



DIVERSITY@WORK

A PUBLICATION OF VA'S OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



VOLUME 9, ISSUE 5

<www.diversity.hr.va.gov/ca/daw.htm>

JULY/AUGUST 2010

COFFEY'S KEYNOTES

Message from the DAS of ODI

Happy July 4th, everyone! As you celebrate Independence Day, please take a moment and thank those who have risked their lives to preserve the liberty we cherish—our military and Nation's Veterans. This date not only marks America's adoption of the Declaration of Independence but it commemorates human rights and equality with that most memorable statement:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

This spirit of equality is certainly poignant this time of year as VA observed LGBT Pride Month in June and will celebrate Women's Equality Day on August 26. I want to thank the Northport VA Medical Center for inviting me to speak at their LGBT event last month. I know other facilities also held programs so please share your events and photos with us! Please e-mail us at <ODI@va.gov>.

We had another successful meeting of the VA Diversity Council, an independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion.

[Continued on page 4.]

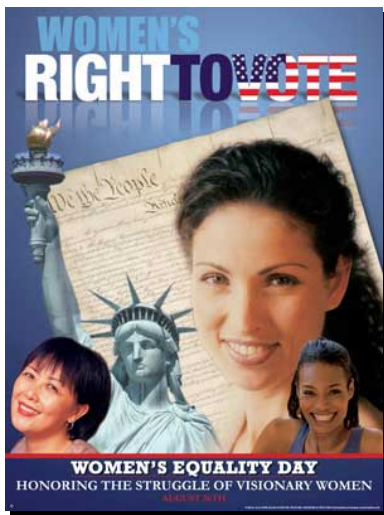
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CELEBRATE!

90th Annual Women's Equality Day Observance

This year we will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the passing of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave American women the right to vote. This amendment was passed on August 26th, 1920 after a 72 year campaign. August 26th was first designated by Congress in 1971 as "Women's Equality Day." Since its designation, every president has honored this event with an annual proclamation. Each president, in his own words, has recognized the long struggle for women's suffrage and supported ongoing efforts towards full equality for women.



On July 13th, 1848, the battle for women's equal rights was launched with the first Women's Convention held in Seneca Falls, New York. During preparations, one of the

leaders of the movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, drafted the "Declaration of Sentiments" framed after the U.S. Declaration of Independence, to address issues effecting women. This document was used as a base to record the various issues women faced, and plans were soon implemented to actively petition the federal and local governments for women's equal rights. This led to a backlash against the women who

contributed to the movement, including violence, mistreatment, and incarceration for their participation. However, their efforts were not in vain and on August 26th, 1920, after 72 years of struggles, women were finally authorized the right to vote.

[Continued on page 6.]

BOOKMARKS

- ▶ **American Veterans for Equal Rights**
<<http://aver.us/aver>>
- ▶ **Diversity Best Practices**
<www.diversitybestpractices.com>
- ▶ **Open for Questions: AAPI Initiative**
<www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/open-questions-aaapi-initiative>
- ▶ **Out & Equal Workplace Advocates**
<www.outandequal.org>
- ▶ **VA Learning University Transformational Leadership Courses**
<<https://www.signup4.net/Public/ap.aspx?EID=VETE12E>>
- ▶ **Women's Bureau**
<www.dol.gov/wb>

Contact information for other diversity-related organizations can be found on the NEW ODI Web site at:
<www.diversity.hr.va.gov/org>

FIELD NOTES

News You Can Use

VA Continues Workforce Recruitment Program Effort

The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) is a nationwide employment resource for Federal and private sector employers to identify qualified temporary and permanent applicants for employment from a variety of fields. The WRP is co-sponsored by the Department of Labor and the Department of Defense. All students participating in the WRP are in good academic standing and are enrolled in either a certificate or a degree program, from the associate degree to the Ph.D. level.

VA placed seven WRP interns in 2010: two at the Cleveland VA Medical Center; two at the VA Medical Center in North Chicago; and one each at the Portland VA Medical Center, the Charleston VA Medical Center, and the Long Beach VA Medical Center.

