



Message from the DAS

New Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan Now Available Online

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Bookmarks:

- Talent Management System
<http://www.tms.va.gov>
- VA Learning University
<http://www.valu.va.gov>
- HR Academy
<http://vahracademy.com>
- WorkLife4You
<http://www.worklife4you.com>

The Department of Veterans Affairs has long been a leader in building the foundation for diversity and inclusion in the Federal workforce. Today, we are proud to usher in the next era in that continuing journey by announcing the online availability of the new VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2012 to 2016 at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/plan.aspx>.

The new plan contains three overarching goals: a diverse workforce, an inclusive workplace, and outstanding public service. Together these three goals create synergy for building a high-performing workforce in service to our Nation's Veterans.

In the plan, we reiterate the business case for diversity in VA and introduce a new paradigm linking workplace inclusion to high performance in the 21st century. Inclusion is the process of enabling the full participation of all individuals in the workforce and leveraging the diverse talent and perspectives to achieve greater performance outcomes.

The plan also focuses on leadership and accountability to ensure we make measurable progress toward achieving our goals. Over the next few years, this plan will serve as a living roadmap for our department as we build and sustain a diverse and inclusive organization. Working collaboratively with you—the highly-dedicated employees, managers, and stakeholders of VA—we know we will continue to lead in these critical areas. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that VA embraces diversity and inclusion throughout our Department so that we can deliver the best service to our Nation's Veterans. My office, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), stands ready to assist you in implementing the strategies and achieving the objectives of this plan.

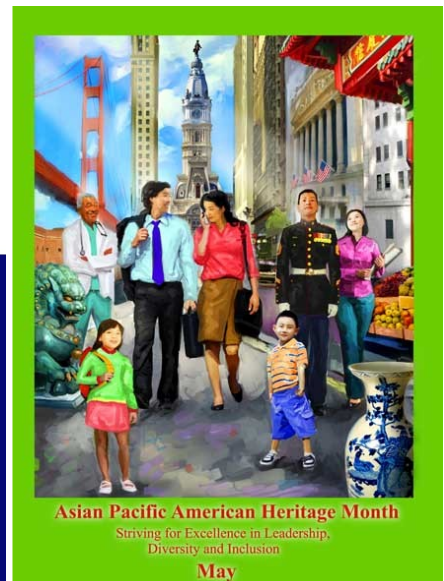
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Commemorate

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

During the month of May, VA joins the Nation in commemorating Asian American and Pacific Islander American (AAPI) Heritage Month. This year's theme is "Striving for Excellence in Leadership, Diversity, and Inclusion."

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is observed in recognition of the historical and cultural contributions made by AAPIs to our culture and our Nation. In 1992, Congress passed the public law which designated May of each year as "Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month." The month of May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants. [Continued on page 6.](#)



Message from the DAS

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Georgia Coffey

Also, congratulations to VA and ODI for another government-wide recognition! The Government Accountability Office (GAO) singled out VA for its best practices in disability employment, including leadership accountability for VA's people with targeted disabilities hiring goal; mandatory disability training; the centralized accommodation fund; quarterly reporting and monitoring; and updated reasonable accommodation policy. GAO stated that "Only VA's plan, as initially submitted, met all [of the Office of Personnel Management]'s criteria for satisfying the requirements of the executive order." I am so proud of the work we do and look forward to continuing to make strides in the areas of diversity and inclusion in the Federal sector.

Finally, don't forget that VA joins the Nation in commemorating numerous observances this time of year including Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month in June. Please join us as we recognize the achievements and contributions of these groups to our Nation's rich history.

~Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

VACO Notes

Welcome, New ODI Employees

ODI would like to welcome Joanne Virgille who joined the office in April 2012 on a rotation from the Environmental Protection Agency. Ms. Virgille works on the Outreach and Retention Team with the Disability Program Manager, helping to ensure that individuals with disabilities enjoy equal opportunity in all aspects of employment within VA. She started her Federal career in the summer of 2010 as a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) intern with the Environmental Protection Agency, where she worked in the Communications Branch of the Office of Chemical Safety & Pollution Prevention's Field & External Affairs Division. Upon her graduation from Florida International University with a Masters in Public Administration, she was hired last September to work in EPA's Office of Diversity, Outreach & Collaboration (ODOC). In the ODOC office, Joanne helped with the editing of EPA's first batch of diversity dashboard reports. She also helped with the drafting of the Agency's Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Plan, which was submitted to the Office of Personnel Management last March. Joanne says that she jumped at the opportunity to work for the VA. "I am from Miami, where there is a very strong VA presence, and I just thought that it would be an awesome experience to work for such a well-respected agency on such an important issue—diversity."

ODI also extends a warm welcome to Bonnie Jeo who will be serving as a Staff Assistant on ODI's Administration Management Team. Ms. Jeo joins ODI from VACO's Office of Finance. She had the pleasure of living, working, and raising a family in Oklahoma, Utah, Colorado, Germany, Maine, and now the DC area. After 25 years of work in the private sector of medical and legal offices, she joined the Federal workforce in the Radiology Department of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in

Germany. She was employed there on September 11, 2001. Over the next many months she watched the hospital prepare for and provide care to our Wounded Warriors where, she says, it was humbling to directly assist these brave men and women. Ms. Jeo emphasized, "I am glad to continue supporting our Veterans in my work at VA."

Finally, ODI welcomes Taylor Njagu, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Specialist. Prior to joining VA, Mr. Njagu worked with the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, as an EEO Specialist where he developed and managed the organization's Affirmative Employment Plan in accordance with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Management Directive 715 (MD-715). Mr. Njagu conducted Workforce data analysis to determine the degree of under-representation of each group in the total workforce population. He identified triggers to under-representation and developed strategies to eliminate impediments in recruitment, selection, transfer, or promotion of protected class individuals throughout the organization. Mr. Njagu also provided advice and assistance to subordinate management officials on the preparation of their MD-715 reports and the integration of the EEO program objectives in daily operations.

