



Diversity@Work

VOLUME II, ISSUE I NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2011

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< [HTTP://WWW.DIVERSITY.VA.GOV/PRODUCTS/DAW.ASPX](http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/daw.aspx) >

Message from the DAS

It is a great new day in diversity and inclusion! I am pleased to announce that the Office of Personnel Management has issued the Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, which outlines the implementation of the President's Executive Order 13583 on Establishing a Coordinated Government-Wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce, and Guidance for Agency-Specific Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans. These documents, available at <www.opm.gov/diversityandinclusion/index.aspx>, incorporate recommendations from stakeholders with expertise in the areas of diversity and inclusion, equal employment opportunity, and organizational change. VA must issue its own revised Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan within 120 days of the publication of the government-wide plan. Look for this shortly!

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) was proud to join the Office of Resolution Management and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in recognizing the recipients of the Second Annual Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence and Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards at a ceremony held at the end of October. Congratulations to all of the award recipients! Read more about that wonderful ceremony hosted by Secretary Eric K. Shinseki beginning on page 11.

Speaking of awards, VA earned recognition from both the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) CONNECT for VA's employment practices of college students and graduates of these programs. [**Continued on the following page.**]

Commemorate!

NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

VA is proud to join the Nation in commemorating National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month during the month of November. This year's theme is "Service, Honor, Respect: Strengthening Our Cultures and Communities." Native Americans have contributed immeasurably to our country and our heritage, distinguishing themselves as scholars, artists, entrepreneurs, and leaders in all aspects of our society. They



National American Indian Heritage Month
Service, Honor, Respect: Strengthening Our Cultures and Communities
November

have also served in the United States Armed Forces with honor and distinction, defending the security of our Nation with their lives. Their courage, determination, and fighting spirit were recognized by American military leaders as early as the 18th century.

American Indian soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen have fought heroically in all of this century's wars and armed conflicts. They have not only been formally recognized for their bravery through military decoration but through anecdotal observation as well. More important, however, is the warrior's spiritual strength and the strong sense of inner spirituality, which is also a part of the Indian character. [**Continued on page 9.**]

BOOKMARKS

VA LEARNING UNIVERSITY
<www.valu.va.gov>

VANTAGE POINT
(VA'S OFFICIAL BLOG)
<www.blogs.va.gov/Vantage>

WORKLIFE4YOU
<www.worklife4you.com/va>

TALENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
<www.tms.va.gov>

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

Message from the DAS (cont. from page 1)

You can read more about these accolades on pages 6 and 8.

Also, I want to personally congratulate the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, South Carolina, which was named employer of the year by the South Carolina Commission for the Blind.

Please join me, VA, and the Nation in observing National Native American Heritage Month this November. American Indians and Alaska Natives have contributed so much to our Nation's culture. I am proud to commemorate these people and their culture.

For those who didn't know, the day before Veterans Day, November 10, is the birthday of the United States Marine Corps. In honor of this special occasion, ODI's three wonderful Marine Veterans—Joe Frazier, John Fuller, and Nanese Loza—held a moving ceremony for the ODI staff in honor of the anniversary of the founding of the Marine Corps. Mr. Frazier served three years in the Active Marine Corps and three years in the Marine Corps Reserve. He was promoted meritoriously from Private First Class to Sergeant before his 20th birthday! Mr. Frazier performed duties as an infantryman, paratrooper, supply clerk, and courier. He was awarded Meritorious Mast for service about the USS Iwo Jima and was named Marine of the Year while serving at New River Air Station. Mr. Fuller enlisted in the US Marine Corps on December 12, 1971, graduating from Marine Boot Camp San Diego on March 17, 1972. He was trained in the military specialties of Field Artillery and Military Police, serving six years and receiving an Honorable Discharge on December 11, 1977, with the rank of Sergeant. Ms. Loza served in the United States Marine Corps from 2000–2004. Her duty stations included Marine Corps Base 29 in Palms, California, Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan, and Headquarters Marine Corps in Arlington, Virginia. She was meritoriously promoted to her last two ranks (Lance Corporal and Corporal) based on her stellar demonstration to effectively discharge the duties and responsibilities of the next higher grade.

I know the entire ODI family joins me in thanking them and all of our Nation's Veterans for their exemplary service to our country and their immeasurable contributions and sacrifices. ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion



ODI's Marines: Nanese Loza (L), Joe Frazier (R), and John Fuller (C)

VACO Notes

VACO NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

The VA Central Office (VACO) Human Resources (HR) Service Department employee orientation is part of a biweekly onboarding process where new employees are introduced to VA. This process is a joint effort between VACO HR, the Inspector General's Office, the VA WorkLife Program Office, the Employee Assistance Program, and ODI—as well as other partnering organizations with VACO. VACO HR Office generally introduces the employee to general information regarding topics including benefits and organizational policies and procedure that apply to all employees. Carolyn R. Williams, Diversity Training Specialist, attends the orientation on behalf of ODI and presents an abbreviated briefing on the mission, visions, and goals of ODI and on VA's commitment to recognize and appreciate the variety of characteristics that makes each of us unique. In addition, Ms. Williams presents each attendee with a copy of the 2011 Secretary's EEO, Diversity, and No Fear Policy Statement, which emphasizes that VA promotes and supports the complementary principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace. For more information, email <Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov>.