This year, VA has also been asked to provide the venue for the WRP Summer Reception, which is currently scheduled for Wednesday, July 21, 2010, 1:30–4:30 p.m. in the VA Central Office G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Conference Center, room 230. The event will honor outstanding WRP interns from across the government who are working in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Kathy Martinez, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, and Clarence A. Johnson, Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Plans) and Principal Director, Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity, will be co-hosting the reception. Historically, VA has been a leader in the placement of WRP interns, which is why VA has been asked to provide the venue for the reception.

Welcome, New ODI Employees!

ODI is pleased to introduce new ODI employees Nanese Loza and Trina Faison and intern Elaine Chen from the International Leadership Foundation (ILF)!

ODI is excited to announce the appointment of Ms. Loza, who enters VA as an EEO specialist with ODI’s Outreach and Retention team. She has over 10 years of Federal service, five in EEO affirmative employment planning and analysis, complaints processing, special emphasis programs (SEPs), training, alternative dispute resolution, and outreach. Ms. Loza will be working in the areas of diversity planning and analysis, SEP programs, and technical assistance reviews, as well as other diversity related initiatives. She most recently ventured from the U.S. Department of Education and, prior to that, the U.S. Marine Corps, where she served as an EEO specialist at both. She is a military Veteran for her service in the U.S. Marine Corps and has a strong interest in ensuring our Nation’s Veterans get all the support they need and deserve.

ODI is also excited to announce the appointment of Ms. Faison as an EEO specialist with ODI’s Outreach and Retention team. Ms. Faison has over 20 years of

government service. Prior to joining VA, she was employed with the Department of the Navy, Naval Sea Systems Command Headquarters, as a Program Manager for the Affirmative Employment Program in the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity. Prior to joining Department of Navy, she spent 16 years with the Small Business Administration’s (SBA’s) EEO and Civil Rights Office where she conducted informal EEO counseling, EEO complaint investigations, and preparing acceptance and dismissal letters for allegations of discrimination. Ms. Faison also assisted the SBA in attaining an EEO complaints tracking system and was lead training administrator for that system. She also successfully settled complaint disputes which arose at the agency and prepared the agency’s EEO Complaints 462 Report as well as the agency’s MD-713 and MD-714 before she transferred to the Office of Hearings and Appeals in 2004.

Finally, ODI welcomes Ms. Chen, a rising junior at the University of Pittsburgh, studying to double major in Global Management and Marketing. Ms. Chen hopes to find a career in the field of public relations, marketing, or event planning. Originally from Gaithersburg, Maryland, Ms. Chen moved with her family to Shanghai, China and lived there for ten years. Bilingual in English and Mandarin, she hopes to pursue a career abroad in the future. She believes her two month internship with ODI will help her gain much experience and help determine whether her future will be in the field of government.

Welcome, new ODI intern and employees!

Farewell

ODI wishes David Walton, national EEO manager on ODI’s Outreach and Retention team, a fond farewell! He has accepted a new position with the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bringing to a close an 18-year VA career. Mr. Walton joined ODI in 2005 as the national EEO manager for people with disabilities. He will serve as a human resources specialist working in the reasonable accommodation program in APHIS’ Workplace Solutions Branch, helping to process accommodation requests, as well as providing training and guidance to managers and supervisors. Mr. Walton will be missed and his contributions to VA will not be forgotten! For questions regarding Mr. Walton’s programs, contact Tinisha Agramonte, Director of Outreach and Retention in ODI, at <Tinisha.Agramonte@va.gov> or Christy Compton, National Disability Program Manager, at <Christy.Compton@va.gov> or (202) 461-4037.

For a complete list of contact information for ODI’s various programs, visit the ODI Web site at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/contactus.htm>. ■

THE COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY PROGRAM

A Case Study in the Effective Use of the Schedule A Special Hiring Authority

Since September 2008, Jim Gilbert, a vocational rehabilitation specialist in the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program working under the direct supervision of Ken Weber, CWT program manager at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Medical Center, has successfully placed 32 Veterans in gainful, permanent employment utilizing Schedule A Excepted Service Hiring Authority.