A retired U.S. Army Veteran with over 23 years of military service, Mr. Njagu served in multiple leadership assignments over the course of his military career. He was assigned as an Equal Opportunity (EO) Program Manager for the U.S. Army 1st Infantry Division and Senior EO Advisor to the commanding general responsible for providing expert advice and guidance on all EO/EEO matters relating to the fair treatment, unit cohesion of 13,000 soldiers, army civilians and families. Mr. Njagu provided technical guidance and direction for the organization's EO programs and developed and implemented policies and procedures to eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure comprehensive EO program implementation. He advised commanders at all levels on the effectiveness of the organization's EO program. [Continued on page 10.](#)

Field Notes

Workforce Resurvey

VA will be resurveying the VA workforce to update disability status of employees pursuant to Executive Order 13548, "Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities." The Rehabilitation Act, as amended (29 USC 701, et seq.) permits VA to request employees self identify their disabilities. Self-identification of disability status is essential for effective data collection and analysis. The information provided will be used for statistical purposes only and will not in any way affect the employee, individually. With current data on the status of people with disabilities, VA will be able to develop more effective policies and programs in compliance with the Executive Order. In the next few weeks, all VA employees will be receiving a memorandum from the office of the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration outlining the re-survey process and encouraging everyone to participate in this important effort. Although self-identification of a disability is voluntary, we encourage all VA employees, especially those with a disability, to participate and update their status. Employee participation will enable us to measure progress towards meeting the President's goals.

Section 508 Training

VA's Section 508 Program Office is conducting "General Section 508 Training" 2-4 pm EST Tuesday, June 5, 2012, at VA Central Office Conference Room 730. Seating is limited. The class is also available via VANTS and Live Meeting. Live Meeting Training will be captioned. The class will provide an overview of the law and its application to Electronic Information Technology (EIT) including the technical, functional, and documentation/support standards surrounding Section 508 compliance. VA employees attending the training session will learn more about VA's Section 508 Program Office and how it works to ensure that Electronic Information Technology products developed, procured, maintained, or used by the VA are Section 508 conformant. If you develop any of the following, supervise, procure, develop or administer policy relating to the following you should attend:

- Develop web pages
- Develop web-based applications
- Develop software
- Produce documents
- Develop or procure hardware
- Develop training materials
- Produce videos or other multimedia products
- Supervise activities above
- Develop or administer policy involving or



- relating to the above
- Have responsibility for the integration or maintenance of any of these items
- Are responsible for the procurement of any of these items
- Are involved in the contracting for the procurement of any of these items.

Contact Vicki Leon at Vicki.Leon@va.gov to register.

Diversity News: An Online Training Resource



Diversity News is a 15-minute video program produced monthly by ODI with the support of the VA Central Office Broadcasting Center. The program is part of VA's continuing effort to foster equity, a diverse workforce, and an inclusive work

environment. Boasting a wealth of knowledge, ODI's library of broadcasts can serve to educate the VA community on workforce diversity and inclusion issues and to share best practices in effective diversity management. The May 2012 edition focuses on VA's revised Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. Diversity News is available both on the internal VA Knowledge Network and on ODI's Web site. To view current and past episodes, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>.

SAIGE Training Program

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) will hold its 9th Annual National Training Program on June 3-8, 2012, at the Omni Interlocken Hotel in Denver, Colorado. This annual training program is a great opportunity for professional development open to all Federal employees, and provides informative workshops in six tracks, including Indian Country, Equal Employment Opportunity and Human Resources, Culture and Diversity, Indigenous Natural Resources, Professional Development, and Wellness. There will be a program for youth to encourage American Indian and Alaskan Native students to become leaders in their communities. SAIGE's annual Veterans Program provides resources tailored for Veterans to help them navigate the Federal benefits and employment systems. VA will join other agencies making presentations for the Veterans Program. In addition, SAIGE is offering a three-day Federal Indian Law Immersion course. This training will qualify for Continuing Law Education Credits. ODI will be conducting a no-cost VA Pre-conference Forum on Monday, June 4, 2012, from 1-3 p.m. This Forum is a diversity training opportunity open to all VA employees who are able to attend the event. Conference information and registration is available at <http://www.saige.org>. For additional information, contact Aurelia Waters, Equal Employment Specialist, ODI, at Aurelia.Waters@va.gov. **Continued on page 7.**

Women's History Month

2012 VACO Event

The Center for Women Veterans and the VA Central Office (VACO) Federal Women's Program hosted "A Salute to Women Veterans and Women Veteran Employees" in the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Conference Center on Thursday, March 29, 2012. The theme was "Women's Education: Women's Empowerment." Vernice "FlyGirl" Armour, America's First African American Female Combat Pilot, was the featured guest speaker. After two tours in Iraq she left the military to launch VAI Consulting and Training, LLC. From her experiences, she created a 7-step process entitled the "Zero to Breakthrough™ Success Plan" that utilizes candid strategies to win on the battlefield of business and life. The Honorable Allison A. Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits, and Alice Muellerweiss, Dean, VA Learning University, also provided educational and informative resources for employees and women Veterans about their eligibility for benefits and services.



From L to R: Alice Muellerweiss, the Honorable W. Scott Gould, Vernice Armour, and the Honorable Allison Hickey

Religious Accommodation

Religion Protected Under Title VII

Employees who hold religious beliefs often confront conflicts between their employment obligations and their religious obligations. Federal law (and many state and local laws) require employers to try to accommodate those obligations. Specifically, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII") provides that an employer must reasonably accommodate an employee's religious beliefs and practices unless doing so would cause "undue hardship on the conduct of the employer's business." A reasonable accommodation is one that eliminates the employee's conflict between his religious practices and work requirements and that does not cause an undue hardship for the employer.