VACO NEW SUPERVISORY TRAINING PROGRAM

The VA Central Office (VACO) Human Resources (HR) Service on a quarterly basis conducts new supervisory training that focuses on VA's mission, vision, and values, and the essential role that supervisors play in communicating and executing the Department's message and goals. VA Directive 5015 and 5 CFR 412 require that all employees who are appointed as supervisors, managers, or executives are provided leadership training appropriate to their position. The VACO 5-day supervisory training is designed to enhance participants' current supervisory skills related to effective communication, conflict management, employee development, diversity and inclusion, and other HR management functions. The ODI module that is presented by Carolyn R. Williams, Diversity Training Specialist, focuses on the business case and performance advantages associated with workforce diversity and inclusion. The module also discusses best practices for managers and supervisors in creating an inclusive work environment and raises awareness on the importance of cultural competency in the workplace.

[Continued on the following page.]

VACO Notes (cont. from previous page)

WELCOME, NEW ODI EMPLOYEE!



Arlene Gonzalez

Arlene J. Gonzalez has been selected to serve as a Diversity Program Manager in ODI. In this capacity, she serves as key advisor to the Director of Outreach and Retention on matters related to the Hispanic Employment Program, Management Directive 715, and other related diversity and inclusion initiatives. Ms. Gonzalez has more than 20 years in the field of equal employment opportunity in the Federal government.

Prior to joining VA, Ms. Gonzalez worked with the U.S. Coast Guard as Division Chief of Policy where she managed Title VI and Title VII programs—including the Equal Opportunity Review Program, Special Emphasis Programs, Affirmative Employment Program, the Awards Program, the Partnership in Education Program, and the Training Program (including residential training at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute). She has worked with the Department of the Army at Fort Stewart, Georgia, and with the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA), in Washington, D.C. While at Labor, she served as Deputy Regional Director for the Office of Job Corps for the Southeast Region, and also as National Equal Employment Opportunity Director for ETA.

Ms. Gonzalez has served as a member of the White House Committee for Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. She has also represented the Coast Guard on the Department of Homeland Security's Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Council, the Gay/Lesbian/Bi-Sexual/Transgender Committee, and the Foreign Language/Limited English Proficiency Task Force.

Ms. Gonzalez has a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Georgia Southern University and a Bachelor's Degree in Human Resource Management.

FAREWELL!

ODI would like to bid Margaret Mele, ODI's WRP intern, a fond farewell. Ms. Mele worked on projects for the Disability Program and delivered finished products that reflected knowledge and skills that were well above her pay level. She was selected because she is working on a minor in Disability Studies at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. Ms. Mele was so productive that ODI extended her employment by an additional three months. An excellent writer, she wrote articles for the *Diversity@Work* newsletter, detailed e-mails to Human Resources and Equal Employment Opportunity staff explaining the accommodation process, and various memoranda. She participated in the planning of VA Central Office Disability Employment Awareness Month events. She used her knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act to update the VA Handbook on Processing Requests for Reasonable Accommodation. She also updated a PowerPoint training presentation, provided considerable feedback to contractors on their proposed training manual for the Reasonable Accommodations Tracking System, and edited the cover memorandum for the SF 256 "Self Identification of Disability." ODI is hopeful that Ms. Mele will be able to return next summer!

Field Notes

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 (VACO) 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 November 2011 edition focuses on the Secretary's Second Annual Alternative Dispute Resolution and Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Award Ceremony. (For more information, see the article on page 11.) The December edition focuses on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Diversity News is available both on the internal VA Knowledge Network and on ODI's Web site. To view current and past episodes, visit <www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>. [Continued on the following page.]

Field Notes (cont. from previous page)

NEW HR&A INTRANET SITE

The Office of Human Resources and Administration (HR&A) launched a new, improved intranet site. At this site, you can find useful information and links to news, information, forms, and other helpful resources, policies, and programs designed to support employee progress within VA.

The site includes resources for:

- Pay
- Benefits
- Leave
- Career Development
- New Employee Resources
- Managing Workplace Disputes
- Jobs Being Recruited Now
- Tele-working
- Transit Benefits
- ...and many more!

For the Web site address, email <ODI@va.gov>.



MYCAREER@VA

MyCareer@VA has arrived. VA employees now have access to the innovative career development tools and resources needed to take control their future and map long-term career path within VA at <www.MyCareerAtVA.VA.gov>. Deputy Secretary W. Scott Gould and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources & Administration John U. Sepúlveda hosted a formal launch ceremony to introduce MyCareer@VA and its one-of-a-kind career development tools and resources that are unparalleled across the Federal government.

MyCareer@VA is designed to allow employees to build a long-term career path using a four-step career planning process, match work preferences and preferred work environment to VA jobs, view side-by-side comparisons of job requirements for occupations, and move seamlessly between MyCareer@VA and other career development resources.

SECTION 508 TRAINING COMING DECEMBER 6

Learn more about VA's Section 508 Program Office and how it works to ensure that Electronic Information Technology (EIT) products developed, procured, maintained, or used by VA are Section 508 conformant. The class will provide an overview of the law and its application to EIT including the technical, functional, and documentation/support standards surrounding Section 508 compliance. If you develop any of the following or 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.