At Hines, the CWT program staff work closely with Veterans during their time in “transitional work experience” (TWE), addressing issues related to barriers to employment—such as poor work history, relapse prevention, and re-learning positive work behavior. This is accomplished through the use of behavior modification and motivational interviewing. Additionally, CWT program staff assist Veterans with developing resumes, conduct mock interviews, and closely monitor participants’ behavior in the workplace. In one case, CWT program staff were able to facilitate a job sharing agreement for two people with disabilities who were interested in working on a part-time basis.

Advocacy

Fostering a positive working relationship with service line chiefs, immediate supervisors, and hiring managers is a critical component to the success that has been achieved at Hines. CWT clients are encouraged to exhibit work behaviors that make them stand out above the rest. For example, if there is idle time, ask if there is something to do; don’t take advantage of excessive breaks; and be on time and always let your supervisor know where you are.

CWT staff follow up with worksite managers on a regular basis, and supervisors are requested to provide periodic performance appraisals on each participant. If an appraisal comes back with high scores, CWT staff seize the opportunity to contact the hiring manager and explain to them what Schedule A is, how it can meet immediate hiring needs, and how it benefits both the service line and the Veteran.

Meeting Minimum Qualifications for Job Posting

In some cases, a Veteran lacks the experience required to meet minimum qualifications to apply for a posted job and to be considered for Schedule A. In some cases, Veterans are encouraged to volunteer to work at the hospital while continuing to search for gainful employment. This is usually reserved for a candidate the service line wants but who lacks a few months experience. The time in CWT and a few extra months volunteering meets the one year experience requirement. When minimum qualifications are met, the application process begins.

Suitability for Federal Employment

Despite positive changes made in their lives, many of the CWT Veterans—particularly those with mental health or substance abuse issues—have backgrounds that raise legitimate concerns related to their suitability for Federal employment. To date, CWT staff have been successful on all three applications in which suitability for employment was an issue following selection. Fortunately, CWT staff were able to convince the suitability officer that past behavior and actions were symptoms of undiagnosed and untreated conditions. In one case, CWT staff assisted the Veteran by providing a summary of multidisciplinary treatments received through VA as proof of positive changes made in the Veteran’s life, and by requesting that past behaviors be viewed as symptoms that have been or are currently being addressed.

For more information on the Compensated Work Therapy program at the Hines VA Medical Center, contact Jim Gilbert at <James.Gilbert@va.gov>. ■

POLICY ALERT

Subject: Increase to the aggregate pay limitation for Title 38 Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs)
Effective April 19, 2010, the aggregate pay limitation for Title 38 CRNAs was increased from the rate for Level 1 of the Executive Schedule to the rate for the Vice President of the United States, which is currently \$230,700. In addition, this policy revision updates the table provided in VA Handbook 5007, part VII, chapter 2 to indicate specific types of pay that do and do not count towards the aggregate limit on compensation.

The basic pay limitation for CRNAs is not changing and remains capped at Level V of the Executive Schedule which is currently \$145,700.

The policy revision will be updated on the OHRM Web site: <<http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm>>. ■

COFFEY'S KEYNOTES

Continued from Page 1

The Council not only comprises executive level representatives from each of the Department's major organizations and stakeholders, but now also includes representatives from each of VA's five major unions and also from VA's affinity (employee resource) groups. You can view a complete roster online at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/council/index.htm>.

I'm also happy to report that VA has launched its Human Capital Investment Plan (HCIP) under the new moniker of ADVANCE. ADVANCE is a key strategy in the Secretary's transformation initiative aimed at "Transforming Potential into Performance" in our workforce. ODI is proud to own three of these initiatives: the centralized funding for diversity-focused internships, centralized funding for reasonable accommodations, and diversity and inclusion training. ODI brought in 57 diverse student interns and has already funded several accommodations for people with disabilities under ADVANCE. You can read more about these initiatives [below](#) and on [page 7](#).