Title VII prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals because of their religion in hiring, firing, and other terms and conditions of employment. Title VII also requires employers to reasonably accommodate the religious practices of an employee or prospective employee, unless to do so would create an undue hardship upon the employer. This means that:

- Employers may not treat employees more or less favorably because of their religion.
- Employees cannot be required to participate—or refrain from participating—in a religious activity as a condition of employment.
- Employers must reasonably accommodate employees' sincerely held religious practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer.
- Employers must take steps to prevent religious harassment of their employees.
- Employers may not retaliate against employees for asserting rights under Title VII.3

It is the policy of VA to permit, when practicable, absence from work for those employees who desire to observe religious holidays. Absence of employees on religious holidays will be charged to annual leave, if they have annual leave to their credit or other form of paid time off (i.e., compensatory time for travel, compensatory time, credit hours), otherwise to leave without pay (LWOP). Employees may elect to work compensatory overtime for the purpose of taking time off without charge to leave when their personal religious beliefs require that they abstain from work during certain periods of the workday or workweek, thereby avoiding an annual leave or leave without pay charge. For more information, contact your local human resources officer.

VACO APA Heritage Kick-Off

Secretary Shinseki, Secretary Chow Speak at This Year's Annual Event

VA Central Office (VACO) held an Asian Pacific American Heritage Month kick-off ceremony on Thursday, May 10, 2012, in the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Veterans Conference Center. Opening remarks were provided by The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The Honorable Edward Chow, Jr., Secretary of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs was the featured guest. Secretary Chow previously served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at VACO; City Administrator for Kent, Washington; and a Cabinet Officer for the State of Washington. Secretary Chow was also commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in 1962 after completing R.O.T.C. and his undergraduate degree at Seattle University. He served in Germany and completed his service as a Captain in Vietnam (1967) where he was awarded the Bronze Star.

VACO will hold a cultural fair featuring food tasting, music, dance performances, and various cultural exhibits, on Thursday, May 31, in the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Conference Center, Room 230 at noon.



Policy Alerts

Noncompetitive Appointment of Certain Military Spouses

VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 2 has been revised to include procedures for noncompetitive appointment of certain military spouses, and also provide that the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration may waive the restriction that the appointment of an eligible military spouse must be to a position within the geographic area to which the service member received assignment.

Revision to Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment Fact Sheet

Revisions have been made to VA Handbook 5005, Part IV, Appendix F, Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (VSIP) Fact Sheet. The revisions clarify the definition of VSIP and remove the age and service requirement for VSIP eligibility. The revision is compliant with Federal laws and regulations governing VSIP.

Veterinary Medical Officer (Laboratory Animal Medicine), GS-701, Qualification Standard

The Qualification Standard for Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) (Laboratory Animal Medicine), GS-701, in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix F32, is under revision. This revision will replace the existing VMO qualification standard in its entirety. Two significant changes are: the addition of licensure as a basic requirement; and the inclusion of qualification requirements at the GS-11 grade level. The electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 will reflect this revision upon its approval.

Commemorate

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According to the U.S. Library of Congress Web site (<http://www.asianpacificheritage.gov/about.html>), Asian-Pacific is a rather broad term that encompasses all of the Asian continent and the Pacific islands of Melanesia (New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands), Micronesia (Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia) and Polynesia (New Zealand, Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, Midway Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia and Easter Island).

“The first Asians to come to the western hemisphere were Chinese Filipinos who settled in Mexico. Eventually, Filipino sailors were the first to settle in the U.S. around 1750 in what would later be Louisiana. Later around 1840, to make up for the shortage of slaves from Africa, the British and Spanish brought over slaves or ‘coolies’ from China, India, and the Philippines to islands in the Caribbean, Peru, Ecuador, and other countries in South America.

“However, the first large-scale immigration of Asians into the U.S. didn't happen until 1848. Around that time, gold was discovered in America. Lured by tales and dreams of making it rich on ‘Gold Mountain’ (which became the Chinese nickname for California), The Gold Rush was one of the pull factors that led many Chinese to come to the U.S. to find their fortune and return home rich and wealthy...In addition to prospecting for gold in California, many Chinese also came as contract laborers to Hawai'i to work in sugarcane plantations. While in California, Chinese miners experienced their first taste of discrimination in the form of the Foreign Miner Tax...The Chinese also worked as small time merchants, gardeners, domestics, laundry workers, farmers, and starting in 1865, as railroad workers on the famous Transcontinental Railroad project...At its peak, 9,000 to 12,000 Chinese worked for the Central Pacific in some of the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs (different sources have different estimates on exact numbers)...The project was completed on May 10, 1869...Rather than accepting demeaning stereotypes of them as perpetual foreigners, Chinese Americans showed that they wanted to assimilate into American society and contribute to its growth, prosperity, and culture” (<http://www.asian-nation.org/first.shtml>).

As per the U.S. Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>), out of the total U.S. population, 18.5 million people, or six percent, identify as AAPI. AAPIs are the fastest growing major race group in the U.S. Within VA's workforce, as of September 2011, 6.90 percent (21,832 employees) are AAPI. Today, there are 293,000 AAPI Veterans serving our Nation. Also, VA employs 98,100 Veterans, of which 3.05 percent (2,986 employees) are AAPI. VA's employment of AAPIs increased from 6.70 percent at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2010 to 6.76 percent at the end of FY 2011.

