



Message from the DAS

VA's Updated Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Plan

ODI ushers in Women's History Month with the launching of our redesigned Diversity@Work Newsletter! Special thanks to our editor in chief, Yvonne Rannels, for updating the look and readability of this widely acclaimed newsletter.

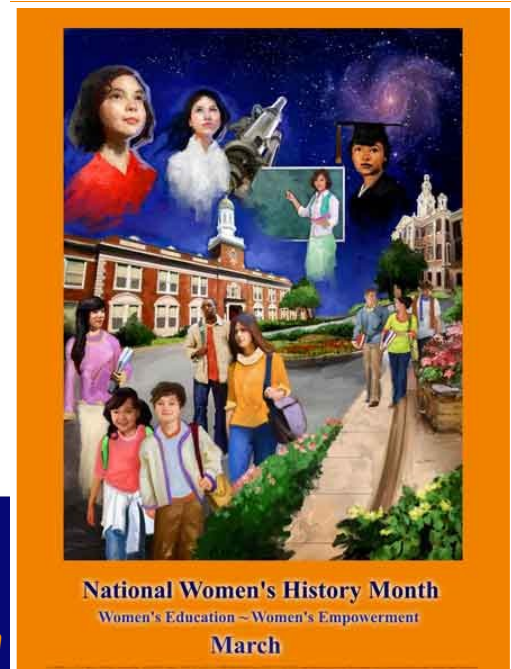
As we reported in our last issue, VA's ODI was instrumental in the development of the landmark Government-wide Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Plan issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in November under the auspices of President Obama's Executive Order on Establishing a Government-Wide D&I Initiative. Since then, ODI has been working closely with VA Diversity Council (VADC) members and other representatives across VA to update our own VA D&I Strategic Plan to align with both the government-wide plan and VA's strategic priorities. I would like to thank all of stakeholders for their hard work and dedication in developing this updated plan. It is important to reiterate that this is not ODI's plan; it is the Department-wide plan which will guide the efforts and strategies of each Administration and staff offices as we strive to build a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment. Our progress and achievements towards this end will be reported in next year's VA Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report. We will be posting VA's Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for FY 2011, as well as VA's Management Directive 715 EEO Report, on the ODI Web site in the next few weeks. Be sure to check the ODI Web site at <http://www.diversity.va.gov> to view VA's revised Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2012-2016 once formally approved by OPM, as well as these other reports. **Continued on the next page.**

Inside:

- VACO Notes | [Page 2](#)
- Field Notes | [Page 3](#)
- Recruitment Guide | [Page 4](#)
- Internships | [Page 4](#)
- Disability Employment | [Page 5](#)
- D&I Indices | [Page 5](#)
- Policy Alerts | [Page 6](#)
- VADC Activity | [Page 10](#)
- WRP | [Page 10](#)
- Progress to 2% Goal | [Page 11](#)
- Compliance Corner | [Page 13](#)
- Resource Rectangle | [Page 13](#)
- Calendar | [Page 14](#)

Bookmarks:

- Talent Management System
<http://www.tms.va.gov>
- VA Learning University
<http://www.valu.va.gov>
- VA Acquisition Academy
<http://www.acquisitionacademy.va.gov>
- Worklife4You
<http://www.worklife4you.com/va>



National Women's History Month
Women's Education ~ Women's Empowerment
March

Commemorate

National Women's History Month

VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating March as National Women's History Month, when we pause to recognize women's place in history, the present, and the future. This year's theme is "Women's Education—Women's Empowerment." As we celebrate this month, we recognize women's long struggle for equality in education. According to the National Women's History Project (NWHF), which provides detailed descriptions and timelines of women's struggles in the education arena, women's struggles in education can be traced throughout civilization's history. Until recent decades, women's roles in education have been limited, which could best be explained by both gender discrimination and social norms which dictated that a woman's role was in the home.

Although Harvard was founded in 1636, it was open only to men. The first women's college, Oberlin, was not chartered until 1833. **Continued on page 8.**

Message from the DAS

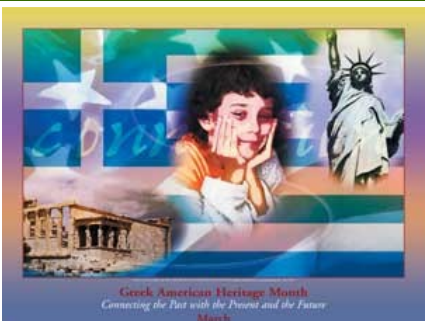
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Georgia Coffey

Also in partnership with the VADC, we are beginning the planning for the Secretary's Third Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program. This awards program recognizes exemplary accomplishment by VA employees, managers/supervisors, and teams who work to create a diverse workforce and cultivate an inclusive workplace. All VA employees are encouraged to take this opportunity to nominate those diversity and inclusion champions who have demonstrated a commitment to the Department's efforts to empower all employees to reach their full potential in service to our Nation's Veterans. You can find information about last year's winners at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx>. More information concerning this year's program will be posted online shortly at this Web site address.

Finally, we are pleased to report that Secretary Shinseki has signed off on the VADC's Biennial Report and action plan. The VADC is growing into its role as an integral partner and advocate of diversity and inclusion matters in VA. We encourage you to view the report at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/council> and find out more about what else this council is working on beginning on [page 10](#).



Finally, please join us in observing Women's History Month, Irish American Heritage Month, and Greek American Heritage Month in March and Deaf History Month from March 13 to April 15. You can read more about some of these observances beginning on [page 1](#). ~Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

VACO Notes

Shared Leadership Award

ODI awarded its Shared Leadership Award posthumously to Maude A. Johnson (Liverpool), beloved friend and valued ODI staff member who passed away almost one year ago. The ODI Shared Leadership Award is intended to recognize VA employees for demonstration of shared leadership principles and competencies to move forward the ODI mission, vision, and agenda. Maude's work ethic, personal grace, and unending courage were—and remain—an inspiration to all of us.

