Corner

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Earlier this year, President Obama issued an Executive order establishing an ambitious goal—that the Federal government will hire 100,000 people with disabilities in the next five years. While it is important that VA recruit and hire individuals with disabilities, it is even more important that the agency reasonably accommodate these individuals once they join our workforce.

In a recent decision, an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Administrative Judge (AJ) found that VA failed to provide the complainant with an effective accommodation for his disability, and failed, in good faith, to engage him in the interactive process.

The complainant was a 100 percent disabled Veteran who is legally blind. He was appointed to a GS-9 social worker position at a VA medical center in December 2006.

According to the complainant's position description, the GS-9 social worker position was a developmental, entry-level position requiring management to closely monitor his work and conduct regularly-scheduled conferences to provide him with guidance and advice and to evaluate his performance. As the complainant mastered tasks and assignments, the amount and extent of his supervision would be reduced. The complainant's duties required that he spend a significant amount of time working on a computer to chart patient visits.

When the complainant began working at the medical center he was provided dual computer monitors and "Zoomtext" software as reasonable accommodations. The software stopped working within four weeks of installation. The complainant was instructed by management to contact the facility's information technology (IT) coordinator and discuss his accommodation. The facility was advised that the software was incompatible with the IT system, and that new software needed to be purchased. No purchase was made.

In April 2007, the complainant—still a probationary employee—was issued a letter of warning based on poor performance. He was subsequently terminated in June 2007 for failing to satisfactorily perform the duties and responsibilities of his position.

The AJ determined that once the complainant informed his supervisors that the offered accommodation was ineffective (i.e., the Zoomtext software), more action was required by the agency. The AJ found it significant that the complainant's supervisors appeared indifferent to his visual impairment and how it affected every aspect of his duties and performance, and that they rarely interacted with him. One of his supervisors was unaware of the expected standards for the entry level social worker position, and she failed to consider that the complainant was a disabled employee who was not provided an effective accommodation for his disability in violation of the Rehabilitation Act.

PRACTICE POINTER: Most accommodations, such as working from home or modifying a work schedule, have no cost. Others are obtained for free from the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) Computer Accommodation Program (CAP) by visiting their Web site, at www.tricare.mil/cap. Accommodations, such as interpreters and readers that are not provided by CAP must be obtained by the employee's office, but the cost will be reimbursed from the centralized fund managed by ODI. The memorandum announcing this fund was issued on May 12, 2010, along with instructions and the form to be submitted for reimbursement. The goal of this fund is to ensure that VA applicants and employees with disabilities receive the accommodation they need to apply for a job, perform the essential duties of the job, or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment. The centralized fund closes the gap between the accommodations provided by DoD's CAP and those that do not require any funds. This fund is also being used for reimbursement of the cost of accommodations for employees with disabilities to attend suitable training opportunities, including career development training such as Leadership VA and the LEAD programs. It will not be used to reimburse the cost of ramps and other physical facility modifications. If your office has paid for any disability accommodations since October 1, 2010, send the invoice to ODI for reimbursement. Please submit your request by September 20, 2011. Funds will be awarded on a first come, first serve basis. The memorandum on the centralized fund and the form for requesting reimbursement are available at www.diversity.hr.va.gov/disabilities.htm.

~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

GINA

The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008, also referred to as GINA, is a Federal law that prohibits discrimination in health coverage and employment based on genetic information. The President signed the act into law on May 21, 2008.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a final rule to implement Title II of GINA, which took effect on November 21, 2009. Under Title II of GINA, it is illegal to discriminate against employees or applicants because of genetic information. Title II of GINA prohibits the use of genetic information in making employment decisions, restricts employers and other entities covered by Title II (employment agencies, labor organizations, and joint labor-management training and apprenticeship programs—referred to as "covered entities") from requesting, requiring, or purchasing genetic information, and strictly limits the disclosure of genetic information.

The EEOC enforces Title II of GINA (dealing with genetic discrimination in employment). The Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and the Treasury have responsibility for issuing regulations for Title I of GINA, which addresses the use of genetic information in health insurance.