However, AAPI men still have a lower than expected participation rate at the GS 2–14 and SES grade level when compared to the workforce and AAPI women have a lower than expected participation rate at the GS 1–7, 9-10, 12-14, and SES grade level when compared to the workforce.

The top five occupations for permanent AAPI employees are Medical Officers, Nurses, Pharmacists, Practical Nurses, and Medical Technologists. In addition to employing AAPIs, VA also provides service to and recognizes the military service and contributions of AAPI Veterans.

VA is committed to reaching out to this important segment of our workforce to make certain every employee, including AAPIs, have the opportunity to participate in all occupations and at all levels in the Department. We must ensure AAPIs are fully included and actively participating in every aspect of our workforce.

During the month of May, we pause to commemorate the vast contributions that more than 18 million Asian Pacific Americans have made to our Nation—from its inception to its latest chapters. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have had a deep impact in our country with their abilities, perseverance, and hard work. As we commemorate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, let us reflect on the richness of their cultures, and their vast contributions to our society and our country's rich diversity.

For more information on VA's AAPI Employment Program, contact Andy Gonzalez, Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist, VA National AAPI Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 461-4042 or Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov. [Continued on page 8.](#)

Field Notes

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Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans

Did you know VA has a directive about caring for transgender and intersex Veterans? Directive 2011-024, located at http://www1.va.gov/VHAPUBLICATIONS/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2416, explains VA policy about specific health care issues for these Veterans and how to provide respectful care. The core message of the directive is that all Veterans are to be treated with respect during their interactions at the VA. This includes during their appointments with providers, when checking in with program support staff, during transactions at pharmacy and travel offices, and while shopping in the canteen and retail stores.

Transgender and intersex Veterans are to receive the same level of care and courtesy as any other Veteran. Respect for this population includes using the pronoun and name they prefer, regardless of the sex/name in the medical record or appearance.

Per the directive, it is appropriate that these Veterans use bathrooms and other facilities that match their gender identity. Staff is expected to keep a patient's gender identity/transgender status confidential, while always conveying the respect that is due to an individual who has served their country. In addition, the directive also explains how the new policy directly affects the work of VA employees.

MD 715 Analytical Table Revisions

Working with the VHA Service Support Center, ODI recently revised its applications for generating the standard EEOC MD 715 Analytical tables. Prior to the change, generating these MD 715 tables was limited to annual reporting. Now EEO managers are enabled to generate the EEOC standard reports monthly, allowing greater flexibility to perform trigger and barrier analysis towards equal employment opportunities.

ADVANCE Conflict Management Training

ADVANCE Your Knowledge and Skill in Managing Conflict and Resolving Disputes through Mediation by taking classes at the Justice Center of Atlanta sponsored by the Office of Resolution Management Workplace ADR Office.

The Managing Conflict and Resolving Disputes through Mediation training is a three-day course, that provides an

opportunity to examine the factors that contribute to workplace conflict. It offers tools that managers can use to prevent these situations from escalating and diverting valuable time, resources, and energy from our mission.

The course is balanced to include information on how to better manage conflict (i.e., asking effective questions, dealing with difficult people, negotiation skills), and understanding the mediation process.

While not asking you to become a professional mediator among your many other responsibilities at VA, it is hoped that by spending in-depth time studying, discussing, and trying the myriad of techniques and communication skills related to the mediation process, you will adopt new approaches, ideas, and skills in dealing with disputes.

Managing Conflict and Resolving Disputes Training is conducted by the Justice Center of Atlanta (JCA) in Atlanta, GA. The JCA has led the field of training and practice in conflict resolution for over 30 years and is nationally recognized as a provider of top quality practice and instruction in mediation by the U.S. Government Accounting Office. Targeted Audience: Senior Executives, GS-14-15s, GS-12-13 Supervisors, LVA participants, and Title-38 Equivalents who are in Supervisory Positions. A class is scheduled for May 15-17, 2012. Other classes will soon be posted and you may register for one of these ADVANCE classes in TMS, visit <https://www.tms.va.gov/plateau/user/login.jsp>. All questions regarding this training may be directed to Rita Reese, ADR Manager, at Rita.Reese@va.gov.

National Compliance and Ethics Week

The Office of Compliance and Business Integrity (CBI), in partnership with the National Center for Ethics in Healthcare, promoted National Compliance and Ethics Week May 6-12 at VISN offices, VA medical centers, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, and Consolidated Patient Account Centers VA-wide. The theme was "Think Integrity First" and reflected VHA's commitment to the highest levels of ethics quality and business integrity in each and every aspect of Veteran and staff engagement.

Broadcast on Hiring Options

On June 5, 2012, the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration will do a HR Connect broadcast on hiring options for hiring Veterans, people with disabilities, and students. Debbie Kolen, Director, Recruitment and Placement Policy; Dennis May, Acting Deputy Director, Veterans Employment Service Office; and Christy Compton, VA Disability Program Manager, will each speak for ten minutes and the audience will have time to ask questions. For more information, visit VA's Office of Human Resources Management intranet site.

Commemorate

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Older Americans Month

VA joins the Nation in celebrating Older Americans Month 2012, observed during the month of May. This year's theme, "Never Too Old to Play", encourages older Americans to stay engaged, active, and involved in their own lives and in their communities.



When Older Americans Month was established in 1963, only 17 million living Americans had reached their 65th birthdays. Today—thanks in part to advances in health care, education, and financial stability—there are over 40 million older Americans. In 2010, the U.S. Census estimated that there were 9.1 million Older American Veterans of the armed forces and 6.7 million older Americans in the labor force. They also continue to be more active in community life than ever before and are out and about giving back and making a difference in their community.

