Commemorate

Women’s History Month

VA Central Office (VACO) will commemorate Women’s History Month on Thursday, March 16, 2017, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, at noon (ET). The theme for 2017 observance, determined annually by the National Women’s History Project (NWHP), is “Honoring Trailblazing Women in Labor and Business” and honors women who have successfully challenged the role of women in both business and the paid labor force. (Continued on the next page.)

Message from the DAS

I am pleased to announce the publication of the Department of Veterans Affairs Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2017-2020. The revised plan updates our strategies and incorporates employee engagement into our diversity and inclusion (D&I) goals, objectives, and strategies. The mission of VA’s D&I program is to grow a diverse workforce and cultivate an inclusive work environment, where employees are fully engaged and empowered to deliver the outstanding services to our Nation’s Veterans, their families, and beneficiaries. ODI looks forward to working with you to achieve this important mission. Now more than ever, we must remain vigilant to protect and advance the cause of diversity and inclusion in VA and beyond. Please review and share our new strategic plan with your colleagues. Read more about it on the next page.

On that point, please join the Nation in commemorating March marks Women’s History Month. International Women’s Day was first observed in 1909, but it was not until 1981 that Congress established National Women’s History Week to be commemorated annually the second week of March. In 1987, Congress expanded the week to a month. Every year since, Congress has passed a resolution for Women’s History Month, and the president has issued a proclamation. This year’s theme, “Honoring Trailblazing Women in Labor and Business,” focuses on women in the workplace and gives us the opportunity to honor those women who challenged the traditional view of a women’s role in society. There is still progress to be made; in 2015, full-time, year-round female workers earned only 80 cents for every dollar their male counterparts earned, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Yet, also according to Census, 30.9 percent of women age 25 and older had obtained a bachelor’s degree or more as of 2015, compared to 30.3 percent of men age 25 and older who had obtained a bachelor’s degree. I am excited, as I hope you are, to watch the future unfold. Finally, March also commemorates numerous other observances including Irish-American Heritage Month, Deaf History Month, and LGBT Health Awareness Week. Join us in celebrating our rich diversity.– Georgia Coffey

ORM

Steps Toward Resolution

Alternative Dispute Resolution
(202-461-0280) can help with resolving conflict. To file a discrimination or harassment complaint, you must contact the Office of Resolution Management at (toll free) 888-737-3361 within 45 calendar days of the date of the alleged discriminatory incident.

Steps Toward Resolution

Deaf History Month

March 13–April 15

Women’s History Month Program

March 16, noon–1 pm
VACO Room 230

St. Patrick’s Day

March 17

LGBT Health Awareness Week

March 27

César Chávez Day

March 31
Commemorate
Continued from the previous page

This year marks the 37th anniversary of the Women’s History Movement and the NWHP. We can be proud that, after decades of dedicated research and technological advances, the stories of American women from all cultures and classes are accessible and visible as never before. Numerous scholars and activists helped shape the Women’s History Movement, and also provided the research and energy which created and sustains the National Women’s History has become woven into the fabric of our national story.

During March, NWHP will honor 13 women from the past and present who exemplified this year’s theme. Their list includes women such as Rebecca Anderson, Barbara Hackman Franklin, Alexis Herman, Lilly Ledbetter, Kate Mullany, Lucy Gonzalez Parsons, Barbara “Dusty” Roads, Andra Rush, Nina Vaca, Maggie Lena Walker, Yvonne Walker, Addie L. Wyatt and Norma Yaeger. To see a complete write up, visit the NWHP Web Site.

For more information on VA’s Federal Women’s Program (FWP) or the VACO observance, contact Ms. Mercedes N. Kirkland-Doyle, VA’s National FWP Manager, Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Training
FEW NTP

The 48th Annual Federally Employed Women (FEW) National Training Program (NTP) will be held July 17-20, 2017 at the Hilton Riverside Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana. FEW NTP qualifies as a training activity in accordance with (IAW) 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and 5 CFR 410.404 and all sessions are mapped to OPM’s Senior Executive Service Executive Core Qualifications (Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions).