Finally, I am proud to announce that VA was featured as a "model" for Federal agencies in the lead article of the July 10 issue of the Federal EEO Advisor entitled "VA's vision for diversity, inclusion to serve as model for agencies." I had the privilege of being interviewed by LRP Publications, which published the article in its Federal EEO Advisor and on its *cyberFeds* Web site, when I had the opportunity to share some of VA's diversity and inclusion best practices. Among other things, we discussed VA's being one of the first cabinet-level agencies to develop and implement a separate strategic plan focused on workforce diversity and inclusion, and our recently issued Best Practices in Recruitment Outreach and Selection Processes Guide. I was proud to showcase some of VA's cutting edge diversity and inclusion initiatives and share our vision with other Federal agencies in this arena. ~Georgia Coffey■



Georgia Coffey (third from right) at Northport VAMC.



Georgia Coffey (far right) with participants at the VACO LGBT Pride Month observance.
Read more on [page 5](#).

VA LAUNCHES ADVANCE

Transforming Potential into Performance

To advance the lives of the Veterans VA serves, those who serve them must advance as well. All VA employees—from those who serve in VA's 153 hospitals across the country to those who process the wide variety of benefits claims nationwide and everyone in between—must have the latest tools, most up-to-date training, and best support to serve our Nation's Veterans, their families, and survivors the very best they possibly can.

ADVANCE, a new program launched by VA, is an unprecedented, long-term investment in the professional and personal development of each VA employee nationwide. ADVANCE will provide every VA employee, regardless of career level, the very tools, training, and support necessary to advance their careers and improve service to Veterans.

ADVANCE is about commitment. It began with President Barack Obama charging Secretary Eric Shinseki with transforming the VA into a 21st century organization, and it continued with the Secretary's declaration that VA's commitment to the employee as an individual is not merely important, but a strategic goal for transforming the VA.

ADVANCE is about resources. ADVANCE is here to offer employees a wide-range of training programs and professional services that will allow employees to do their job the best they can and to advance their career within VA, the second largest agency in the country.

For more information on ADVANCE, visit <<http://vaww.va.gov/hradmin>>.■

ADVANCE
TRANSFORMING POTENTIAL INTO PERFORMANCE

LGBT PROGRAM UPDATES

Working to Build a More Inclusive VA

New Guidance Regarding Same-Sex Domestic Partners

In a recent memo to the heads of executive departments and agencies (<www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-memorandum-extension-benefits-same-sex-domestic-partners-federal-emplo>), President Barack Obama directed agencies to immediately take action to extend a host of benefits to the same-sex domestic partners of agency employees and their children. These benefits include:

- Identifying children of same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees to be included in the definition of “child” and are able to receive subsidies from Federal child care and child care services if necessary.
- Identifying same-sex partners and children of Federal employees to be qualified as “family members” and be seen as dependents of the employee for purposes of evacuation payments.
- Allowing a Federal retiree’s same-sex domestic partner to have insurable interest.
- Amending its guidance on implementing former President Clinton’s April 11, 1997 memorandum on “Expanded Family and Medical Leave Policies” to specify that 24 hours of unpaid leave are made available to Federal employees for family medical purposes, school activities, etc, to meet needs of their same-sex domestic partner and children.
- Wanting the Administration of General Services to take appropriate action to include same-sex domestic partners and children of same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees to appear in the Federal Travel Regulations, 41 C.F.R. Chs. 300-304 so that they can obtain the full benefits available to them under specific law.

In that memo, President Obama also directed John Berry, Director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), to issue guidance to ensure consistent and appropriate implementation of his memo. That guidance, which can be viewed at <www.chcoc.gov/transmittals/TransmittalDetails.aspx?TransmittalID=2982>, specified that the following benefits also be made available to same-sex domestic partners to the same extent that such benefits are available to spouses (and their children):

- Credit union membership;
- Access to fitness facilities;
- Hardship transfers to maintain or improve the health of a domestic partner equal to that of a spouse;
- Planning and counseling services;
- Family assistance services;
- Family and morale/wellness/recreation (MWR) events;
- Access to medical treatment;
- Access to lodging or allowances;
- Joint consideration of transfers; and
- Accidental death and dismemberment insurance.