Help VA commemorate Older Americans Month! Join your neighbors not only to recognize what older citizens bring to our communities, but also to help them continue playing a vital role in weaving a unique and lasting community fabric.

VA urges all staff to work collaboratively to strengthen the services our VA hospitals provide to older Veterans and employees in ways that recognize the changing nature of their needs and provide older adults with more opportunities to make informed choices about their lives. Our efforts can improve the lives of older citizens and help pave the way for future generations. VA reaffirms our country's commitment to older Americans during the month of May and throughout the year.

Jewish American Heritage Month

During May 2012, VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating the 8th official Jewish American Heritage Month. This month commemorates 427 years of Jewish American achievements and contributions to American culture and society. According to the Jewish American Heritage Month Web site, the first Jew to set foot on American soil was Joachim Gaunse (Ganz) in 1585. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter first recognized April 21–18, 1980, as Jewish American Week. This proclamation was renewed by the president every year until 2006. In 2006, the month of May was officially recognized as National Jewish American Month by President George W. Bush. This month acknowledges the achievements and

contributions of Jewish Americans in the United States.

Throughout time, many Jewish Americans have battled discrimination and faced tremendous hardships, yet they continue to flourish despite these challenges. They have persevered and embody the passion and strength of the American spirit. Contributions of Jewish Americans have changed the way Americans live and changed the course of American history. Some famous Jewish Americans include Albert Einstein, Barbra Walters, Jerry Lewis, Shelley Winters, Sammy Davis Jr., Marilyn Monroe, Sandy Koufax, Barbara Streisand, Dustin Hoffman, Goldie Hawn, Harrison Ford, Ben Stiller, Katie Couric, Mila Kunis, and Adam Sandler among thousands of others.

In the realm of battle, according to the Library of Congress (2012), "Fighting Nazi Germany took on special significance for one group of U.S. servicemen in the European Theater." The Library of Congress has developed a collection of stories on Jewish Veterans of WWII, including U.S. Veterans Art Buchwald, Aben S. Caplan, Benjamin Gilman, John H. Horn, Rudolph H. Michaels, Irving Oblas, Milton W. Stern, Tracy Sugarman, Louis L. Weinstein, and Milton Zaslow. To read their stories, visit <http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/ex-war-jewishveterans.html>. According to the Jewish Virtual Library (2012), there have been 18 Jewish Congressional Medal of Honor recipients whose time served ranges from the Civil War to today. VA honors those Jewish American Veterans who made selfless sacrifices by serving in our Nation's Armed Forces.

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 Statistical Abstract data (2012) identified that in 2008 there were approximately 6,500 Jewish Americans, representing 2.1 percent of the total U.S. population. Although data regarding religion is not captured by VA for its employees or for our Nation's Veterans, VA recognizes that many employees and the Veterans they serve are Jewish Americans and embrace and salute them. This month, all employees are encouraged to commemorate Jewish Americans through learning activities, social functions, and programs intended to enlighten individuals about Jewish American history and positive impact on our society. For more information on Jewish American History and events celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month, please visit <http://www.jewishheritagemonth.gov>.

References

Jewish American Heritage Month (2012). *Historical Timeline*. Retrieved April 12, 2012 from <http://www.jewishamericanheritagemonth.us/timeline.aspx#1500>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2012). *The 2012 Statistical Abstract*. Retrieved April 9, 2012 from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population.html>.

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Holocaust Remembrance



FEDERAL INTER-AGENCY HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE PROGRAM

19th Annual Inter-Agency Program Held May 9

Wednesday, May 9, 2012, marked the 19th Annual Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program. The theme for this year's program was "Speaking Out." The program was moderated by Steve Chenevey, Edward R. Murrow and Emmy award-winning journalist and anchor for ABC7/WJLA-TV.

Guest speakers included Stefania Kenigswain Sitbon, who was hidden with 300 Jewish men, women, and children in the empty cages of the Warsaw Zoo; Henry Abraham, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1937 as part of the "Richie Boys", a group of 9,000 mostly Jewish, Germans and Austrians of high IQ and German language skills who were trained in methods of intelligence and psychological warfare at Camp Richie, Maryland, and who collected evidence against Nazi officials for the Nuremberg Trials; and Ernst Floeter, a German Witness who recalls life as the Nazi's came to power in 1933, the horror of Kristallnacht, and what ultimately became of his Jewish neighbors.

The observance program took place at the beautifully-restored Lincoln Theatre in Washington, DC. This program was sponsored by 30 Federal agencies.

Visit <http://holocaustremembrance.org> for more information.

VACO Notes

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Mr. Njagu is also a member of the Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) program and has been designated by the program's leadership as a delegate at their annual AW2 symposium to be an advocate for Wounded Warriors and their families.



Taylor Njagu

He earned Bachelor Degrees in Management and Liberal Studies from the University of Maryland University College and the University of the State of New York. Ms. Njagu also earned Master's Degrees in Human Relations and International Relations from the University of Oklahoma. He is a graduate of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's Resident EO Advisors Course, EEO Specialist Course and EEO Counselors course. Mr. Njagu is also a trained and certified mediator for workplace disputes with the Justice Center of Atlanta.

Among other things, he will be responsible for VA's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Program. For more information, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/lgbt.aspx>.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Training Opportunity

EEOC is the Federal agency responsible for enforcing employment discrimination laws.

The Training Institute provides a wide variety of training programs to help employers understand, prevent and correct discrimination in the workplace. Experience and learn from the authorities on EEO law. Visit <http://www.eeotraining.eeoc.gov> for more information. Here are some upcoming courses:

New Counselor

May 21–25; Alexandria, VA

New Investigator

April 30–May 4; Charlotte, NC

Counselor Refresher

May 15; Washington, DC

Disability Program Manager Basics

May 22–23; Washington, DC

EEO Laws Refresher

May 24; Washington, DC

EEO and HR for Managers

May 30–June 1; Washington, DC

Tribal Consultation

VA Sessions Begin

VA hosted its first tribal consultation focused on providing services to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans in Washington, D.C., on April 5.