"General Section 508 Training," is scheduled for 2:30–4:40 p.m. EST, Tuesday, December 6, 2011, at VA Central Office in Conference Room 730. Seating is limited; however, the class will also be available via VANTS and Live Meeting. Live Meeting Training will be captioned. Contact Vicki Leon, Office of Information Technology, at <Vicki.Leon@va.gov> or (202) 461-5237 to register. [Continued on the following page.]

Field Notes (cont. from previous page)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT

The time has come, once again, for VA to assess the prior year's activities—to determine what worked, what didn't work, and what processes or procedures should be classified as effective practices for future years. ODI is responsible for realizing the goals set forth in VA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2009–2013, and ODI needs your assistance and input to produce both the Management Directive 715 (MD-715) and the FY 2011 Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report. Just as you are thinking about and reporting on your personal accomplishments, offices throughout VA are assessing and developing their performance metrics.

Each year, through the MD-715 report, VA reports to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on our progress toward eliminating barriers to employment. ODI compiles and submits the Department's report with input from the field and the administrations. The submission process changed this year: that is, EEOC no longer accepts hand carried reports and everyone must use the OMB/MAX Portal. ODI issued instructions on completing this year's MD-715 report on August 11, 2011. A copy of the memo is available online at <www.diversity.va.gov/products/reports.aspx#md715>. Please be aware that Parts G, H, and I must be submitted to ODI through VSSC no later than Wednesday, November 23, 2011. Administrations are asked to submit their final and signed reports to EEOC and ODI by close of business on Friday, January 27, 2012. For more information, please contact David Williams, Director of Workforce Analysis, at (202) 461-4033 or <David.E.Williams@va.gov>.

Since 2009, ODI has been producing the Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report to chronicle VA's progress toward achieving the goals of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. The Annual Report provides a comprehensive view of the state of the agency with respect to diversity and inclusion. As in the fiscal year 2010 Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report, relevant responsibilities, activities, and accomplishments will be identified for each administration, organization, and office within VA. ODI will be issuing the call memo and instructions for this year's Annual Report shortly. For more information, contact Thomas Middleton at (202) 461-4036 or <Thomas.Middleton@va.gov>.

ODI understands the burden these data calls have on our colleagues in the field and administrations. However, each one of your successes is also a success for the Department and we want to identify and recognize your accomplishments. We thank you for your diligence and support.

MANDATORY TRAINING FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

On May 19, 2010, the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration distributed VA-wide a memorandum to the attention of Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, and Field Facility Directors promoting diversity and inclusion, and resolving workplace conflict constructively in order to maintain a high-performing workforce in service to our Nation's Veterans.

On September 22, 2010, the launch of the Online Mandatory EEO, Diversity, and Conflict Management Training for Managers and Supervisors was announced. Secretary Shinseki articulated his commitment in his initial memorandum, dated February 27, 2009, to all employees summarizing VA's EEO, Diversity, and No Fear Policies: "Managers and supervisors bear a special responsibility in maintaining a fair and inclusive work environment."

The Offices of Diversity and Inclusion and Resolution Management created training curriculums that address the legal obligations and supervisory responsibilities in the areas of Equal Employment Opportunity, Reasonable Accommodation, Diversity and Inclusion, and Alternative Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management.

This training has been added to each manager's and supervisor's learning plan and may be accessed through the VA's Talent Management System at <www.tms.va.gov> under each employees log in and password. The course item number is 1328672 and is a **biennial** training requirement. For any additional questions, contact Brenda A. Martin, Diversity Training Logistical Coordinator, at (202) 461-4040 or <Brenda.Martin@va.gov>.

VA Earns Recognition for Workforce Diversity



HACU President and CEO Dr. Antonio R. Flores (R) and Leslie Navarro, President Morton College, Cicero, Illinois (L) present the award to VA representative Andre Castillo

On October 30, 2011, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) received the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) prestigious “Outstanding HACU Public Partner Award” in recognition of the Department’s efforts to bring Hispanics into its workforce by means of HACU’s internship program. The award was presented at HACU’s 25th Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas. VA’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion created the National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP) under an innovative blanket contracting vehicle in 2010 that yielded a significant increase in diverse student interns working in VA, including those from HACU institutions. As a result of NDIP, VA strengthened its partnership with HACU and significantly increased the diversity in its employment pipeline.

“This award demonstrates VA’s commitment to a diverse workforce,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “These young people are given a unique opportunity to learn

about the Department of Veterans Affairs and Federal Government through the HACU internships. Many will return to VA as fulltime employees.” The program’s objective is to provide professional work experience that will enable Hispanic students to make more informed career choices and supplements their academic study with practical experience. VA’s Veterans Health Administration alone has averaged 58 interns every summer for the last five years.

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities is a national association of nonprofit higher education institutions. HACU is the Nation’s largest Hispanic college internship program representing more than 350 colleges and universities in the United States and Puerto Rico. HACU represents Hispanic-Serving Institutions where Hispanic Americans constitute at least 25 percent of the total enrollment at either the undergraduate or graduate level.

Several VA offices collaborated to support HACU’s conference as well as the Department’s acceptance of HACU’s “Outstanding Public Sector Partner” award. The VA exhibit of Hispanic recipients of the Medal of Honor was on display, and VA personnel distributed information on VA careers and VALU programs to emphasize professional and personal development. For additional information on VA’s Hispanic Employment Program, contact Andy Gonzalez at Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov.