Sexual Orientation and VA Policy

Although VA’s human resources directives and handbooks will be reviewed to identify necessary revisions and then those policies will be updated accordingly, Executive Order 13087 presently prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation in the Federal government.

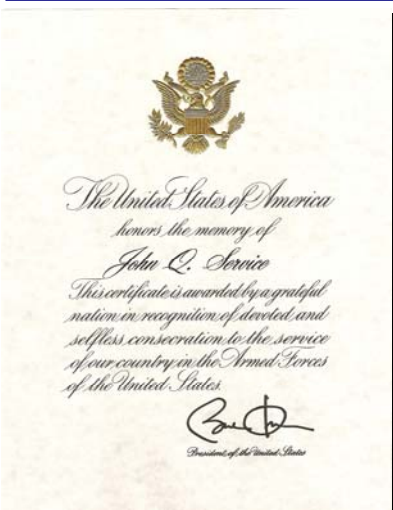
VA is also updating its EEO, Diversity, and No FEAR (Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act) Policy statement to include VA’s new process for filing EEO complaints based on sexual orientation, a procedure which was described in a May 13, 2010, memo from VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. VA defines sexual orientation as “homosexuality, bisexuality, or heterosexuality, whether such orientation is actual or perceived, and includes association with another individual of a particular sexual orientation.” Previously, VA’s Office of Resolution Management processed complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation through an informal counseling stage. Effective May 13, 2010, however, complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation that meet the appropriate requirements will be processed through formal investigation as outlined in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulation 29 C.F.R. 1614.

VACO’s LGBT Pride Month Observance

In light of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Pride Month, ODI hosted VA Central Office’s (VACO’s) Second Annual Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) observance on Wednesday, June 23, 2010, from 8:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m., in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center. The event was also broadcast live on the VA Knowledge Network and will continue to be aired periodically. The theme for this year’s VACO observance was “The Way Forward, Helping to Build a More Inclusive VA.” Speakers included the Honorable Tammy Baldwin of the U.S. House of Representatives; Michelle Zavos, Civil Rights activist and family law advocate; Tona Brown, Musician and Equal Rights Advocate; and Maurice Dorsey, National Program Leader for Public Policy, U.S. Department of Agriculture. For more information about VA’s LGBT program, contact Durodgio Peterson, LGBT Coordinator, at <Durodgio.Peterson@va.gov> or (202) 461-4034. ■

MEMORIAL CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Presidential Memorial Certificate Program Addresses Needs of a Veteran's Unsighted Spouse



Recently, a funeral home while making burial headstone and marker arrangements for an Honorably discharged deceased veteran contacted the Presidential Memorial Certificate program (PMC) requesting a certificate for the Veteran's wife.

The funeral home identified that the wife was unsighted and asked if it were possible to provide the certificate in Braille. The Program Manager for the PMC Unit, James Flanagan, did some research and found that this had never been done by the PMC Unit before. He then started contacting several private contractors to identify available sources for this need. Unfortunately, no print contractor that he was able to find seemed to be able to produce the certificate in Braille at a cost that wasn't prohibitive. The Printing Office for VA Central Office (VACO) was also involved and researched the possibility of any Government Printing Office vendors under contract who could meet this need. Again, this effort fell short.

The VA Section 508 Program Office at VACO possessed a printer that was able to produce documents in Braille. With this information, Mr. Flanagan contacted Terri Bean in the Section 508 office. With her help and with the support and encouragement of her supervisor Robert Volck, Mr. Flanagan was able to provide them with the paper stock used for the PMC so that they could test out the application using their equipment. The testing proved very successful.

Mr. Flanagan was then able to bring a sample document to the National Cemetery Administration senior leadership for review and approval to distribute the document to the Veterans' loved ones. It was also decided that two separate documents would be provided to the Veterans' family which were: a printed copy without Braille for the sighted family members of the family and the full certificate in Braille without print for the unsighted spouse.