Definition of “Genetic Information”

Genetic information includes information about an individual’s genetic tests and the genetic tests of an individual’s family members, as well as information about the manifestation of a disease or disorder in an individual’s family members (i.e. family medical history). Family medical history is included in the definition of genetic information because it is often used to determine whether someone has an increased risk of getting a disease, disorder, or condition in the future. Genetic information also includes an individual’s request for, or receipt of, genetic services, or the participation in clinical research that includes genetic services by the individual or a family member of the individual, and the genetic information of a fetus carried by an individual or by a pregnant woman who is a family member of the individual, and the genetic information of any embryo legally held by the individual or family member using an assisted reproductive technology.

Discrimination Because of Genetic Information

The law forbids discrimination on the basis of genetic information when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoffs, training, fringe benefits, or any other term or condition of employment. An employer may never use genetic information to make an employment decision because genetic information doesn’t tell the employer anything about someone’s current ability to work.

Harassment Because of Genetic Information

Under GINA, it is also illegal to harass a person because of his or her genetic information. Harassment can include, for example, making offensive or derogatory remarks about an applicant or employee’s genetic information, or about the genetic information of a relative of the applicant or employee. Although the law doesn’t prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so severe or pervasive that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted). The harasser can be the victim’s supervisor, a supervisor in another area of the workplace, a co-worker, or someone who is not an employee, such as a client or customer.

Retaliation

Under GINA, it is illegal to fire, demote, harass, or otherwise “retaliate” against an applicant or employee for filing a charge of discrimination, participating in a discrimination proceeding (such as a discrimination investigation or lawsuit), or otherwise opposing discrimination.

Rules Against Acquiring Genetic Information

It will usually be unlawful for a covered entity to get genetic information. There are six narrow exceptions to this prohibition:

1. Inadvertent acquisitions of genetic information do not violate GINA, such as in situations where a manager or supervisor overhears someone talking about a family member’s illness. **[Continued on the next page.]**

Genomics

For over 85 years, VA has been at the forefront of research to enhance the lives of Veterans and all Americans. Sen. Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, recently observed, "VA Research has yielded vital breakthroughs that have benefited all Americans, Veterans, and non-Veterans alike. Looking back, we applaud VA Research's many award-winning discoveries; looking forward, we expect its greatest days are yet to come."

One cutting-edge area of current VA research focus is the science of genomics—the study of genes to better understand their role in health and disease. Genomic medicine, which is customized health care based on a person's genetic makeup could result in early intervention or even prevention of genetic diseases. A particular area of the research, pharmacogenomics, can identify patients who respond differently to current medicines because of differences in their genes. This research may result both in new treatments and significant cost savings by eliminating treatment with drugs that do not work on the patient.

In order to facilitate genomics research for the future benefit of Veterans and the nation, VA Research is launching a new program called the Million Veteran Program (MVP). Under this research partnership between VA and Veterans who volunteer to participate, as many as one million Veterans will donate their genetic information, or DNA, by providing a blood sample and completing a health questionnaire. Over the next five to seven years, Veterans who participate are helping to create one of the largest DNA databases of its kind.

Using the data collected, researchers will study which genetic variations are associated with a particular health issue. Then this information could help answer questions like "Why does a treatment work well for some people but not for others?" and "How can we prevent health conditions in the first place?" Patient safety and information security are the top priorities in all VA research. So in this program, data collected from Veterans will be labeled with a code instead of any personal information that could identify a specific person. Tentatively, MVP is expected to launch in phases beginning fall 2010. The program will start at a few pilot sites—referred to as vanguard sites—and then expand to all the major VA medical centers.

For more information about VA's genomics program, contact Sumitra Muralidhar by telephone at 202-461-1669 or by e-mail at <Sumitra.Muralidhar@va.gov>.