Farewell

ODI wishes Scot Evans, Senior Management Analyst on ODI's Workforce Analysis Team, a fond farewell. Mr. Evans has accepted a position with the Office of Women and Minorities at the National Credit Union Administration at the U.S. Department of Treasury. Mr. Evans joined ODI in 2007 and worked on VA's Management Directive 715 (MD-715) Report to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, MD-715 training, and other related tasks. He also served as a mediator. Mr. Evans will be missed but his contributions to VA will not be forgotten! For workforce analysis questions, including questions regarding MD-715, contact David Williams, Director of ODI's Workforce Analysis Team, at David.E.Williams@va.gov.

ODI would also like to wish Michael Morgan, Writer/Editor

on ODI's Training and Communications Team, a fond farewell. Mr. Morgan has accepted a position with VA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. Mr. Morgan joined ODI in 2005. He has been the script writer for Diversity News and a key player in ODI's other communications products as well as with VA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and subsequent reports. Mr. Morgan will be missed but his ODI contributions will not be forgotten! For communications inquiries, contact Yvonne Rannels at Yvonne.Rannels@va.gov.

Welcome, New ODI Employee

Ryan Pugh joined ODI in February 2012. She works on the Workforce Analysis Team as a Management and Program Analyst, helping to establish strategies and guidance for achieving diversity Department-wide. Ryan started her Federal career in 2003 as a summer intern for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Office of Civil Rights. During her summer and winter breaks in college, she came back to work in the same office. Upon her graduation from Towson University with a Bachelor of Science in Economics, she was hired permanently. During her time at FAA, she performed a range of duties from working the National Intake Unit for pre-complaints to training managers and supervisors and monitoring the progress in establishing a Model EEO Program. She is ecstatic about working for VA. She says, "When I saw the mission—to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans—I said I definitely want to be a part of that."

Field Notes

Certified Government Financial Manager Training

The Office of Finance is sponsoring Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM) training for VA employees who perform finance related duties or those looking to enhance their overall knowledge in financial management. Since its inception in 1994, the Certified Government Financial Manager has become the standard by which government financial management professionals are measured. The Office of Finance is sponsoring CGFM training for VA employees in Austin, Texas, March 26-30. For additional information and registration instructions, visit the FM Training SharePoint site. To register in TMS for the CGFM training in Austin, go to [https://www.tms.va.gov/plateau/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?](https://www.tms.va.gov/plateau/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERING_DETAILS&scheduleID=1318380)

[linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERING_DETAILS&scheduleID=1318380](https://www.tms.va.gov/plateau/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERING_DETAILS&scheduleID=1318380). All VA employees who attend this training are encouraged to sit for the certification exams. Training and travel is funded by VA Learning University (VALU). Travel instructions must be followed and can be obtained from the FM Training SharePoint site as well as prerequisites for certification. Contact Shonny Ogunfiditimi at Shonny.Ogunfiditimi@va.gov for additional information.

ADVANCE Conflict Management Training

ADVANCE Your Knowledge and Skill in Managing Conflict and Resolving Disputes through Mediation by taking classes at the Justice Center of Atlanta sponsored by the Office of Resolution Management Workplace ADR Office. The Managing Conflict and Resolving Disputes through Mediation training is a three-day course, that provides an opportunity to examine the factors that contribute to workplace conflict. It offers tools that managers can use to prevent these situations from escalating and diverting valuable time, resources, and energy from our mission. The course is balanced to include information on how to better manage conflict (i.e., asking effective questions, dealing with difficult people, negotiation skills), and understanding the mediation process. While not asking you to become a professional mediator among your many other responsibilities at VA, it is hoped that by spending in-depth time studying, discussing, and trying the myriad of techniques and communication skills related to the mediation process, you will adopt new approaches, ideas, and skills in dealing with disputes. Managing Conflict and Resolving Disputes Training is conducted by the Justice Center of Atlanta (JCA) in Atlanta, GA. The JCA has led the field of training and practice in conflict resolution for over 30 years and is nationally recognized as a provider of top quality practice and instruction in mediation by the U.S.

Government Accounting Office. Targeted Audience: Senior Executives, GS-14-15s, GS-13 Supervisors, LVA participants, and Title-38 Equivalents who are in Supervisory Positions. Classes are scheduled for March 13-15th; April 17-19th, and May 15 -17th.

To register for one of these ADVANCE classes in TMS, visit <https://www.tms.va.gov/plateau/user/login.jsp>. All questions regarding these classes may be directed to Rita Reese, Project Manager, at Rita.Reese@va.gov.



Diversity News: An Online Training Resource

Diversity News is a 15-minute video program produced monthly by ODI with the support of the VA Central Office Broadcasting Center.

The program is part of VA's continuing effort to foster equity, a diverse workforce, and an inclusive work environment. Boasting a wealth of knowledge, ODI's library of broadcasts can serve to educate the VA community on workforce diversity and inclusion issues and to share best practices in effective diversity management. The March 2012 edition features Kevin Kelly with the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaints Adjudication discussing reasonable accommodation case studies. Diversity News is available both on the internal VA Knowledge Network and on ODI's Web site. To view current and past episodes, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>.

FAPAC VA Preconference Event

ODI will be conducting the annual VA preconference forum before the Federal Asian Pacific American Council's (FAPAC's) 27th Annual National Leadership Training Conference. This year's conference will be held April 30-May 4, 2012, at the Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Georgia. The theme for the conference is "Striving for Excellence in Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion."