By not only dedicating recognition to passed Veterans, but also attending to the needs of their families, the Presidential Memorial Certificate program continues to uphold the VA motto: "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." ■



90TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY OBSERVANCE

Continued from Page 1

Women's Equality Day today is an important and unique observance because it brings together women of all races, national origins, colors, economic classes, educational levels, professions, and ages for one unified cause: to honor those who have fought for equality for women today and to ensure women are treated equally in the present and future. Throughout history, women have fought fiercely for rights and privileges and because of their efforts, women today reap the benefits. Some of those benefits include, but are certainly not limited to: choosing their professions, handling their own finances, owning their own land, attaining education degrees and certificates, obtaining licenses, managing their own careers, earning their own pensions, and having the right to vote. Today, efforts continue to ensure women are treated equitably.

VA continuously strives to ensure women are treated equally in our workforce and as Veterans who are clients. This year, women account for 59.87 percent of the VA workforce. Women in permanent positions have grown from 59.31 percent in 2008 to 59.79 percent in 2009. However, VA still has work to do because the VA women's workforce remains below the Federal average of 64.6 percent. On a positive note, women in VA's leadership pipeline (GS-12 through GS-14) have increased from 51.9 percent in 2008 to 53.19 percent in 2009. Women in Senior Executive Service (SES) have increased from 30.60 percent in 2008 to 33.75 percent in 2009. The number of women Veterans has also increased from 23.67 percent in 2008 to 24.23 percent in 2009.

For more information on VA's Federal Women's Program, contact Nanese Loza at (202) 461-4049 or Nanese.Loza@va.gov. ■

EEO, DIVERSITY & CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TRAINING

Mandated Training for Senior Executives, Managers and Supervisors

VA is committed to ensuring equal employment opportunity (EEO), promoting diversity and inclusion, and resolving workplace conflict constructively in order to maintain a high-performing workforce in service to our Nation's Veterans. In a memorandum dated May 19, 2010, from the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, John U. Sepúlveda, all VA managers, supervisors, and Senior Executive Service (SES) members were mandated to receive diversity and inclusion, EEO compliance, reasonable accommodation, and conflict management training on a biennial basis.

ODI, in collaboration with the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) and the VA Learning University, designed and developed a course of instruction to meet VA's training and development obligation to employees. This course presents core concepts, principles, and VA policy, and will be available for managers and supervisors online using VA's Learning Management System in September 2010. Additional communications about this training is forthcoming.

Assistant Secretary Sepúlveda has made it mandatory that VA SES members complete this training requirement not later than September 30, 2010. For VA SES members, delivery of this training is being expedited through custom face-to-face presentations on August 26-27, 2010, at the site of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Senior Leadership Conference (SLC) and on September 15, 2010, (repeated on September 16) at the Westin Alexandria Hotel in the Washington DC area. ODI and ORM will conduct the required eight hours of face-to-face training. The presentations at VHA SMC will be custom to VHA, and therefore, it is more meaningful to VHA SES and Title 38 executives that they participate in the August session.

To sustain a high-performing organization in service to our Veterans, it is imperative that VA equips its leaders with the knowledge and tools necessary to meet their EEO and diversity responsibilities and to set new standards for delivery of customer care, as outlined in Transformation 21 and the Human Capital Investment Plan. The workplace environment in which VA operates and the customer we serve are dynamic, continually evolving, and much more diverse. VA must be culturally competent in the design, development, and delivery of products and services to meet emerging customer needs and expectations. Further, it is a matter of public trust that VA be a responsible steward of the resources entrusted to VA employees as we continue to transform VA into a high-performing 21st century organization. For more information about this training, contact James Blockwood at <James.Blockwood@va.gov>.■

NEW CENTRALIZED FUNDING FOR ACCOMMODATIONS

Funds for Reasonable Accommodations for Employees with Disabilities Now Available!