GINA (cont. from previous page)

2. Genetic information (such as family medical history) may be obtained as part of health or genetic services, including wellness programs, offered by the employer on a voluntary basis, if certain specific requirements are met.
3. Family medical history may be acquired as part of the certification process for FMLA leave (or leave under similar state or local laws or pursuant to an employer policy), where an employee is asking for leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition.
4. Genetic information may be acquired through commercially and publicly available documents like newspapers, as long as the employer is not searching those sources with the intent of finding genetic information or accessing sources from which they are likely to acquire genetic information (as Web sites and online discussion groups that focus on issues such as genetic testing of individuals and genetic discrimination).
5. Genetic information may be acquired through a genetic monitoring program that monitors the biological effects of toxic substances in the workplace where the monitoring is required by law or, under carefully defined conditions, where the program is voluntary.
6. Acquisition of genetic information of employees by employers who engage in DNA testing for law enforcement purposes as a forensic lab or for purposes of human remains identification is permitted, but the genetic information may only be used for analysis of DNA markers for quality control to detect sample contamination.

Confidentiality of Genetic Information

It is also unlawful for a covered entity to disclose genetic information about applicants, employees or members. Covered entities must keep genetic information confidential and in a separate medical file. (Genetic information may be kept in the same file as other medical information in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.) There are limited exceptions to this non-disclosure rule, such as exceptions that provide for the disclosure of relevant genetic information to government officials investigating compliance with Title II of GINA and for disclosures made pursuant to a court order. For more information, visit <www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/genetic.cfm>.

Celebrate! (cont. from page 1)

Dr. King endured harassment, threats and beatings, bombings, and went to jail 29 times to achieve freedom for others. Even when he came to the realization that he could pay the ultimate price for leading this transformative effort, he continued marching, protesting, and organizing.

On a daily basis, VA is in a position to carry on the legacy Dr. King left behind—his commitment to helping others. Veterans and their families are our priority, and the employees who serve them are our most valued resource. Therefore, we must ensure that equal opportunity is carried out in our Veterans programs and through hiring, promotion, and advancement of our diverse workforce. We call on every VA employee to commemorate this holiday by making a personal commitment to serve humanity with the vibrant spirit of unconditional love that was Dr. King's greatest strength, and which empowered all the great victories under his leadership. Let us remember and embrace the theme for 2011: "Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On, Not A Day Off!"

NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH

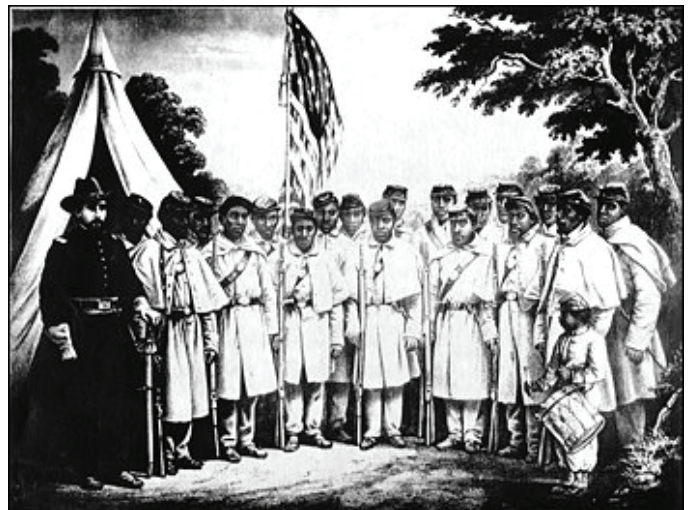
The month of February is designated as African American History Month. This year's national theme, "African Americans and the Civil War," encourages all to reflect on and honor the many contributions of African Americans, both free and enslaved, who enlisted in the Union Army to save the union and abolish slavery.

Moved by Frederick Douglass' words, "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States," approximately 180,000 African Americans joined the fight, comprising 163 units that served in the Union Army during the Civil War. Additionally, many more African Americans served in the Union Navy. Over the course of the war, African American soldiers rallied around the Union flag fighting for freedom. From the cotton and tobacco fields of the South to the small towns and big cities of the North, they took up arms to destroy the

Confederacy. They served as recruiters, soldiers, nurses, and spies, and endured unequal treatment, massacres, and riots as they pursued their quest for freedom and equality.