Four Ways Women Stunt Their Careers

The Federal Government and many public and private organizations have recognized that diversity in the work place makes sense from an ethical point of view and equates to good business practice. The advantages of a workforce functioning as empowered “stakeholders” through the contribution of a diverse array of skills and abilities cannot be overestimated. VA has several initiatives that provide the opportunity for all employees to achieve and thrive while working for those who have proudly served our country with honor, Veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

Despite these efforts VA has a low participation rate for women in the senior pay grades. VA is aggressively taking measures to ensure women are represented in the wide array of career fields at VA at all levels. According to an article in this month’s Harvard Business Review, “Four Ways Women Stunt Their Careers Unintentionally,” Jill Flynn, Kathryn Heath, and Mary Davis describe four attributes displayed by some professional women and others that may have prevented receiving recognition for their achievements while at the same time diminishing promotion opportunities http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/10/four_ways_women_stunt_their_careers.html. According to the authors the four characteristics that are displayed by some women are: Being overly modest, not asking, blending in, and remaining silent. [Continued on the following page.]

Women (cont. from previous page)

In the article, an example given by Sharon Allen, former chairman of the board of Deloitte & Touche USA (voted one of America's top 100 places to work in 2008), underscores how she was initially overlooked for promotion because she remained silent and was not at the outset given credit for her many noteworthy accomplishments.

All VA employees can improve opportunities for promotion by documenting accomplishments at least weekly and ensuring their supervisor is informed of major contributions when they occur and throughout the year. This should significantly enhance ratings on performance evaluations and improve prospects for promotion.

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

BIG Conference

Blacks in Government (BIG) held its 33rd National Training Conference August 22–25, 2011. The theme for this year's conference was "Explore and Navigate Your Leadership Journey Through BIG."

On August 23, ODI partnered with BIG to host a VA forum/training event. The event was held at the John B. Hynes Memorial Convention Center in Boston, Massachusetts. VA employees, Veterans, and guests from outside Federal agencies attended the four-hour training. During the event, BIG National President J. David Reeves presented VA with an award for the continued support and provided kind remarks.



*Perdita Johnson-Abercrombie (L)
BIG National President J. David Reeves (C),
and Dr. Betty Moseley-Brown (R)*

Dr. Michael F. Mayo-Smith, Network Director, New England Healthcare System, VISN 1, provided opening remarks. Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Associate Director for Women Veterans, and the Honorable Gregory Reeves, Past National President for BIG, were the keynote and guest speakers. Presentations on TMS and VA Career Pathways were provided by Dr. Reginald E. Vance, Director, Learning Infrastructure, and Dr. Arthur McMahan, Dean, VA Learning University. Mr. Scot Evans, Management Analyst, Office of Diversity and Inclusion provided the State of VA on workforce demographics related to African Americans. Additional speakers were Mr. John Bender, Patient Safety Manager, VA North Texas Healthcare System, and Mr. Gregory Ingram, Healthcare Systems Specialist, Boston. Both shared their experiences on navigating their journey through VA to reach their goals. Mrs. Perdita Abercrombie, EEO Manager, National Cemetery Administration, was the Mistress of Ceremony.

In addition to the forum, ODI—in collaboration with the VA Central Office, Office of Human Resources Management, and VISN 1 local HR support—staffed a recruitment booth throughout the conference to reach and attract diverse candidates for employment consideration. Information on how to apply for VA jobs nationally and locally was provided to individuals looking for employment during the week. For additional information, contact Trina R. Faison, ODI, at (202) 461-4044 or <Trina.Faison@va.gov>.

BIG Award Goes to CDCO-AITC

In recognition of the outstanding leadership, teamwork, exemplary service, and dedication to strengthening the National Organization of Blacks in Government (BIG) and for their dedication and support of BIG's goals and objectives, Corporate Data Center Operations (CDCO) - Austin Information Technology Center (AITC), Austin, Texas, received the Special Achievement Award. Aligned under VA's Office of Information and Technology, the CDCO consists of VA's four national data centers: the AITC, the Hines Information Technology Center, the Philadelphia Information Technology Center, and the Capital Region Data Center. These centers are responsible for nearly \$100 billion in Veterans' benefits, payments, and payroll processing for the Department as well as national health and benefits systems. The CDCO also operates the VA's Records Center and Vault, a storage facility for primarily VA and other Federal agencies' paper records. Judy Downing is Acting Director for the CDCO-AITC and, under her leadership, the agency has continually provided support to BIG at the Chapter, Regional, and National levels.

2011 HBCU Week Conference

The White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) hosted a 2-day national conference commemorating National HBCU Week at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C., September 19–20, 2011. The theme for this year's conference was "HBCUs: Engaging the World Anew."

Dr. Tshaka Cunningham, Scientific Program Manager, Office of Research and Development (ORD) Rehabilitation Research & Development Service, presented VA research funding opportunities to attendees. Dr. Cunningham is the Scientific Program Manager for Aging and Neurodegenerative Diseases. He is a graduate of Princeton University, where he earned a BA degree in molecular biology.