VA Administrations and Central Staff Offices are encouraged to utilize the new centralized funding for reasonable accommodations for VA employees with disabilities, a new ADVANCE initiative administered by VA's ODI. This initiative will help VA meet its obligation to advance, retain, and provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities, particularly those with targeted disabilities. The fund will be used to reimburse offices that have paid for any approved reasonable accommodation requests from May 2010 to the end of this fiscal year. It will also be 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. Although the employee's office must pay for the cost of the training, this fund will provide reimbursement for any accommodations needed to attend the training.

As of June 30, ODI has paid out \$33,834 in reimbursements for various accommodations including two amplified stethoscopes, an air purifier, several sign language interpreter service periods, and a wheelchair lift. The fund will also be used to reimburse the cost of a scooter for an employee who has to walk long distances on the job and cab fare for an employee to attend training not being held on a VA campus.

Funds will be awarded on a first come, first serve basis. Approval will be determined at the VA headquarters level. Requests for reimbursement for approved reasonable accommodations and training for VA employees with disabilities may be made now through September 20, 2010. Funding is also expected to be made available in fiscal year 2011 and beyond. To request reimbursement or for additional information about the Centralized Funding for Reasonable Accommodations, contact Christy Compton, VA Disability Program Manager, ODI, at <Christy.Compton@va.gov> or (202) 461-4037.

The fund will not be used to reimburse the cost of ramps and other physical facility modifications; the facility engineer should be contacted if the workplace is not accessible. The fund is meant to cover accommodations not provided by DoD's Computer Assistance Program (CAP). Examples of CAP accommodations include software that reads electronic text, allows people to speak instead of typing, predicts words, has text-to-speech capabilities, or registers only the key that is hit the hardest if more than one key is hit at the same time. CAP also provides hardware such as alternative keyboards, keyboard trays, monitor arms and risers, document holders, etc. In addition, CAP provides assistive listening devices, signal devices for the phone, amplifiers and headsets. For more information, please see CAP's website at <www.tricare.mil/cap/index.cfm>.■

WHITE HOUSE INITIATIVE ON AAPI

President Obama Signs E.O. Reestablishing Program

On October 14, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Executive Order reestablishing the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). The initiative, co-chaired by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, is housed within the U.S. Department of Education, and led by Executive Director Kiran Ahuja. The initiative works to improve the quality of life and opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by facilitating increased access to and participation in Federal programs where they remain underserved.

The Executive Order also established the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the Federal Interagency Working Group. Working in conjunction, the Commission and Federal Interagency Working Group are comprised of individuals, executive branch departments, agencies, and offices representing a broad spectrum of fields and programs impacting Asian Americans and Pacific Islander communities.

The Initiative seeks to highlight both the tremendous unmet needs in the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities as well as the dynamic community assets that can be leveraged to meet many of those needs. The Initiative focuses on crosscutting priority areas that may reach across all issue areas and agencies, including, for example, advancing research, data collection, analysis and dissemination for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and ensuring access, especially linguistic access and cultural competence, for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and encouraging Asian American and Pacific Islander involvement in public service and civic engagement opportunities.

This historic Executive Order initiates another avenue of access to the Federal government for Asian American and Pacific Islander communities and affirms President Obama's commitment to Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. For more information on the Initiative, visit <www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/asian-americans-initiative>. For more information on VA's AAPI Program, contact Nanese Loza at (202) 461-4049 or <Nanese.Loza@va.gov>.■

COMPLIANCE CORNER

Spotlight on OEDCA: Employee's involuntary retirement violated the Rehabilitation Act

Ms. C, a Program Support Assistant, was an employee of the VA for over 20 years. At the time of her complaint, she suffered from bone degeneration and osteoporosis and was a qualified individual with a disability. Early in January 2008, Ms. C underwent left hip replacement surgery and did not return to work until April 2008. In May 2008, she requested 10 to 12 weeks of Leave Without Pay (LWOP) to undergo and recuperate from right hip replacement surgery. Her request was denied because she had exhausted all of her accumulated leave and all benefits available to her under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Ms. C's second level supervisor, Dr. J, maintained that her right hip surgery was elective and that she had abused her leave in the past. The record established, however, that Ms. C's requests for leave had always been granted and she had never been counseled about any leave abuse issues. Ms. C's first level supervisor, Ms. W, maintained that her absence for 10 to 12 weeks would cause the VA undue hardship because Ms. C performed a critical position providing data support and it was necessary to have a full time person providing the function.