VA celebrates the contributions of those brave soldiers and all Veterans who have fought to preserve the freedoms and right to equality that we cherish as Americans. To carry forth the legacy of ensuring equal opportunity, ODI will continue to lead the effort in creating a diverse, results-oriented, high performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve and the diversity of our nation by eliminating barriers to equal opportunity. During fiscal year (FY) 2010, African Americans represented 23.79 percent of VA's permanent workforce. African American Veterans represented 9.59 percent and African American disabled Veterans represented 3.01 percent. African Americans participation rates in the GS-13 through GS-15 grade levels grew to 13.65 percent from 13.44 percent in FY 2009 and 13.13 percent in FY 2008.

VA's groundbreaking work in the area of diversity and inclusion will continue to cultivate a flexible and inclusive work environment that enables all employees to realize their full potential in service to our Nation's heroes—our Veterans. For more information on VA's African American Program, please contact Trina Faison, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, at [<Trina.Faison@va.gov>](mailto:Trina.Faison@va.gov).



Black soldiers who served in the Union Army are shown in this reproduction from the collections of the Library of Congress.

Disability Issues

WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

On December 6, the 2010 Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) database was released. It includes over 2,000 college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are seeking summer or permanent employment in Federal agencies nationwide. This release is much earlier than in prior years. Traditionally, there is considerable competition for these applicants.

The WRP is a recruitment and referral program that connects Federal and private sector employers with highly motivated postsecondary students with disabilities, who are eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs. Most of these students qualify at the GS-5 through GS-9 levels, with some qualifying for a higher level because of a combination of education and experience. Their salary is paid by the employing agency. These candidates are pre-screened; only the best qualified individuals make the list. All are students in good standing and enrolled in either a certificate or a degree program, from the Associate to the PhD level. Since about 30 percent of the WRP candidates are non-traditional students who are older than the 18-22 year old students traditionally enrolled in college, we have also found WRP to be a source for reaching disabled Veterans. Further information is available on their Web site at <<https://wrp.gov>>.

SCHEDULE A NON-COMPETITIVE APPOINTMENT AUTHORITY

Individuals with severe physical disabilities, mental illness, or developmental disabilities may be hired non-competitively through the Schedule A appointment authority. Qualified candidates can be found via the Disability Services office at colleges and universities, the local Vocational Rehabilitation office, the Workforce Recruitment Program, OPM's Shared Register, the Employer Assistance & Resource Network (EARN) at <www.earnworks.com>, and local nonprofits that assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment. The job does not need to be announced. Once the candidate is interviewed and the hiring official decides to select them, they can be brought on board within two weeks or less.

REHABILITATION ACT AND MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE (MD) 715

The Rehabilitation Act charges each Federal agency to promote the hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities by:

- Being a model employer through use of meaningful affirmative hiring, placement, and advancement opportunities;
- Preventing discrimination against applicants and employees with disabilities; and
- Providing reasonable accommodation.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) MD 715 instructs agencies to focus on the targeted disabilities. The idea is that if agencies hire people who have severe disabilities, there will be less resistance to hiring individuals with other disabilities. EEOC also reviews and reports the on board ratio of employees with targeted disabilities.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

VA is committed to improving our retention rate of persons with disabilities and our responsiveness to requests for accommodation. The updated Reasonable Accommodation Handbook allows 30 days (minus the time waiting for medical documentation) from the date of the request to the provision of the accommodation or communication of the denial. Waiting longer than 30 days or ignoring a request can be the equivalent of a denial of the request.

ODI is asking all managers to consider accommodation requests in a positive light. When an employee requests an accommodation, it is because s/he wants to be more productive or wants to participate in office events. In a few cases, the employee will request a reassignment because the functional limitations caused by the disability have grown more severe, preventing the employee from being productive in the current position. VA wants to retain these employees and requests that all offices work together to address every request with respect and promptness. For more information, visit <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/disabilities.htm>.