The Agency Forum for Special Emphasis Program Managers and other VA employees will be held from 8 a.m. to noon on Monday, April 30. This no-cost event is a diversity training opportunity designed to provide attendees with information on VA's workforce, particularly regarding demographics, leadership, equal employment opportunity, career development programs and advancement initiatives, and Veteran employment issues. All employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend the forum, which is free of charge to all participants. [Continued on page 7.](#)



Recruitment & Selection Guide

Best Practices Available Online

As many of you may be aware, ODI, with assistance from key stakeholders in the EEO and HR communities, developed the "Recruitment and Selection Best Practices Guide—Avoiding Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Pitfalls To Create A Diverse Workforce." The guide offers practical tips, checklists, related reference resources, and strategies to assist managers avoid common EEO pitfalls throughout the recruitment and selection processes. It is offered as recommended guidance only and should not be construed as regulation or required procedure.

ODI is excited about the overwhelming response to the guide—the office received a significant number of requests for copies. Due to the high demand for the guide, ODI also created a booklet version, which is a condensed version of the guide. Our vision is to help VA become a leader in the Federal community in the area of diversity and inclusiveness. As a major healthcare and benefits provider, VA must maintain a workforce that is reflective of the communities it serves. Ensuring EEO in the personnel recruitment and selection processes is a cornerstone of Federal service and an essential component of our human capital management strategy.

Unfortunately, ODI's supply of hard copies in both expanded and booklet versions is now exhausted; however, you can still obtain copies. For an electronic copy, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/rsg.aspx>. To order hard copies of the guide, you will need to contact your Publications Control Officer for printing orders through VA's Publications Service, Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction. We hope this guide serves as a valuable tool to assist managers in eliminating barriers to equal opportunity so that VA remains a fair, diverse, and inclusive workplace to best serve our Nation's Veterans and their families. If you have any questions, contact ODI at 202-461-4131 or odi@va.gov.



Internships

Changes Coming Soon to Pathways; NDIP Centralized Fund Now Available

The Pathways Internship Program, scheduled to launch mid-2012, will allow select students to join VA in career positions that emphasize long-term training and development. Opportunities will be accessible through various means, including USAJOBS.gov (keyword: "student") or offered through individual VA offices and other competitive means.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact individual VA offices to discuss potential Pathways Programs opportunities. Please note that the comparable Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) is still in place until the Pathways Programs are launched. For the latest information on SCEP and Pathways, please see <http://www.usajobs.gov/studentjobs> and <http://www.opm.gov/hiringreform/pathways/psPFM>. For the latest information on VA's Pathways Internship Program, visit <http://www.mycareeratva.va.gov/Careerpath/Internships>.

VA also offers temporary student internships through its National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP), administered by ODI. NDIP recruits interns through organizations that conduct focused outreach to diverse student populations. Applicants apply first to these recruiting organizations and are then placed in participating VA offices.

The Office of Human Resources and Administration has established a Department-wide centralized fund to support increased participation in the NDIP. This funding is available to all administrations and staff offices. There are a limited number of centralized-funded slots and applications will be approved on a first come, first serve basis. Organizations/offices interested in being considered for an NDIP intern through this centralized fund must submit the application form by Monday, March 5, 2012. To obtain this form and submission instructions, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/internship.aspx>.

For more information on VA's NDIP, visit <http://www.mycareeratva.va.gov/Careerpath/Internships/Pages/NationalDiversityInternshipProgram.aspx>.

HRML No. 05-12-02

Employment of People with Disabilities, Including Under Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(u)

VA is justly proud of its role as a major employer of people with disabilities, including Disabled Veterans, and is committed to continuously expanding upon these achievements. On July 26, 2010, which is the tenth anniversary of Executive Order (E.O.) 13163 entitled, "Increasing the Opportunity for Individuals With Disabilities To Be Employed in the Federal Government," the President of the United States signed E.O. 13548 entitled, "Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities."

E.O. 13548 established as official policy that "the Federal Government must become a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities...through compliance with Executive Order 13163 and achievement of the goals set forth therein over 5 years, including specific goals for hiring individuals with targeted disabilities." E.O. 13548 further adopts a principal E.O. 13163 goal for the Federal Government to hire 100,000 qualified individuals with disabilities over five years. To achieve these objectives, E.O. 13548 directed the development and implementation of multi-faceted Federal-wide efforts.

To implement E.O. 13548, on November 8, 2010, the Director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued a companion memorandum entitled "Model Strategies for Recruitment and Hiring of People with Disabilities as Required Under Executive Order 13548." This memorandum provided multiple strategies to achieve increased hiring and retention of people with disabilities within Federal departments and agencies.

ODI administers VA's People with Disabilities Employment Program and exercises the Departmental Selective Placement Program Coordinator role. In accordance with E.O. 13548, VA disseminated several issuances developed by ODI:

1. In a September 7, 2010 memorandum to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, and Field Facility Directors, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs set a two percent goal for hiring persons with targeted disabilities in fiscal year (FY) 2011, in accordance with the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. [Continued on page 7.](#)

Diversity & Inclusion Indices

Idea Takes LVA 2012 Top Honors

The Leadership VA (LVA) 2012 curriculum included an innovation project requirement where class participants worked on small teams to prepare a proposal paper and brief on an innovative project related to Transformation 21 initiatives. There were a total of 10 innovation projects. On January 25, 2012, the LVA 2012 class held a public and juried symposium to present their proposal to class participants and other invites guests. The six-member panel of judges evaluated each project's written proposal and oral presentation in determining the project final scores.

At the conclusion of the event, the judges announced their top three proposals: "Correlating Diversity and Inclusion to Organizational Performance," "Stand up for Women Veterans," and "Promotion of Fitness and Exercise at Your Desk Guidebook."