Ms. C alleged that the Friday before her scheduled surgery Dr. J gave her three options when he advised her that her request for LWOP would be denied. According to Ms. C, he told her that she could continue working and earn enough leave to take off the 10 to 12 weeks required for surgery, she could proceed with the surgery and be considered AWOL and possibly face termination, or she could retire and have the surgery. Ms. C, who suffered from constant pain, elected to retire.

The Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA) found that Ms. C's request for LWOP was a request for reasonable accommodation that was denied by the VA. OEDCA further determined that the VA violated provisions of the Rehabilitation Act when it failed to engage Ms. C in an interactive process to determine her entitlement to a reasonable accommodation. As a result, the VA gave the complainant no choice but to retire. Her involuntary retirement was found to be a constructive discharge based on her disability.

BOTTOM LINE: A request for LWOP may be construed as a request for reasonable accommodation and cannot be summarily denied. In this case, management should have immediately engaged Ms. C in an interactive process to determine whether or not she was entitled to a reasonable accommodation and what that effective accommodation might have been. Instead, the interactive process was ignored and her request for reasonable accommodation was denied by categorizing her surgery as "elective" without any medical document to support that categorization.

~Maxanne Witkin, Director, OEDCA■

Diversity@Work

is published by the
Office of Diversity & Inclusion,
a program office within
VA's Office of Human
Resources & Administration.
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<www.diversity.hr.va.gov>
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OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Under Secretary for Health
Diversity Advisory Board
<[vaww1.va.gov/
vhadiversity](http://vaww1.va.gov/vhadiversity)>

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

VA's Office of Resolution
Management
<www.va.gov/orm>

VA's Office of Human
Resources Management
<www.va.gov/ohrm>

GOT NEWS?

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

ODI ON THE INTERNET <www.diversity.hr.va.gov>



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 that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- ▶ Women's Equality Day 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 us at <odi@va.gov> with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWSLINK in the subject line. You can find a sample of *NewsLink* on the ODI Web site at this address: <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/ca/newslink.htm>.

ODI ON YOUR TV SCREEN (OR PC MONITOR)

Diversity News is a monthly video program produced by the VACO Broadcasting Center for ODI. *Diversity News* follows *VA News* on VAKN channel 2. The programs are also placed on the ODI Web site at: <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/ca/diversitynews.htm>. The July 2010 edition focuses on how to use employee survey data to improve organizational effectiveness and the August 2010 edition focuses on corporate social responsibility.

FROM THE 2010 DIVERSITY CALENDAR

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

JULY

Independence Day
July 4

NAACP Annual Convention
July 10–15; Kansas City, MO
<www.naacp.org>

**Federally Employed Women
National Training Program**
July 12–16; New Orleans, LA
<www.fewntp.org>

**League of United Latin American Citizens
Annual National Convention and Exposition**
July 12–17; Albuquerque, NM
<www.lulac.org>

**Veteran Small Business
Conference and Exposition**
July 19–22; Las Vegas, NV
<www.nationalveteransconference.com>

**National Conference of the
American GI Forum**
July 21–24; Las Vegas, NV
<<http://www.implanners.com/AGIF2010>>

**National Urban League
Centennial Conference**
July 28–31; Washington, DC
<www.nul.org>

**Disabled American Veterans
National Convention**
July 31–August 3; Atlanta, GA
<www.dav.org>

AUGUST
American Veterans National Convention
August 7–14; Louisville, KY
<www.amvets.org>

**Annual Federal Dispute Resolution
Conference**
August 9–12; Atlanta, GA
<www.fdrconferences.org>

**Blacks in Government
Annual National Training Conference**
August 16–20; Kansas City, MO
<www.bignet.org>

Women's Equality Day
August 26

**Asian MBA Leadership Conference and
Career Expo**
August 26–28; New York City
<www.asianmba.org>