Field Notes

SUCCESS WITH SCHEDULE A APPOINTMENTS

By Linda Murdock, VHA HR Specialist

The Birmingham, Alabama VA Medical Center (BVAMC), has been actively recruiting applicants with disabilities for the past few years. Our affiliation with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) has

contributed to our success. One ADRS counselor, Stella Pelham, works closely with BVAMC human resources (HR) staff to provide acceptable candidates with disabilities (candidates who have a chance at succeeding in the position). This is important in building credibility for the program, as it only takes one wrong match and the service is reluctant to consider another applicant with a disability.

The summer of 2009, Ms. Pelham approached BVAMC HR with an opportunity to provide summer work experience to disabled applicants, with ADRS paying the stipend. This was an opportunity for VA managers to get a volunteer worker and for the applicant to prove themselves worthy of a paid appointment with the VA. When Ms. Pelham proposed this program, the goal was to place five applicants. HR obtained approval from the medical center director, Mrs. Rica Lewis-Payton, and called the service chiefs at the BVAMC to ask if they would each take one volunteer student with disabilities.

The response was overwhelming: That summer, the BVAMC had 21 of the ADRS referrals working as volunteers. Each volunteer cleared the fingerprinting/background investigation and had a tuberculosis test administered by Employee Health. Six of these students were later hired into permanent positions through the Schedule A non-competitive appointing authority. Since that time, BVAMC HR has worked to persuade all staffing specialists to become interested in this hiring option, by providing training.

Recently, we had an applicant apply for several vacancies under Schedule A. One HR specialist took the applicant around and introduced him to the other staffing specialists. This helped all the specialists see how the applicant interacted with others, allowing them to optimize their presentation of the applicant to managers who have vacant positions. BVAMC had a vacancy that we were having a hard time filling. While this gentleman had applied and been referred, he had not been interviewed. We recommended an interview to the service chief. The applicant was interviewed and pretty much on the spot selected for the GS-7 secretary position. He has not started with us yet but we have a good feeling he will work out just fine.

If we gave a reason for the success BVAMC has had with hiring disabled applicants, meeting the applicant for just five minutes has helped to see and understand what their abilities are. This then allows each specialist to be comfortable with a referral for a vacancy as we would never want to refer an applicant who can't perform the duties of the position. Also, it is very important to accept what the applicant has given you as evidence of their eligibility for appointment under the Schedule A hiring authority. This means that the documentation should be from an accepted source, but it doesn't have to be an original letter or a letter dated within a certain period of time, etc. Finally, work to form an affiliation with an agency or department that works full time with disabled applicants. This provides an excellent source of recruitment and will ultimately help us meet the two percent hiring goal.

Note: As of the end of FY 2010, 1.54 percent of BVAMC's permanent staff were individuals with targeted disabilities.



Life to the Fullest

When Josh Echols' parents learned their son had Cerebral Palsy, they knew he would face many struggles ahead. But they kept their eyes on one prize: they were determined that one day, Josh, just like his normally developing siblings, would graduate from high school.

And he did—but then, the family found themselves at an impasse. “After high school, we felt like there was a world out there that really didn’t care anymore,” remembers Josh’s mother, Suzanne. With seemingly no prospects and no new goals, Josh restlessly wheeled his chair around the house. “I was starting to wear out the carpet,” he jokes.

Josh aspired higher. He wanted greater independence. He wanted a career. Simply put, “I needed hope,” Josh says.



Josh Echols

An Unexpected Resource

Then the Echols found out about The Full Life Ahead Foundation—a Birmingham, Alabama-based organization dedicated to helping children, teenagers and young adults with all forms of disAbilities overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams. *(The word "disAbilities" in this story is spelled with a capital "A" to place the emphasis on "Abilities," reflecting the philosophy of the Full Life Ahead Foundation.)*

The group was founded by Judy and Henry Barclay, whose own daughter, Dine (pronounced "Denny"), had a seizure disorder and died at 22 inexplicably after surgery; and Jan Cobb and Mike Cobb, also the parents of a child with disAbilities. The Barclays and Cobbs felt that the lessons they had learned from addressing their children’s special needs gave them a unique opportunity to help other families affected by disAbilities.