Out of the three proposals, the judges selected the ODI initiative, "Correlating Diversity and Inclusion to Organizational Performance," as the best proposal. This proposal outlined a need for developing and executing a five-phase plan to create a legal and defensible set of diversity and inclusion indices and to then perform regression analysis of the indices with respect to organization performance measures. The results of the analysis will be useful in evaluating the effect diversity and inclusion initiatives have on Human Capital Investment Plan, VA Learning University, and other human capital programs.

The team was lead by David Williams, Director Workforce Analysis in the Office of Diversity Inclusion. Other LVA 2012 class members on the team were John Santell (Veterans Health Administration, VHA), James Talton (VHA), Tracy Strub (Office of Resolution Management), Simon Kim (VHA), Andrea Henderson (National Cemetery Administration, NCA), Katina Stone-Jones (VHA), and Santiago Montalvo (NCA).

Policy Alerts

Military Leave and Court Leave for Employees Appointed Under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(D) or 7406

VA Handbook 5011, Hours of Duty and Leave, Part III, Chapter 3, paragraph 7, has been revised to allow employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(D) or 7406 to be entitled to use military leave and court leave:

a. Military Leave

- (1) A full-time employee appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7306, 7401(1), [7405(a)(1)(A) [or (D) or 7406] not limited to 1 year or less is eligible for and shall be granted military leave in the same manner as other Federal employees. The granting and charging of military leave contained in chapter 2 of this part for title 5 employees is also applicable to title 38 employees covered under this paragraph. Administrative non-duty days that occur within the period of military service will not be charged to military leave. However, those employees on 24/7 schedules will continue to be charged military leave on a daily basis for duty days.
- (2) A part-time employee appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(A) [or (D) or 7406] not limited to 1 year or less is entitled to leave without loss in pay, time or performance or proficiency rating for active duty or engaging in field or coast defense training under sections 502-505 of title 32, United States Code, as a member of the Reserve of the armed forces or member of the National Guard. Leave accrues for these employees at the rate of 15 days per fiscal year (to be credited at the beginning of the fiscal year) and, to the extent that it is not used in a fiscal year, accumulated for the use in the succeeding fiscal years until it totals 15 days at the beginning of a fiscal year. Scheduled workdays and intervening days for which no work is scheduled falling within a period of absence for this duty are not charged to military leave. This entitlement is provided pursuant to authority of 38 U.S.C. 7421.

- b. Court Leave. Employees appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7306, 7401(1), [7405(a)(1)(A) [or (D) or 7406] are eligible for and shall be granted court leave in the same manner as other eligible Federal employees.

Executive Order 5396 for Title 38 Employees

VA Handbook 5011, Part III, Chapter 3, paragraph 5c(5), is being revised to provide that Executive Order 5396 applies only to service-connected disabilities.

Executive Order 5396 (<http://www.apwu.org/dept/ind-rel/sc/burrusbook/article%2019/executive%20order%20disabled%20veterans.pdf>) addresses special leaves of absence to be given Disabled Veterans in need of medical treatment. With respect to medical treatment of Disabled Veterans who are employed in the executive civil service of the United States, upon the presentation of an official statement from duly constituted medical authority that medical treatment is required, such annual or sick leave as may be permitted by law and such leave without pay as may be necessary shall be granted by the proper supervisory officer to a Disabled Veteran in order that the Veteran may receive such treatment, all without penalty of his efficiency rating. The granting of such leave is contingent upon the Veteran's giving prior notice of definite days and hours of absence required for medical treatment in order that arrangements may be made for carrying on the work during his absence.

Guidance Regarding VA's Human Capital Accountability Program

VA Handbook 5024, Human Capital Management Accountability Systems, contains mandatory procedures regarding VA's Human Capital Accountability Program, including mandatory procedures for the completion of facility-level HR self-evaluations and the process for conducting on-site Human Resources Management assessments. The official version of this handbook is maintained electronically and is available through the HRM intranet Web site. This handbook is reissued in its entirety. Significant changes include:

- Incorporates provisions of Human Resources Management Letter 05-06-03, VA Human Capital Accountability Policy, dated June 14, 2006.
- Modifies timing of self-evaluations from end of each fiscal year to beginning of each fiscal year.
- Adds requirements pertaining to Delegated Examining Units including the requirement that Delegated Examining Units provide completed self-audits to Oversight & Effectiveness Service.
- Modifies the term human capital "standard" to human capital "system" to be consistent with revised Office of Personnel Management terminology and combines elements of two standards into one "system".

Field Notes

[Continued from page 3.](#)

Detailed registration information for VA's FAPAC preconference event is forthcoming and will be available on ODI's Asian American and Pacific Islander Program Manager (AAPI) webpage at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/aapi.aspx>.

The Office of Personnel Management has certified the FAPAC conference as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41. All Federal employees are encouraged to attend, with supervisory approval. Additionally, all associated costs to attend the main conference must be authorized by your organization. Detailed conference and registration information can be obtained from FAPAC's Web site at <http://www.fapac.org>. For additional information, contact Andy Gonzalez, VA's National AAPI Program Manager, ODI, no later than March 15, at (321) 397-6830/(202) 299-4302 or Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov.

Secretary's 2012 EEO, Diversity, and No FEAR Policy

VA is committed to ensuring equal employment opportunity (EEO), promoting diversity and inclusion, and constructively resolving workplace conflict to maintain a high-performing workforce in service to our Nation's Veterans. To that end, the Department will vigorously enforce all applicable Federal EEO laws, regulations, Executive Orders, and Management Directives to ensure equal opportunity in the workplace for all VA employees. The Secretary's 2012 EEO, Diversity, and No FEAR Policy Statement will soon be made

available online at <http://www.diversity.hr.va.gov/exec/policy.htm>. Changes to the policy statement include emphasis on VA's enforcement of all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws, No FEAR and Whistleblower retaliation protection laws, as well as the employees' legal right to petition Congress. Additionally, the policy statement clarifies that political affiliation, parental status, and marital status are prohibited discrimination bases. For more information on this policy, contact Carolyn Williams, ODI, at (202) 461-4012 or Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov.