"The only way we can fully address the concerns of these Veterans is through a consistent and comprehensive dialogue," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We consider these meetings vital to that effort."

This was the first of four scheduled meetings VA plans to hold in 2012 to address the needs of the American Indian and Alaska Native Veteran population, currently estimated at 200,000. The meetings focused on areas concerning the three major components of VA. Within the Veterans Benefits Administration, the discussion centered on the Native American Direct Loan Program, which enables eligible Veterans to use their VA home loan guaranty benefit on Federal trust land. Included in the topics covered by the Veterans Health Administration was a discussion on how VA can engage tribes in activities related to an agreement with the Indian Health Service. The agreement seeks ways to enhance the health care of American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans through greater collaboration and resource-sharing between both agencies. Finally, the National Cemetery Administration explored ways of increasing awareness of a public law stipulating that grants to tribal organizations will be made in the same manner as grants to states.

"The meeting was productive and allowed everyone involved to provide their unique insights on the issues," said Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs John Garcia. "We think it established a good foundation for progress the rest of this year." *Article originally appeared online at <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2300>.*

MyCareer@VA

Online Career Tool Helps VA with Retention, Employees' Professional Development

VA has created an online tool to help VA employees set their career paths and inform employees on the steps they need to take to achieve those goals, the VA recently said.

VA released MyCareer@VA last fall, but plans to expand the portal to cover additional occupational fields will be launched later this year. The tool currently serves employees in ten occupational fields, covering about 40 percent of all agency employees. Eventually, the portal will include all mission critical occupations, VA said.

"MyCareer@VA is primarily a tool to help our employees to chart out their career at VA and also identify what are the gaps they need to fill in terms of educational retirements, training, rotational assignments or certifications they will need to move from a GS-5 to a GS-15 in HR or acquisition or IT, which are some of the mission critical occupations MyCareer focuses on," said John Sepúlveda, VA's Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, at a conference.

Assistant Secretary Sepúlveda said the portal will help VA retain the highest performing employees.

"If they have a career path, they're on that path, they are getting support from their supervisors and getting the training they need, they will want to stay at VA," he said. "It costs the taxpayers significant dollars whenever there is turnover. We want to keep folks at VA serving our Veterans. We want the most experienced, best trained and most inspired employees serving our Veterans."

MyCareer@VA also helps educate VA employees on how to move up the ranks and what gaps they need to fill, Assistant Secretary Sepúlveda said.

"The idea here is, to the extent that people are able to identify what they need to perform at the highest level of their occupation and get the training, which we would be providing, you have a higher performing employee," he said. *Article originally appeared online at <http://www.fedmanager.com/9-general-news/697-online-career-tool-helps-va-with-retention-employees-professional-development>.*

FAPAC

VA Employee Recognized for Workforce Diversity Efforts

On May 3, 2012, Mr. Thomas Szymanek, Program Specialist, Office of the Chief of Staff, VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System (VA GLAHS), received the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) 2012 Civilian Award for Outstanding Individual Leadership, GS 1-10 category. The award was given in recognition of Mr. Szymanek's significant contributions to the advancement of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in VA. This award demonstrates VA employees commitment to a diverse workforce.

The award was presented at the FAPAC 27th Annual National Leadership Training Conference which was held on April 30–May 4, 2012, at the Grand Hyatt Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia. The FAPAC conference coincided with the Federal government's observance of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. The Conference theme was "Striving for Excellence in Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion."

ODI coordinated VA's support and participation in the FAPAC conference. On Monday, April 30, ODI conducted a Pre-conference VA forum training for VISN 7 Special Emphasis Program Managers and other VA employees. Several VA offices collaborated and committed to supporting the FAPAC conference. The VA Asian Medal of Honor was on display and personnel distributed promotional items and information on VA careers and VALU programs on professional and personal development.

FAPAC is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the interests of over 155,000 civilian and military Asian Pacific American employees in the Federal and District of Columbia governments of all ranks, including GS and SES employees.

For additional information on VA's Asian American Pacific Islander Employment Program, contact Andy Gonzalez at Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov.



Mr. Szymanek (center) and other FAPAC awardees along with FAPAC President, Dr. Kin F. Wong (third from right)

Affirmative Employment

Addressing Low Participation Rates Without Violating the Law

A frequent question from Facility Directors and other senior staff is how to address low participation rates of a race/ethnicity/gender group while following Merit Systems Principles and guarding against Prohibited Personnel Practices. This article explains how affirmative employment works and what Facilities are required to do.

As a Federal agency, VA has an obligation to consider affirmative employment obligations during the recruitment process. This means that the recruitment team and the hiring official must ensure that sufficient outreach was done to ensure that qualified individuals from race/ethnicity/gender groups with low participation rates and people with targeted disabilities are aware of the vacancy and encouraged to apply. If there are any groups with low participation rates at the facility level, simply announcing the position on USAJOBS is not sufficient to bring VA into compliance with the pertinent EEO laws and Executive Orders.