Dr. Tshaka Cunningham

As part of a panel on science and technology-related funding mechanisms at government agencies, Dr. Cunningham described in detail for the audience of roughly 100 attendees how to apply for research funding support from the VA ORD. He described how the VA ORD is divided into four different research services that support different kinds of research—from basic biomedical research to applied rehabilitation research and multi-site clinical trials.

In order to give the participants a better idea of the types of research VA ORD supports, Dr. Cunningham presented some examples of currently-funded projects in Veterans rehabilitation research such as advanced wheelchairs and assistive devices, advanced upper and lower limb prosthetics (i.e., the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and DEKA Research and Development Corporation arm program jointly funded by VA and the Department of Defense), and the brain-computer interface that is being developed to allow amputees to one day control their prosthetic devices using their brain, just as they did with their actual limbs. Dr. Cunningham also included some tips for preparing successful applications and generally encouraged the participants to apply to the VA ORD for funding if they have research projects that are novel and relevant to Veterans' health.

He is committed to working to increase the diversity of the scientific workforce supported by VA ORD and has worked diligently to implement an HBCU-focused career development award funding opportunity for investigators based at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The Request for Application for this program was released on September 8, 2011. The first applications are anticipated by December 15, 2011.

For more information about the VA ORD, visit <www.rehab.research.va.gov/staff/cunningham1.html#start>. For additional questions, contact Trina R. Faison, ODI, at (202) 461-4044 or <Trina.Faison@va.gov>.

VA Recognized for HBCU Student Employment

VA has been recognized as a top employer of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) students and graduates. HBCU CONNECT, a social networking organization founded to provide a platform for networking as well as professional and educational opportunities for HBCU graduates, recognized VA for its outreach efforts to recruit students and alumni of HBCUs. VA ranks seventh on HBCU CONNECT's recently-released 2011 list of Top 50 Employers of HBCU Students and Graduates on their Web site at <www.hbcuconnect.com/top50employers.shtml>. Since 2002, HBCU CONNECT has been working with thousands of companies and organizations in their efforts to reach out to HBCU students and graduates. VA is one of those organizations and encourages expansion of affiliation efforts with HBCUs to publicize the positive long-term educational and professional benefits of VA training programs for HBCU students. In addition, VA's National Diversity Internship Program Centralized Fund, a Human Capital Investment Plan initiative administered by ODI, provides funding to sponsor HBCU summer interns. There were significant increases over the last two years. To learn more about VA's efforts in these areas visit <www.diversity.va.gov> or contact Trina R. Faison, ODI, at (202) 461-4044 or <Trina.Faison@va.gov>.

Commemorate! (cont. from page 1)

Many Native Americans are raised on rural or remote reservations, an environment that fosters self-reliance, introspection, and a meditative way of thinking. It is well recognized that, historically, Native Americans have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups. In many respects, Native Americans are no different from others who volunteer for military service. They do, however, have distinctive cultural values which drive them to serve their country. One such value is their proud warrior tradition. This characteristic has been clearly demonstrated by the courageous deeds of Native Americans in combat.

Moreover, the warrior tradition is best exemplified by the following qualities said to be inherent to most if not all Native American societies: strength, honor, pride, devotion, and wisdom. America's journey has been marked both by bright times of progress and dark moments of injustice. For millennia before Europeans settled in North America, the indigenous peoples of this continent flourished with vibrant cultures and were the original stewards of the land. From generation to generation, they handed down invaluable cultural knowledge and rich traditions, which continue to thrive in Native American communities across our country today. Yet, tribal communities face stark realities, including disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, crime, and disease.

VA's mission is to serve America's Veterans and their families with dignity and compassion and to be their principal advocate in insuring that they receive medical care, benefits, social support, and lasting memorials promoting the health, welfare and dignity of all Veterans in recognition of their service to this nation. Within VA's permanent workforce, 1.14 percent (3,337 employees) are Native American. Also, VA employs 98,008 Veterans, of which 1.08 percent (1,060 employees) are Native American. Federal agencies, including VA, are striving to recruit qualified Native Americans to apply for our vacant positions. Our effort to reach out and recruit more American Indians is a pivotal endeavor to enhance the VA's responsibility in providing for the welfare of Native American Veterans. As we commemorate the contributions and heritage of Native Americans during this month, we also recommit to supporting tribal self-determination, security, and prosperity for all Native

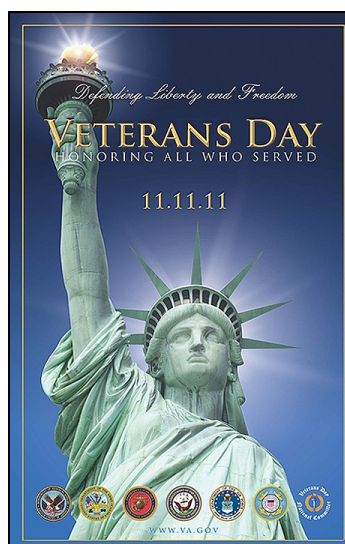
Americans. For more information on VA's American Indian and Alaska Native Program, please contact Aurelia Lopez, Equal Employment Specialist/American Indian and Alaska Native Program Coordinator, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, at <Aurelia.Lopez@va.gov>.

VETERANS DAY & VA FOR VETS

VA joined the Nation in proudly saluting those who have served our Nation on Veterans Day, November 11. Of VA employees, 32 percent are Veterans and 9.7 percent are service-connected Disabled Veterans.