AAFEA Annual Training Workshop



The African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA) will hold its Annual Training Workshop from April 30–May 2, 2012, in Newport News, Virginia, at the Newport News Marriott at City Center. This year's theme is "Public Service—The Call for Excellence." This three-day event, which is designed for employees in grades GS-13 and above, will feature workshops and presentations that focus on the programs, policies, practices and processes that promote career—enhancing opportunities and the core subjects critical for becoming a member of the Senior Executive Service.

This AAFEA conference qualifies as training in compliance with Title 5, Chapter 41, of the United States Code. Employees should obtain supervisory approval in order to attend the conference. Conference information and registration can be obtained from AAFEA's Web site, at <http://www.aafea.org> or by calling 1-866-600-4894. For additional information about this event, your staff representative may contact Trina Faison, VA's National African American Employment Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 461-4044 or Trina.Faison@va.gov. [Continued on page 12.](#)

HRML No. 05-12-02

[Continued from page 5.](#)

2. In a related September 15, 2010 memorandum to the same VA executives, the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (AS/HRA) provided guidance on reaching the two percent hiring goal established by Secretary Shinseki.
3. Most recently, the AS/HRA, who serves as the Department's Chief Human Capital Officer, provided to the Deputy Director of OPM VA's Plan for Increasing Employment of Individuals with Disabilities for Fiscal Years 2011-2015 and his letter transmitting it to his VA colleagues with thanks for their invaluable contributions and reliance on their continued commitment.

A Human Resources Management Letter (HRML) was recently released to provide technical guidance to VA servicing human resources offices on the proactive hiring of persons with disabilities and targeted disabilities. This guidance includes a focus on job opportunity announcement requirements, appointment under Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(u), and other authorities, and also highlights 5 CFR 213.3102(II), the authority for hiring interpreters, readers, and personal assistants as needed for employees with disabilities.

This HRML is available online at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx>.

Commemorate

[Continued from page 1.](#)

However, even with discrimination and limitation, women have plowed their own path to receiving education, often not even getting recognition when they completed the requirements for a degree. Even as “coeducation” grew, women’s courses of study were often different from men’s, and women’s role models were few, as most faculty members were male. Single-sex education remained the elite norm in the U.S. until the early 1970s. Discrimination against women attending college was not prohibited until Title IX of the Education Codes of the Higher Education Act Amendment was passed in 1972 and implemented in 1976. Today, there are about 60 women’s colleges, but all educational institutions must allow women to enroll. In addition to being students, women today play an even larger role as faculty members, educators, and leaders. Because of the achievements and struggles of women in education, doors have been opened for all women in employment and career progression, leading to better equality for women.

According to 2010 Census data, women now account for 50.8 percent of the U.S. population. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 2009 women accounted for 57.1 percent of all individuals enrolled in either full or part-time postsecondary education. In VA, as of September 30, 2011, women account for about 59.8 percent of the total VA workforce, mainly because of the large number of nursing positions. VA education attainment data for fiscal year 2011, which is based on self-reporting, showed that 63 percent of the VA workforce has achieved some type of postsecondary degree (Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s, Professional, or Doctorate). Of this group, 66 percent are women with an Associate’s degree or higher-level degree.

As the leader in providing benefits and health care to Veterans, VA understands the important role women have in the military. As of September 30, 2011, there were over 214,098 women serving on active duty, reserves and National Guard, representing 14.6 percent of the overall military workforce. As of 2011, there were 1,853,690 women Veterans, representing about 8.3 percent of the overall Veteran population. While women’s roles in the military are critical, historically their roles were limited to what some considered “gender appropriate” jobs or assignments. Today, some of those limitations still apply, including limited roles in combat-only specialties or assignments. However, new

challenges have arisen in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which may alter women’s roles in combat. On February 9, 2012, Lolita Baldor of the Associated Press published an article that included newly-released Pentagon rules that “opened thousands of jobs to women in units that are closer to the front lines than ever before.” These assignments have been historically banned from women. Thousands of women have served and died in combat throughout our Nation’s history and most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, so this discussion is but a milestone in recognizing women as equivalent contributors to our Nation’s safety and security.

This month, as we celebrate Women’s History, please take time to reflect on the journey of women in fighting for access to higher education and their continued contributions to our Nation’s safety, progress, and success. To learn more about VA’s National Women’s Program, please contact Nanese Loza, Outreach and Retention, ODI, at Nanese.Loza@va.gov. To learn more about VA’s Women Employment Program, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/women.aspx>.

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National Irish American Heritage Month

VA also joins the Nation in commemorating the month of March as Irish-American Heritage Month.

Our diverse Nation has been shaped by the sacrifices and successes of those who crossed both land and sea in pursuit of a common dream. [Continued on the next page.](#)



Commemorate

Continued from the previous page.

For millions of Americans, this journey began in Ireland. In the wake of the Great Hunger, many sons and daughters of Erin came to our shores seeking a brighter day, with only courage and the enduring values of faith and family to sustain them. Alongside many others who sought a better life in a new Nation, these intrepid immigrants built strong communities and helped forge our country's future. During Irish-American Heritage Month, we honor the contributions Irish Americans have made, and celebrate the nearly 40 million among us who proudly trace their roots back to Ireland.

From the earliest days of our Republic, the Irish have overcome discrimination and carved out a place for themselves in the American story. Through hard work, perseverance, and patriotism, women and men of Irish descent have given their brawn, brains, and blood to make and remake this Nation -- pulling it westward, pushing it skyward, and moving it forward. Half a century ago, John F. Kennedy became our first Irish-American Catholic President and summoned an expectant citizenry to greatness. This year, as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of President Kennedy's inauguration, we recognize our 35th President and the countless other Irish Americans whose leadership and service have steered the course of our Nation.