Low participation rates occur when the on board ratio of a group is below their expected participation rate, as measured by their presence in the Relevant Civilian Labor Force. When the applicant pool does not include people from a group that has a low participation rate at the facility, recruitment activities must be expanded to increase the number of applicants from this group. Sometimes the hiring official or other subject matter expert is invited to go to targeted recruitment events to encourage people to apply and provide insight into the job duties and challenges. In some cases, the job announcement will need to be reopened to allow time for additional recruitment efforts. If an agency cannot eliminate low participation rates, it must notify the Office of Personnel Management for assistance. [Continued on page](#)

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Parking

For Employees with Disabilities

VA is very proud of having the second highest ratio of employees with targeted disabilities of the cabinet level agencies. We in VA are fortunate to see firsthand the talent and drive exhibited by our Veterans and employees with disabilities. They are a reminder that people who have severe disabilities can and do contribute to the success of VA. We are working on improving our hiring and retention of individuals with targeted disabilities, including disabled Veterans. One issue that can be a barrier to their employment is a lack of sufficient accessible parking. This article outlines the VA policy regarding parking, which is based on Federal regulations and supersedes any facility policy or union agreement.

When there are a limited number of employee parking spaces, employees with mobility impairments have priority over all other groups, per Title 41 CFR § 102-74.305. Additional handicapped (HC) spaces will have to be created if a facility does not have enough HC parking spaces for the number of employees with mobility impairments who are requesting parking as an accommodation. Facilities may NOT require employees to arrive early in order to get a space. Assigning each space to a specific employee is highly recommended. When an employee requests a space near the building as a reasonable accommodation (and it is approved through the accommodation process), that employee must be provided an assigned space with the shortest route to their work space. This applies to VA facilities and leased facilities that have parking spaces. The Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines specify the size of the space and the access area. The availability of public street parking does not satisfy this requirement if the facility has parking spaces.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has ruled that agencies must provide reasonable accommodations that will enable the employee to perform the essential functions of the position or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment. An assigned parking space close to the building is a valid accommodation for an employee with a mobility impairment.

Per VA Handbook 5975.1 "Processing Reasonable Accommodation Requests from Applicants and Employees," before a request for reasonable accommodation is denied, the National Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator or the Office of General/Regional Counsel in the facility's geographic area MUST be consulted. The Handbook and other information on VA's disability program can be found at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx>. For additional information, contact Christy Compton, National Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator, Outreach and Retention Division, ODI, at Christy.Compton@va.gov.

Accommodation Options

For Employees with Disabilities

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires agencies to provide accommodations to applicants and employees with disabilities as needed to apply for the job, perform the duties of the job, and enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment. VA Handbook 5975.1 "Processing Reasonable Accommodation Requests from Applicants and Employees," provides detailed information. The Handbook and other information on VA's disability program can be found at: <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx>.

Each facility in VA now has a Local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator (LRAC) and an Alternate LRAC. These individuals are available to help process requests. Many requests are simple and can be granted immediately. VA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Department of Defense's Computer/Electronics Accommodation Program (CAP), which provides software and assistive technology at no costs. Only the LRAC or Alternate LRAC may make requests to CAP; it is no longer accepting requests from employees or supervisors.

Items not provided by CAP, and any services needed as an accommodation, must be purchased by the facility. The LRAC can request reimbursement from VA's Centralized Fund, which is managed by ODI. Information about the Fund is also on the Disability Program website. Before purchasing items costing more than \$500, the LRAC should consult with VA's Disability Program Manager at Christy.Compton@va.gov.

Affirmative Employment

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(Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations at Chapter 1, Part 720, subsection 720.204)

While hiring the best qualified individual is always optimal, the decision of who is the best qualified is very subjective. VA hiring officials and Human Resources staff are responsible for ensuring that the selection process, including interviews, does not create a barrier to one or more groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, or disability status. All hiring officials should be aware that interview questions should be directly related to the essential duties of the job or the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the applicant. A best practice is to use the four or five specific criteria listed in the job announcement as interview questions. Examples of topics that should not be raised are ethnicity, race, color, age, marital status, residence, weight, life style, creed, language, and disability status.

Avoiding Disability Complaints

Well-Written Job Announcements Key

One way to avoid disability complaints is to list all essential physical requirements in the job announcement. Stating that the individual “must pass pre-employment examination” or “must meet the physical requirements of the position” is not sufficient. When the physical requirements are not clearly stated, it can lead people who are qualified in terms of education, skills, and experience to apply for the job but not be selected. This creates the appearance of discrimination. Only the physical requirements related to the essential elements may be listed. Non-essential elements can be modified or eliminated if necessary, to accommodate the candidate’s functional limitations.

For example, a position for a Medical Technician is advertised but the announcement does not mention that the job requires bending, stooping, and lifting. When the top rated candidates are interviewed, one is a person who uses a scooter. If, at that point, the hiring official states

that the job requires bending, stooping, and lifting, the applicant may wonder if the hiring official has invented these requirements to avoid hiring someone who uses a scooter.

In another example, an attorney position requires the incumbent to lift heavy case files, but this is not mentioned in the job announcement. After the new hire comes on the job, she discovers how heavy the case files are, and has considerable difficulty lifting them. She develops pain in her wrists and files a Workmen’s Compensation claim and requests an accommodation. There is no way to accommodate the employee because lifting the case files is an essential part of the job. Thus, the only option is to reassign the employee.

In both of these situations, the applicant or employee could file an EEO complaint because the job announcement did not clearly specify the physical requirements of the job. It is strongly recommended that all VA job announcements for any position which requires physical activity specify the activity that is essential. Doing so will reduce the number of applicants with disabilities who perceive discrimination when they are not hired and will avoid placing people into positions for which they do not have the stamina or physical ability. This recommendation also applies to any medical requirements for a position, such as Pharmacists must be able to distinguish colors.

VA has a goal for hiring people with targeted disabilities. The targeted disabilities, as established by the U.S. Equal Employment Commission, are blindness, deafness, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, missing extremities, severe intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, epilepsy, and dwarfism. The Performance Plan of each Senior Executive includes the VA goal, which is that two percent of new hires be individuals with targeted disabilities. VA also has a goal that this group will represent two percent of our workforce. In order to be seen as a fair employer, we must clearly state in our job announcements what is required.