Secretary Shinseki recently announced the establishment of a new, integrated, high-tech, high-touch program to help Veterans find appropriate careers at VA: VA for Vets.

Launched on November 11 (Veterans Day), VA for Vets wants Veterans to come to VA and build meaningful careers serving other Veterans. To achieve this goal, VA for Vets aims to:



- Recruit Veterans outside of VA to come work at VA
- Retain the Veterans currently employed at VA
- Reintegrate VA's Military Service Member employees seamlessly after deployments
- Recognize and honor our employees who are Veterans
- Educate supervisors, coworkers, hiring managers and HR professionals about Veteran-specific issues

For more information on VA for Vets, visit <www.VAforVets.VA.gov>.

Information, activities, and resources concerning VA's Veterans Day celebration can be found at <www.va.gov/opa/vetsday>.

2012 WRP Set to Kick Off

ODI is excited to announce the start of the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for fiscal year (FY) 2012. WRP is coordinated annually by the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Defense, and provides job opportunities in the Federal government for college students with disabilities, some of whom are Veterans. The WRP is an excellent recruitment and workforce succession tool that can be used to identify qualified candidates to fill temporary or permanent staffing needs in a variety of occupations. Annually, trained recruiters from WRP's Federal agency partners conduct personal interviews with more than 2,000 students with disabilities at college and university campuses across the nation and develop a database listing the qualifications of each student. Student applications are evaluated and those who receive a score indicating their employment readiness are referred for employment. A list of prescreened applicants will be available approximately December 6, 2011.

VA has established a goal to employ at least 60 college students and recent graduates with disabilities as summer interns through the WRP. Additionally, we have set a goal to retain at least 20 percent of those who are ready for full-time employment. To encourage greater participation with the WRP, we are pleased to announce that the Office of Human Resources and Administration, as a part of the Human Capital Investment Plan for FY 2012, has established a centralized fund that will be used to reimburse salary costs for an average of 50 WRP students. The goal of the fund is to minimize funding barriers that may prevent full utilization of the WRP.

ODI will administer the centralized fund and will approve reimbursement funding on a first-come, first-served basis; however, priority consideration will be given to offices that have advised, on the attached "Funding Reimbursement Request" form, that they are actively recruiting and may have an identified position that can be used to convert an intern to a permanent position once the internship ends. To improve your chances of receiving centralized funds for an intern, it is recommended that you promptly request access to the WRP site and identify qualified candidates. Detailed instructions are available on VA's Disability Program Web site at <www.diversity.hr.va.gov/spi/programs/peopledisabilities.htm>.

Disability Accommodations

Employees and applicants with disabilities are entitled to request reasonable accommodations to enable them to navigate the application process, perform the duties of the job, and/or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment. Accommodations cover a broad range, from telework to assistive devices to software. Managers are encouraged to view these requests positively; they mean that the requestor is determined to work at VA, wants to improve the quality or quantity of their work, or is seeking to participate in VA-sponsored events. The interactive process is critical; decisions can't be made without communicating with the requester to determine the issues and what is suitable.

Decisions should be made as quickly as possible, and always within 30 calendar days. The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) has reduced the emphasis on whether an individual has a covered disability. Any disability that is not transitory and minor is considered to be covered by the Rehabilitation Act, which was amended to include the protections provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The VA Handbook will be revised to reflect the ADAAA. The caveat that if an employee has a visible disability or has submitted medical documentation in the past, VA cannot request new documentation still stands. It is critical that VA uses the correct form, VA Form 0857e. If the medical provider completes the VA Form 0857e, it will be VA's policy to not request additional medical documentation. Instead, the facility or office must move to the decision process of whether the request will be granted or denied. Additional documentation can be requested only if the medical provider did not complete the VA 0857e. The request will be limited to the questions on the form:

- The nature, severity, and duration of the impairment.
- One or more of the activities the impairment limits (walking, reaching, breathing, etc.).
- The extent or degree to which the impairment limits an activity.
- The reason the individual requires accommodation or the particular accommodation requested.
- How the accommodation will assist the individual in applying for a job, performing the essential functions of the job, or to enjoy a benefits of employment.

VA has lost EEO cases when additional medical documentation was requested, so adherence to this guidance is essential to the appropriate processing of accommodation requests. If you have any questions, please contact your EEO Officer.

Secretary's Awards

ODI and the Office of Resolution Management joined together to recognize VA employees who have made exemplary accomplishments in furthering VA's goals in the areas of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and diversity and inclusion.

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki presented the second annual ADR Excellence and Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards at a ceremony held Friday, October 21, 2011, in the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Conference Center at VA Central Office in Washington, D.C.

The criteria for selection in furthering the goals of Alternative Dispute Resolution are based on individuals' and programs' demonstrated efforts in effectively managing conflict, thereby preventing disputes from arising and saving time and resources, and encouraging others to use Alternative Dispute Resolution by developing creative and innovative ways and solutions.

The criteria for selection in furthering the goals of diversity and inclusion are based on individuals' and teams' demonstrated efforts in creating a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects the communities VA serves; cultivating an inclusive workplace that enables full participation; and facilitating outstanding customer service and stakeholder relations.