Seldom in this world has a country so small had so large an impact on another. Today, the rich culture of Ireland touches all aspects of American society, and the friendship that binds Ireland and the United States is marked by a shared past and a common future. As communities across our country celebrate Irish-American Heritage Month and St. Patrick's Day, our Nation pays tribute to the proud lineage passed down to so many Americans from the Emerald Isle.

Parts of this article taken from the 2011 Presidential Proclamation on Irish-American Heritage Month.

Deaf History Month

Deaf History Month is from March 13 to April 15. The concept of National Deaf History Month had its origins in Washington, DC at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, which had two deaf Librarians, Alice L. Hagemayer and Ida Mapes. Ms. Hagemayer recommended that the library host a "Deaf Awareness Week" with the goal of introducing the public to deaf people and informing deaf people of services offered by the library. While the event continues to be held by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, it also spread to other libraries across the country. In 1996, the National Association of the Deaf suggested that National Deaf History Month be held across the country annually from March 13 to April 15.

Although sign language is strongly associated with deafness in the public media, a small percentage of individuals with hearing loss know sign language. Most use what is called oral communication and rely on various forms of assistive technology, ranging from text pagers to real time captioning, where a person uses a special machine and types the conversation word for word. Reading lips is often used, but is not as effective and should not be relied upon for important or large meetings.

Sign language has an interesting history. In 1815, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet left his home in Hartford, Connecticut, to visit Europe. Dr. Mason Cogswell had asked Gallaudet to investigate methods of teaching his deaf daughter, Alice Cogswell. Gallaudet first went to England, but the directors of the Braidwood Schools, who taught the oral method, refused to share their methods of teaching. However, while in London, Gallaudet met with Abbé Sicard, director of the Royal Institution for the Deaf in Paris. Sicard invited Gallaudet to visit the school in Paris. Gallaudet then traveled to Paris and learned the educational methods of the Royal Institution for the Deaf with sign language, a combination of Old French Sign Language and the signs developed by Abbé de l'Épée. Gallaudet persuaded a student, Laurent Clerc, to return with him to Connecticut and become a teacher for the deaf. Gallaudet and Clerc opened the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (now called American School for the Deaf) in April 1817. Deaf students were taught French signs and brought in signs of their own, such as those from Martha's Vineyard. Thus, it was at this school that all these influences would intermingle and become what is now known as American Sign Language (ASL). Nearly 60 percent of the signs used in ASL are the same as the signs used in French Sign Language. The alphabet signs are also the same. Thus, deaf Americans can understand deaf individuals who are French but not deaf people from England. For more information on VA's People with Disabilities Employment Program, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx>.

VADC Activity

VA Diversity Council Working to Make Diversity and Inclusion Connections Across VA

The VA Diversity Council (VADC) serves as an independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion. The Council is composed of representatives from each of the Department's major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders and serves as a communications link between the workforce and leadership and a forum to share best practices, consider new initiatives, monitor progress, leverage resources, and ensure accountability in the area of organizational diversity and inclusion. The VADC ensures that diversity and inclusion considerations are integrated throughout VA's strategic planning efforts, business practices, and organizational components. [Continued on the next page.](#)

Workforce Recruitment Program

Have You Considered a Summer Intern?

The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) provides pre-screened job applicants who are 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 during an 11-week internship. All students are in good academic standing and are enrolled in either a certificate or a degree program from the associate to the Ph. D. level, and some have work experience as well.

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. This year, human resources staff from the Veterans Health Administration participated in the recruitment interviews. Students were evaluated on their resumes and interview. Those who receive a score indicating their employment readiness are referred for employment. A database lists the qualifications of each student who passed the screening. This list of prescreened applicants is available at <https://wrp.gov>. Since this is a secure Web site, each user will be asked to create a password.

VA has established a goal to hire at least 60 college students and recent graduates with disabilities as summer interns. Additionally, VA has set a goal to convert to a permanent position at least 20 percent of those who are ready for full-time employment. To encourage greater participation with the WRP, ODI is pleased to announce that the Office of Human Resources and Administration, as a part of the Human Capital Investment Plan for fiscal year (FY) 2012, has established a centralized fund that will be used to reimburse salary costs for approximately 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-serve 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.

The goal of the fund is to minimize funding barriers that may prevent full utilization of the WRP. Hiring a WRP intern will not count against the facility's full-time equivalent employment ceiling. ODI will track and report the WRP hires by Administration. To improve your chances of receiving centralized funds for an intern, ODI recommends that you promptly request access to the WRP site and identify viable candidate(s). Detailed instructions are available on VA's Disability Program Web site at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#WRP>.

Please note that VA organizations and facilities do not need to create a new position description (PD); they may use an existing PD. Also, funds (if available) will only be reimbursed to those organizations that hire WRP interns for the summer. It is highly recommended that you first contact ODI to confirm that funds are still available.

Organizations interested in hiring a WRP intern using their own funding are welcome to visit the secure WRP Web site at <https://wrp.gov> and request a password to access the intern database to identify and recruit an intern. For record keeping purposes, please advise ODI when you hire an intern through the WRP. For questions regarding WRP or the WRP centralized fund for FY 2012, contact Aurelia Waters, WRP Coordinator, ODI, at (202) 461-4124 or Aurelia.Waters@va.gov.