VADC Activity

Biennial Report to Secretary Now Online

The VA Diversity Council (VADC) serves as an independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion. The Council is composed of representatives from each of the Department’s major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders. The VADC’s first biennial report to the Secretary is now available online at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/council>. For more information on the VADC, including meeting agendas and minutes, the roster, and a copy of the charter, visit the Web site above.

Five More Things You Should Know About GINA

In the last issue, we discussed the basics of The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA). GINA prohibits discrimination against employees or applicants for employment based on differences in their DNA that may increase their chances of getting certain diseases. It also prohibits employers from acquiring or using genetic information, including an individual's family medical history, to make decisions related to any terms, conditions, or privileges of employment. Finally, GINA prohibits harassment or reprisal because of an individual's genetic information or that of his/her family. Here are 5 more things you should know about GINA:

Who enforces GINA? The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is responsible for enforcing GINA provisions that relate to employment. If discrimination is found, GINA allows for the same legal remedies that are provided under Title VII. These remedies include reinstatement, hiring, promotion, back pay, compensatory damages, and attorney fees and costs. Punitive damages are not available against public employers, including the VA.

How does GINA define family medical history? Under GINA, your family members include your spouse, children (natural and adopted), siblings and half-siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, grandparents and grandchildren, great- and great-great grandparents and grandchildren, and first cousins and first cousins once removed. Your family medical history includes information concerning any disease or disorder that any of these individuals suffered—whether or not hereditary. For example, GINA protects the fact that my great-great grandfather lost his vision during the Civil War, that my cousin is dyslexic, and that my grandmother died of heart failure!

What if I read in a newspaper obituary that an employee's mother died from colon cancer? Have I violated GINA? No. If a supervisor or manager acquires genetic information about an employee through commercially and publicly available documents, she has not violated GINA. Publicly available documents may include newspapers, periodicals, magazines, books, television, or the Internet. However, this exception does not apply if the employer acquires genetic information from medical databases, court records, or research databases only available to scientists; sources with limited access (e.g., require permission to access from a specific individual); or commercially and publicly available sources that are accessed with the intent to obtain genetic information.

What if I learn about an employee's family medical history on Facebook? Can I use the "commercially and publicly available" exception above to avoid agency liability under GINA? It depends. If the employee has set all of her privacy settings to "friends only" and you were able to access the page because the employee has accepted a "friend request" from you, the answer would be no. However, you could invoke the "inadvertent acquisition" exception. This exception covers instances when a supervisor or manager inadvertently learns about an individual's genetic information by overhearing an office discussion, through receipt of an unsolicited email, or during a casual conversation. Bottom line: Be careful of "friending" co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates!

Would I violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or GINA if when reviewing a video resume, I learned that an applicant is disabled? No. However, you must avoid follow-up questions prior to making a job offer. In regard to GINA, you would not violate the law if you inadvertently acquired genetic information by watching a video resume. For example, you may learn that the applicant selected a career in health care because his mother died of cancer when she was 35 (family medical history). For further information see EEOC Informal Discussion Letter, September 21 2010 (available on the EEOC's website: <http://www.eeoc.gov>). ~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

Resource Rectangle

Disability Training

The Disability Program Manager is available to provide training to facility managers on the VA process for providing reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities (two hours) and training to HR staff and hiring officials on hiring people with disabilities (90 minutes). Training will be via video-conference unless the facility or VISN/Area can provide travel expenses. Please contact Christy.Compton@va.gov to make arrangements.

D&I Online

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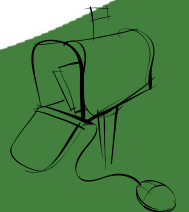
Veterans Health
Administration's Diversity
and Inclusion Community
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GOT NEWS?

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.

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs' diversity and inclusion program is to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and strategic focus on diversity and inclusion as key components of the Department's human resources strategies. Here's a sampling of online tools available at <http://www.diversity.va.gov> that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- ▶ AAPI Heritage Month and other observance resources.
- ▶ Training resources, guides, and reports.
- ▶ Links to professional and community organizations.
- ▶ Best practices for diversity management.



D&I 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 [http://
www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx](http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx).

D&I on Your TV or PC

Diversity News is a monthly video program produced by the VA Central Office Broadcast Center for ODI. Diversity News follows VA News on the VA Knowledge Network, Content Distribution Network channel 2. Programs are also available at [http://www.diversity.va.gov/
products/dn.aspx](http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx).

Calendar

<http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar>

May

Asian American and Pacific Islander
Heritage Month
Jewish American Heritage Month
Older Americans Month

Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust
Remembrance Program
May 9; Washington, DC

<http://holocaustremembrance.org>

Armed Forces Day
May 19

NAACP Leadership 500 Summit
May 24-27; Destin, FL
<http://l500.org>

Memorial Day
May 28

June

Caribbean American Heritage Month
Gay and Lesbian Pride Month

Society of American Indian Government
Employees (SAIGE) Annual Conference
June 4-8; Denver, CO
<http://www.saige.org>

Asian American Government Executives
Network (AAGEN) Leadership
Conference and Banquet
June 7; Arlington, VA
<http://www.aagen.org>

The Conference Board Corporate
Diversity & Inclusion Conference
June 27-28; Chicago, IL
[http://www.conference-board.org/
conferences/
conferencedetail.cfm?
conferenceid=2381](http://www.conference-board.org/conferences/conferencedetail.cfm?conferenceid=2381)

League of United Latin American Citizens
(LULAC) National Convention &
Exposition
June 25-30; Orlando, FL
<http://lulac.org>