The ADR Excellence Award recipients:

Category A (Employee): Sandra F. Simmons, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 4 Lead, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Manager, VA Medical Center, Coatesville, PA

Ms. Simmons is being recognized for her visionary leadership in managing a cadre of 45 collateral duty mediators and maintaining a premier ADR program in VISN-4 for the past five years. As a result of her leadership, mediations are conducted timely, pre-mediation coordination has been consistent, and performance ratings for mediation services have been outstanding. Ms. Simmons has a proven record for effectively managing conflict, thereby preventing disputes from arising and saving time and resources. She has contributed to the fair, efficient, and effective resolution of disputes, and has furthered the Department's mission and goals by promoting and utilizing ADR. She encourages all employees to use ADR and continuously develops creative and innovative solutions to workplace disputes.



Category B (Manager): Adam C. Walms, Director, VA Medical Center, Houston, TX

Mr. Walms' leadership in maintaining a positive work environment of acceptance and inclusion is the cornerstone of the medical center's ADR program. This is accomplished by utilizing strategic goals and objectives as tools to ensure the positive embracement and effective utilization of ADR throughout the medical center. His focus on early conflict resolution has assured that a wide perspective of thoughts are incorporated into addressing issues and concerns involved in planning and delivering the highest quality healthcare to our nation's Veterans. Mr.

Walms is a great example for leadership throughout the VA for

emphasizing the importance of ADR, and demonstrating on a daily basis an unprecedented commitment to ADR that fosters an atmosphere supportive of early dispute resolution. **[Continued on the following page.]**

Awards (cont. from previous page)

Category C (Program): The Marion VA Medical Center, Marion, IL

The Marion Medical Center's ADR program consistently exceeds participant satisfaction performance measures. This program has 11 mediators, 7 of whom have been certified by the Office of Resolution Management. These mediators come from a wide range of disciplines, and have been so successful in resolving disputes that they are requested by other Federal agencies to conduct mediations. With its team of mediators, the Marion VA Medical Center experienced a cost avoidance of \$308,771 in EEO complaint processing as of April 2011. Part of Marion's mission is providing exemplary services to our Veterans; this care is delivered by an engaged, collaborative team in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement. Marion's ADR staff reached this goal by resolving workplace disputes in a timely and efficient approach. This helps to ensure an environment of honesty and mutual trust, which in turn helps to provide excellent care to our Veterans.



The Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Award recipients:



Category A (Manager/Supervisor): Terry Gerigk Wolf, Director and CEO, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS), Pittsburgh, PA

Mrs. Wolf is being recognized for her outstanding leadership and commitment to fostering a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment at VAPHS. Under Mrs. Wolf's leadership, VAPHS is active in succession planning and has enacted numerous programs to ensure that employees can bolster their professional skills. Mrs. Wolf also supports flexible scheduling to help employees enhance productivity while accommodating their educational and personal goals. In addition to being a tireless advocate for educating employees, Mrs. Wolf is also greatly concerned with communicating with all VAPHS stakeholders. Her management style champions communication, which she sees as vital to ensuring that all employees feel included and engaged in the conversations at VA

Pittsburgh. She uses a number of innovative communication methods to promote a culture of open communication and inclusion among her 3,704 employees. These include a "Director's Page" on VA Pittsburgh's Intranet site—which includes a compliments page, blog, message board, and an archive of every all-employee email message sent from the Director's signature. Mrs. Wolf is a VA leader whose actions serve as a model for diversity and inclusion excellence as she continues to make invaluable contributions to furthering the Department's goals in these areas and to ensuring equal opportunity.

Category B (Nonsupervisory Employee): Novella Brown Scott, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist, Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS), Tuskegee, AL

When it comes to the diversity and inclusion arena, Ms. Scott has embraced the concept of shared leadership in her role as a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist within the CAVHCS, Mental Health-Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (MH-RRTP). She shines as a beacon of hope to encourage Disabled Veterans that they can be positive contributors in the workplace and has dedicated herself to conveying this message to them as well as to CAVHCS staff, stakeholders, communities, and even potential employers.

[Continued on the following page.]



Awards (cont. from previous page)

Ms. Scott was instrumental in the development of various programs and initiatives to aid homeless and unemployed Veterans and Disabled Veterans, such as a “Ready to Work” training and skills program for unemployed Disabled Veterans. She also helped to develop the first MH-RRTP Women’s Focus Group and the first MH-RRTP Annual Prom in an effort to recognize the service of women Veterans and promote positive awareness of homeless Veterans seeking employment by ensuring participation of positive community leaders. Ms. Scott worked to remove the stigma and barriers associated with the equal opportunity employment of homeless Veterans and coordinated various trainings to understand disabilities, decrease stigma, and emphasize the desire for community employment by people with disabilities. Ms. Scott is a hidden treasure within the walls of CAVHCS and is the manifestation of the organization’s leadership drive to meet the vision of the Department of Veterans Affairs to create and sustain a high-performing workforce by leveraging diversity and empowering employees to achieve superior results in service to our Nation’s Veterans.