Secretary's Two Percent Goal

First Quarter Progress

As noted in the Performance Plans of VA's Senior Executive Service (SES) Officials, VA has a goal that two percent of all new hires be individuals with targeted disabilities. For fiscal year (FY) 2012, VA also has a goal that this group be two percent of our on board workforce. This meets requirements set by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and helps VA comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The targeted disabilities are blindness, deafness, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, missing extremities, severe intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, epilepsy, and dwarfism. People who have disabilities come from every race and ethnicity. Therefore, all VA employees are expected to support this initiative and help employees with disabilities feel welcome to the VA workforce.

The first quarter data shows that of total VA hires to permanent and temporary positions, 1.94 percent were individuals with targeted disabilities. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) led with 5.41 percent, the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA's) total was 1.96 percent, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) was 1.57 percent, and VA Central Office (VACO) was 1.64 percent (data from the VHA Support Service Center). Congratulations to the MSNs, Areas, and VISNs that met the Secretary's two percent goal.

In NCA, MSN 2 (Atlanta) had an awesome 33 percent of new hires were individuals with targeted disabilities. MSN 3 had 6.45 percent. In VBA, VBA/VACO led with 2.8 percent new hires being individuals with targeted disabilities. Area 4 (Western) had 2.63 percent and Area 1 had 2.04 percent. In VHA, VISN 16 (Jackson, Mississippi) led with 4.58 percent of new hires. VISN 6 had 2.45 percent, VISN 7 had 2.42 percent, VISN 9 had 2.15 percent, VISN 10 had 1.99 percent, VISN 11 had 3.09 percent, VISN 12 had 3.0 percent, VISN 15 had 2.08 percent, VISN 18 had 3.25 percent, VISN 20 had 2.82 percent, and VISN 21 had 2.84 percent.

Anyone hired under Schedule A must complete the SF 256 "Self Identification of Disability" and self-identify a specific disability. Schedule A information is available on our Web site at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx>. Some facilities have chosen to re-survey their workforce to allow all employees to decide whether to self-identify whether they have a disability. Eventually, the VA workforce will become more similar to the Veteran population that we serve.

VA Diversity Council

[Continued from the previous page.](#)

On October 5, 2007, then-Acting Secretary for Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield announced the establishment of the "VA Diversity Advisory Council" in accordance with the Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2006–2011. The initiative gained momentum in 2009 when a new title was adopted, council members were appointed, and the charter was finalized. The VADC, the first VA-wide body devoted to diversity matters, was a strategy contained in the new VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. On March 23, 2010, Secretary Shinseki distributed a memo adopting the new charter and the VADC was officially launched.

In 2010 and 2011, the Council met quarterly and, among other notable activities, it convened Screening and Judging Committees for the Secretary's new Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program. In 2011, the Council established five committees to focus on specific areas of interest that have emerged from the Council's quarterly meetings. These committees report their recommendations and advice to the VADC for full deliberation and discussion:

1. Diversity and Inclusion Communications Committee
2. Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Report Committee
3. Emerging Issues in Diversity and Inclusion Committee
4. Disability Committee
5. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Committee

The VADC recently submitted to the Secretary its first biennial report containing the Council's mission, history, and other details; chronicling the Council's 2010-2011 achievements; and laying out the Action Plan to guide the VADC in its future activities. For more information on the VADC, including meeting agendas and minutes, the roster, and a copy of the charter, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/council>. For more information on the VADC, e-mail ODI@va.gov.

Field Notes

Continued from page 7.

Gateways for Veterans

When the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Steve Muro, participated in the American GI Forum National Conference and Heroes Hire Heroes Job Fair during July 2011 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he reaffirmed VA's support for the Federal and state government agencies along with affinity and Veterans service organizations who came together to do more for our Veterans...to combine their ideas and resources to get results. This pilot is now called Gateways Smart Jobs for Veterans (Gateways).

The Gateways pilot speaks to Veterans' interests, continuing education, and a right to self employment. While job fairs have focused on general employment, the Gateways strategy aims to provide Veterans access to opportunities at the local community level in technical occupations in demand by corporate America. In partnership, the New Mexico coalition is supporting the Puerto Rico coalition.

The League of United Latin American Citizens Puerto Rico Chapter will host the Veterans Summit, "Integrating a New Strategy: Education, Employment, Outreach, and Entrepreneurship" on March 1-3, 2012, at the Reception & Multiple Activities Center, Road #2 (in front of City Hall), Vega Alta, Puerto Rico. The Veterans Summit is the second phase of the pilot featuring solutions that meet employers' and Veterans' needs through technical certifications, job inventories, and business incubators. Under Secretary Muro and the Acting Assistant Secretary Ismal Ortiz Jr. for the Veterans Employment and Training Service, Department of Labor, will attend.

Gateways Smart Jobs for Veterans does not require standing up new programs. Veterans have access to the GI Bill to pay for their tuition up to \$17,000 per academic year while employers have potential tax incentives. Tuition benefits can be used to pay for technical and college-university careers. Some Veterans' dependants may have tuition benefits based on the Post 9-11 GI Bill. The building blocks for this collaborative effort are technical certifications and short-term career-development opportunities for corporate occupations and small business development. The Gateways pilot promotes the study of industry—technical certification programs for information technology and the construction trade—along with entrepreneurship courses. The returning heroes and wounded warrior tax credits for employers are another benefit for hiring certain unemployed Veterans eligible for tax credit. For more information, contact José Marrero at

Jose.Marrero@va.gov.

VHA's 2012 Employee Innovation Competition

The Veteran Health Administration's (VHA's) 2012 Employee Innovation Competition launched a Web site on February 27 for VA employees to submit innovative ideas that improve Veterans' health care. The competition is open to all VA employees and contractors who are encouraged to submit ideas that reflect VA's innovative spirit. Ideas should focus on medical services innovations and how the transformation of VA can be accelerated to an organization that is Veteran-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking. In general, ideas should address quality, safety, efficiency and transparency for Veterans. While proposals may have an IT component, innovations that do not require IT funds will be favored in this competition due to resource constraints. Ideas may be submitted through March 16. To obtain the intranet Web site addresses for the Innovation Competition and for the Web site with detailed instructions on how to use the idea management tool, or for additional questions regarding the 2012 VHA Employee Innovation Competition, contact VHA Innovation Program Support at

VHAInnovationProgramSupport@va.gov.