Not long after Dine’s death, Judy and Jan co-wrote “Full Life Ahead: A Workbook and Guide to Adult Life for Students with DisAbilities and their Families.” It started with a printing of fewer than 100 copies but today is distributed in the thousands around the country. Its impact led to the creation of the Foundation itself. As one of their many services (most are free), the Foundation offers weekend camps aimed at supporting, encouraging and connecting families with similar needs.

Crossing a Threshold

One of these weekend retreats, held at Children’s Harbor at Lake Martin, proved to be a major breakthrough for Josh. “We spent a couple of nights there and it was an environment where Josh was all of a sudden able to be independent, and this was a really big thing,” Suzanne says. “It was the first time in his life that he left a room—we were in a cabin—and he was able to open the door, wheel outside, go to an entirely different part of the campground, attend a meeting, and stay as long as he wanted without his mother or dad having to escort him.”

The weekend retreat was just a beginning, Suzanne adds. “Josh had lost hope, and Full Life Ahead helped him adjust his attitude and get his hope back. It helped to rescue him from what was turning into depression.”

The next breakthrough occurred when a job coach mentioned to Josh that he had connected someone else with a job working at a local VA hospital. “That planted a seed in Josh, and he knew he wanted that,” Suzanne says.

Josh had worked for a local grocery store, but the weekend at Children’s Harbor helped him realize his many gifts, and he knew he wanted a career—not just a job. He applied and was hired at the VA, initially to greet people as they entered; later, he visited people in the various hospital clinics.

Soon he was promoted to working with veterans on computer-software programs. “I feel like I’m appreciated here,” says Josh, who radiates confidence, arrives at work impeccably dressed in a suit. He has become an integral member of the hospital staff.

As Josh puts it, “I believe that the more I can do, the better off my life is going to be.” *Article taken from* www.seethegood.com/article/11/19/2010/Life-to-the-Fullest.

Leadership VA (cont. from page 1)

Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and field facility Directors are responsible for ensuring that the program is formally announced to all eligible employees.

LVA seeks individuals from all elements of VA who are having or who may have significant impact on the future of the Department. Applicants should be high achievers who have demonstrated leadership, success, career progression, and who are active contributors to the community of which they are a part. Competition will be keen due to limited program capacity. Those whose personal or work considerations necessitate their missing a program, session, or any portion thereof, should not apply this year.

This intensive leadership training program encompasses four one-week sessions for approximately 80 competitively selected participants. Participants are exposed to best-in-class leadership tools and training; learn best practices from top VA, military and business leaders; and exchange information with VA peers and colleagues to broaden their perspectives. The program's objectives are to:

- Employ an enterprise-wide systems-thinking approach to leadership.
- Foster learning and leading across boundaries.
- Develop critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- Promote organizational stewardship to eliminate barriers and meet common goals.

LVA participants will leave the program with a shared leadership framework, skill-set, and tool-set to drive excellence in their organizations and accomplish VA strategic goals.

Applications are due by COB Monday, January 31, 2011. (Note that this has been extended from an initially published date of January 14.) New this year is an online application. LVA graduates, especially those who are helping someone complete an LVA application, are also encouraged to familiarize themselves with the new application and selection process:

1. Go to the VALU Web site: <<http://vaww1.va.gov/valu>> and select the LVA page link listed on the left side.
2. Complete the online LVA 2011 program application on the LVA Web site. The application has been revised and is now completely online; as such, only the online LVA 2011 application will be accepted. Narrative responses should be typed using a 10-point font size.
3. Let your supervisor and another rater of your choice know that you have completed the application. You will enter your supervisor and rater information into the online application and they will then receive e-mail notification to complete their portion of your online application. Another rater of your choice is a person with whom you work and who is at your same grade level or higher, and can attest to your leadership ability.