Category C (Team): VISN 16 Diversity Advisory Committee, South Central VA Health Care Network, Ridgeland, MS

The VISN 16 Diversity Advisory Committee is being recognized for their outstanding efforts to promote diversity and inclusion throughout the entire South Central VA Health Care Network. The Committee took creative action knowing that a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment are essential to a high-performing organization. They developed, signed, and executed a Diversity Contract aimed at creating and sustaining a high-performing workforce by leveraging diversity and empowering all employees to achieve superior results in service to our Nation’s Veterans and leadership accountability in these areas. The Committee also created a Diversity Web page to facilitate communication: the VISN Director can post monthly messages and all employees can submit ideas for improvements and share thoughts about how to create the best workplace cultures. Their proactive commitment also led them to establish the goal of critically evaluating their VISN data and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement in the areas of representation, recruitment, and retention. The VISN 16 Diversity Advisory Committee serves as a model of excellence for their creative and innovative approaches to VA’s diversity and inclusion goals.



Congratulations to the Secretary’s 2011 ADR Excellence and Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Award recipients!

Religious Accommodations

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 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, see VA Directive and Handbook 5011 and 5 CFR 550.1002. Employers are required under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide reasonable accommodation for the religious practices and beliefs of employees.

Compliance Corner

THE ADA AND THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF MEDICAL RECORDS

On occasion, VA may request an individual to provide personal medical information as part of the hiring process, when a reasonable accommodation request is made, or under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires that all information obtained regarding the medical condition or history of an applicant or employee must be maintained on separate forms and in separate files and must be treated as a confidential medical record. These requirements also extend to medical information that an individual voluntarily discloses to VA and remain regardless of whether an applicant is eventually hired or if a VA employee resigns, retires, or is removed. Finally, the ADA requirements cover ANY confidential medical information from any applicant or employee and are not limited to individuals with disabilities.

There are, however, limited exceptions to the ADA's confidentiality requirements. For example, supervisors and managers may be informed regarding necessary restrictions on the work or duties of an employee and necessary accommodations. First aid and safety personnel may be informed, when appropriate, if the disability might require emergency treatment, and government officials investigating compliance with the ADA may also be provided relevant information on request. Employers may also disclose medical information to state workers' compensation offices, state second injury funds, workers' compensation insurance carriers, and to health care professionals when seeking advice in making reasonable accommodation determinations.

So, exactly what types of medically-related information fall within the ADA's confidentiality provisions? According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), any information or documentation related to an individual's diagnosis must be treated as confidential. In a 2009 case, *Lampkins v. U.S. Postal Service*, the EEOC held that the agency violated the ADA when it disseminated the complainant's private medical information during a pre-disciplinary meeting to individuals who did not have a "need to know."

Mr. Lampkins was absent from work and sought FMLA leave. He provided his supervisor with a heavily-redacted medical document. The supervisor testified that he became "suspicious" and contacted the Postal Service's Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The OIG investigated the matter and subsequently disseminated its report during a pre-disciplinary meeting attended by the complainant, his supervisor, and his union representative. The OIG's report contained detailed medical records including documentation of complainant's symptoms when he was hospitalized and the resulting diagnoses of the psychiatrist and emergency room physician. The EEOC determined that the dissemination of Mr. Lampkin's medical information as part of the OIG report was a per se violation of disability anti-discrimination laws.

Practice Pointer: The recently enacted Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) prohibits the use of genetic information in making decisions related to any term, condition, or privilege of employment (e.g., hiring, firing, and opportunities for advancement). GINA also restricts employers from requesting, requiring or purchasing genetic information. Genetic information may include the results of genetic tests to determine whether an individual is genetically predisposed to such diseases as breast cancer, Huntington's disease, cystic fibrosis, or sickle cell anemia. Genetic tests do not include HIV, cholesterol, and drug or alcohol tests.

When managers request medical documentation under the ADA or FMLA they must specifically direct the individual or health care provider responding to the inquiry NOT to provide genetic information. According to GINA regulations, if an employer provides such an affirmative warning (i.e., "safe harbor"), any receipt of genetic information in response to the request will be considered inadvertent and will not violate GINA. ~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication





ODI on the Internet

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

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

DIVERSITY@WORK

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OTHER USEFUL LINKS

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

VA Learning University

www.valu.va.gov

VA's Office of Resolution Management

www.va.gov/orm

VA's Office of Human Resources Management

www.va.gov/ohrm

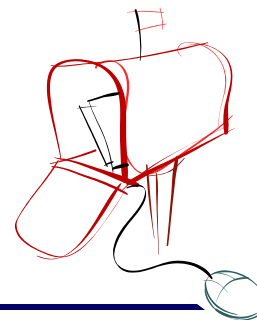
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GOT NEWS?

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

ODI in Your E-mail Inbox

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



ODI 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 www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx.

From the 2011 Diversity Calendar

www.diversity.va.gov/calendar/default.aspx

NOVEMBER

National Native American Heritage Month

Veterans Day

November 11

www.va.gov/vetsday

CAREERS & the disABLED Magazine's Career Expo for People with Disabilities

November 18; Washington, DC

www.eop.com/expos.php

Transgender Day of Remembrance

November 20

Thanksgiving Day

November 24

DECEMBER

Universal Human Rights Month

Rosa Parks Day

December 1

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

December 3

Pearl Harbor Day

December 7

Perspectives on Employment of Persons with Disabilities Conference

VA Forum: December 7

December 7-9; Bethesda, MD

<http://perspectivesconference.org>

Human Rights Day

December 10

Bill of Rights Day

December 15