Congratulations, Diversity Poster Contest Winners!

The Detroit Federal Executive Board's (FEB) Diversity Council (Sana Isho, Chairperson) conducted a Diversity Art Poster Contest and Holiday Market in December. The art work for the fair was provided by K-8 schools within the Detroit City Limits.

Congratulations to the Farwell Middle School students of teacher Bettye Foster. The theme of their piece was "Diversity Around Me."

Thank you to FEB Diversity Committee member and Detroit VA Medical Center Equal Employment Opportunity Assistant Tanisha Holmes-Garris for submitting this photo.



Compliance Corner

GINA: Five Things You Must Know

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

What is genetic information? Under GINA, genetic information includes data about your own genetic tests and those of your family members. It also includes your family medical history. Examples of protected genetic information include: tests for breast or ovarian cancer (BRAC1 or BRAC2 genes), genetic variants for Huntington's disease, and carrier screening for adults for cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, spinal muscular atrophy, fragile X syndrome, or paternity tests. Examples of non-protected information includes: genetic data about an individual's race, sex, ethnicity, or age; routine testing such as complete blood counts and cholesterol screenings; and liver function, pregnancy, and blood glucose tests. Other test results not protected under GINA include HIV and STD tests, and alcohol or drug tests.

Are there any exceptions to acquiring genetic information? Yes, if a supervisor or manager inadvertently learns about an individual's genetic information by overhearing an office discussion, through receipt of an unsolicited e-mail, or during a casual conversation. For example, a manager can ask a subordinate who is being treated for cancer, "How are you?" or "Did they catch it early?" However, the manager crosses the line by asking probing questions such as "Does cancer run in your family?" or "Are you worried that your other children may have cancer?"

If I need to collect medical information from an employee, for example by sending an employee for a fitness for duty exam, what should I do? First, you must direct physicians NOT to collect genetic information when conducting employment-related medical exams. If you request such an exam or receive medical information from an individual or outside healthcare provider that contains genetic information, you will not be liable if an appropriate warning is provided. The model "safe harbor" language is contained at 29 CFR 1635.8(b)(1)(i)(B). In brief, it states, "...we are asking you not provide any genetic information when responding to this request for medical information..."

Should electronic employee medical records maintained by the VA be encrypted? According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), neither the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) or GINA specifically address this issue. In a May 31, 2011, Internal Discussion Letter, the EEOC stated that "we do not interpret either statute's confidentiality provisions as applying only to paper records. Therefore, if an employer maintains medical information and genetic information electronically, it must ensure that it is kept confidential, and disclosed only to the extent permitted by the ADA and GINA."

I received a subpoena and a discovery request asking for an employee's medical information. What should I do? GINA and the EEOC's implementing regulations prohibit disclosure of genetic information in litigation except in response to a court order that specifically calls for its disclosure. This is a tricky area given the expansive definition of "genetic information." Best advice: consult with agency counsel. The ADA also prohibits disclosure of medical information pursuant to civil discovery or a state or local subpoena. See *Ronald E. Bennett v. U.S. Postal Service*, EEOC Appeal No. 0120073097 (January 11, 2011). ~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication



Resource Rectangle

Training

Workforce diversity is a critical component of a 21st century VA. Creating and sustaining a diverse and productive workforce rests with all employees at all levels within the organization. To that end, ODI offers training resources at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/training>. Please note that these resources are being offered for your general awareness. ODI strongly discourages the use of these materials in a classroom setting without the facilitation of a qualified trainer. To schedule a face-to-face training session, please contact Brenda Martin at Brenda.Martin@va.gov.

Diversity@Work is published by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), a program office within the Office of Human Resources and Administration (HR&A).

To subscribe or unsubscribe, e-mail odi@va.gov.

CONTACT US

Mail:
810 Vermont Avenue
NW (06)
Washington, DC 20420

Phone:
(202) 461-4131

Fax:
(202) 501-2145

E-mail the Editor:
odi@va.gov

Visit our Web site
[http://www.
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Veterans Health
Administration's Diversity
and Inclusion Community
of Practice
[Michael.Youngblood@
va.gov](mailto:Michael.Youngblood@va.gov)

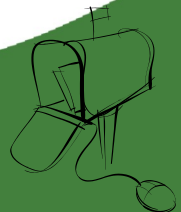
GOT NEWS?

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.

D&I Online

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

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



D&I In Your E-mail Inbox

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

D&I on Your TV or PC

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

Calendar

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

March

National Women's History Month
Irish American Heritage Month
Greek American Heritage Month

March 6; Washington, DC
National Council of La Raza
2012 NCLR Capital Awards
<http://www.nclr.org>

March 8
International Women's Day

March 13–April 15
Deaf History Month

March 26–27; Washington, DC
17th Annual National Capitol Forum on
Hispanic Higher Education
<http://www.hacu.net>

April

Celebrate Diversity Month

April 13–14; Houston, TX
League of United Latin American Citizens
National Women's Conference
<http://lulac.org>

April 19
Holocaust Remembrance Day

April 26
Take our Daughters and Sons to Work

April 26–28; Albuquerque, NM
Gathering of Nations Powwow
<http://www.gatheringofnations.com>

April 30–May 2; Newport News, VA
African American Federal Executive
Association Annual Training Workshop
<http://www.aafea.org>

April 30–May 4; Atlanta, GA
Federal Asian Pacific American Council
27th National Training Conference
<http://www.fapac.org>