Selection procedures are also new this year. The applications will be automatically scored in the online system. Narrative responses will be scored by the Application Review National Panel using a blind review process. Applicants who meet the minimum threshold score based on review of their application will be referred to the next step in the selection process, which is the interview. Interviews will be 30 minutes in length, conducted via telephone, and based on the performance-based interview (PBI) format. Each interviewee will be interviewed by three members of the Interview Review National Panel who will then submit an interview score. The application score and interview score will be tallied and a final list of applicants will be submitted to the National Panel Steering Committee for final approval. Selectees and non-selectees will be notified in April 2011. Inquiries about LVA may be directed to Dr. John Garvin, Director, Leadership Development, VALU, at 202-618-5042 or <John.Garvin@va.gov>.

ALP (cont. from page 2)

Given the number of employees in VHA and the ability to provide a comprehensive LEAD program across the Department at the VISN and in some cases, at the Medical Center level, VHA field employees are ineligible to apply at this time. Additionally, the number of program and staff offices in VACO experiencing workforce growth requires that this limitation be enforced. This decision was made by VALU in collaboration with VHA's Office of Workforce Management and Consulting to ensure an equal number of quality applicants across each of the Department's leadership programs. More importantly, this is a decision that will allow every VA employee access and opportunity to participate in formal leadership development and realize their full leadership potential in service to the Department and our Nation's Veterans. For more information about VA's Aspiring Leaders Program, contact Sabrina Clark by e-mail at <Sabrina.Clark@va.gov>.



ODI on the Internet

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OTHER USEFUL LINKS

VA's Office of Human Resources & Administration
<www.va.gov/ofcadmin>

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<vaww.va.gov/valu>

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<www.va.gov/orm>

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GOT NEWS?

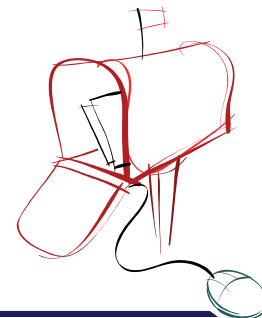
We want to hear from you! If you'd like to share your story ideas, comments, or suggestions, e-mail us at <odi@va.gov> with the words DIVERSITY@WORK in the subject line.

The mission of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is to foster a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment that ensures equal opportunity—through national policy development, workforce analysis, outreach, retention, and education—to best serve our Nation's Veterans. Here's a sampling of online tools available at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov> that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- ▶ National African American History Month and other special observance resources.
- ▶ Training resources, guides, and reports.
- ▶ Links to professional and community organizations.
- ▶ Best practices for diversity management.

ODI in Your E-mail Inbox

Once a week, ODI sends out *NewsLink*, an e-mail message with annotated links to current news items and other information related to leveraging diversity and building inclusion. For a FREE subscription to this weekly electronic news service, e-mail <odi@va.gov> with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWSLINK in the subject line. Find a sample of *NewsLink* at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/ca/newslink.htm>.



ODI on Your TV or PC

Diversity News is a monthly video program produced by the VACO Broadcasting Center for ODI. *Diversity News* follows VA News on the VA Knowledge Network (VAKN) channel 2 at <<http://vaww.vakncdn.lrn.va.gov>>. Programs are also available at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/ca/diversitynews.htm>.

From the 2011 Diversity Calendar

<www.diversity.hr.va.gov/calendar>

JANUARY

National Mentoring Month

OPM Veterans Hiring Event

January 6 (deadline to apply)
<www.fedshirevets.gov/job/events/index.aspx>

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday

January 15 (observed January 17)

Religious Freedom Day

January 16

World Religion Day

January 16

Assistive Technology Industry Association Leadership Forum on Accessibility

January 26–29; Orlando, FL
<www.atia.org>

FEBRUARY

Black History Month

Lunar New Year

February 3

League of United Latin American Citizens Legislative Conference and Gala

February 9–10; Washington, DC
<www.lulac.org>

Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week

February 13–19

Race Relations Day

February 14

Washington's Birthday (Presidents Day)

February 21