ODI is tentatively scheduled to present a no-cost VA Agency Forum designed to provide VA employees and Veterans with information on professional development, VA’s Federal Women’s Program (FWP) workforce demographics, leadership, and ODI workforce initiatives. If scheduled, employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend the Agency Forum, with supervisory approval. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending the Agency Forum and/or NTP must be authorized by each employee’s organization. Employees who plan to attend the Agency Forum, if scheduled, and/or the FEW NTP must also pre-register through VA Attendance and Cost Estimation System (ACES). For the intranet link address, or for additional information, contact Ms. Mercedes N. Kirkland-Doyle, VA’s National Federal Women’s Program Manager, ODI. Additional conference information including registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules is available on the FEW Web site.

Policy Alert
New Department of Veterans Affairs Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2017-2020 Now Available

ODI proudly presents the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2017-2020!

ODI created VA’s first Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan in 2008. The intent was to develop a leading-edge, living road map for incorporating diversity and inclusion in VA based on the best practices in the public and private sectors. This revised plan incorporates employee engagement and aligns with both the VA FY 2014-2020 Strategic Plan and the Government-Wide Inclusive Diversity Strategic Plan 2016.

ODI is privileged to lead the effort to promote diversity, inclusion, and engagement in VA in collaboration with all our partners and stakeholders! Please contact ODI for more information.
Employee Engagement in Action – Measurement to Engagement
Tips from Senior Management Analyst and Employee Engagement Task Force Team Lead, Ms. Renee Williams

“The human resource is our greatest commodity,” said Ms. Renee Williams, who was the Employee Engagement Task Force (EETF) Team Lead at the Office of Information and Technology (OI&T). “Providing the employee[s] the experience they need at work [in order] to be fulfilled as well as fulfill the mission is paramount to everything we do,” she advised.

Over the last year, the EETF has made major strides in improving employee engagement at OI&T, particularly in how to use survey feedback to direct change that improves the workplace. VA’s Employee Engagement Service (EES) met recently with Ms. Williams to learn more about the EETF’s success and some steps others can take to improve employee engagement in their facilities.

Create a working group. When Ms. LaVerne Council was brought in as the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer in July 2015, she set out to determine OI&T’s health. She first looked at recent employee survey results, where she found evidence of a lack of synergy, communication, and coordination within the office. Armed with this information, Ms. Council put together the EETF in March of 2016 and made Ms. Williams the team lead. “It is important for an organization to look at how it functions and how the employees are functioning,” said Ms. Williams. “Ms. Council created the task force for us to really be able to look at that and answer that question.”

Gather information. EETF’s first goal was to understand OI&T’s unique challenges in improving employee engagement. When addressing issues such as employee engagement, it is very easy to get caught up trying to fix symptoms without addressing the underlying issues. To avoid this, the EETF used the All Employee Survey, the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, and the VA Pulse Survey to gauge the largest obstacles to employee engagement in the organization. They supplemented these federal and VA-wide surveys with their own internal OI&T surveys to delve deeper into some of the unique challenges their workforce was facing. Data from these surveys revealed employees didn’t feel as though there were enough opportunities for them to express their concerns, offer suggestions, or ask questions of peers and leadership.

Determine solutions. Once they had fully digested information gathered from federal, VA, and OI&T surveys, EETF was able to develop solutions that would directly address specific issues at OI&T. They determined their main goal would be “to build a more collaborative and inclusive, results-oriented culture that inspired trust and strength in communication,” said Ms. Williams. The task force immediately addressed specific shortcomings revealed from survey data by streamlining email communication, using technology to create platforms for employees to communicate directly with leadership, and meeting face-to-face with employees throughout the country to discuss ways to improve employee engagement. These solutions were both effective and strategic as they directly addressed key areas of concern revealed during thorough fact finding.

Track results. EETF, recently renamed the Office of Organization Diversity and Engagement as a permanent part of the organization, continues to solicit feedback from employees through surveys internal to OI&T. These surveys allow them to measure ongoing progress to determine whether or not changes in the office were taking shape, and they have revealed improvements in employee engagement. “The overall results showed a positive uptake in every measure since [the EETF] started,” said Ms. Williams. This includes improvements in employee recognition, opportunity to express opinions, management giving value to employee opinion, teamwork, and executive communication.

Actual behavioral change takes time, but any organization can make improvements by gathering information, determining the right solutions to address underlying problems, as well as assessing results to help keep strategies focused on improving employee engagement.

For any questions related to employee engagement at VA, contact ODI’s Employee Engagement Service.
– Ms. Clarise Cannings