Message from the DAS

As we come to the end of the current fiscal year, I’d like to take this time to thank you VA, along with my staff in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), for all of the work we have accomplished in the areas of diversity and inclusion and for your commitment to ensuring that the Department continues to make progress towards the three goals outlined in VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan: 1) a diverse workforce, 2) an inclusive workplace, and 3) outstanding customer service (http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/plan.aspx).

Soon, ODI will begin summarizing all of VA’s D&I accomplishments in VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report (http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/diar.aspx). Please be sure that your office’s accomplishments are captured. Contact your VA Diversity Council representative to find out how to submit information for the report. Visit http://www.diversity.va.gov/council for the list of current members.

On Wednesday, August 28, we commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. As we remember the events of the American Civil Rights Movement and recall these rallies as well as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s historic “I Have a Dream” speech, I challenge you to rise up for equality. It is the responsibility of each of us to ensure that VA workplaces are inclusive so that the Department may reap the benefits of the diverse workforce VA is building.

It is also a historic time as VA received word that the President has accepted the Attorney General’s recommendation that the Executive Branch of government cease enforcement of the definitions of “spouse” and “surviving spouse” in Title 38 to the extent that they limit Veterans’ benefits to couples of the opposite sex. Read more about this under the Policy Alerts section of this newsletter. Continued on the next page.

Have a dispute?
VA’s Alternative Dispute Resolution program can help: http://www.va.gov/adr.

Have an EEO complaint?
Contact the Office of Resolution Management at (888) 737-3361 within 45 calendar days of the alleged incident.

Commemorate
National Hispanic Heritage Month

VA takes great pride in observing National Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from September 15 to October 15, 2013. This year’s theme is: “Hispanics: Serving and Leading our Nation with Pride and Honor.” Hispanic Heritage Month started in 1968 to honor the contributions from generations of Hispanics have made to our country. September 15 was chosen as the starting date because it is the day of independence for five Latin American countries: El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Mexico won its independence on September 16, while Chile gained its freedom on September 18. Columbus Day, which is October 12, is also celebrated during Hispanic Heritage Month. Continued on page 7.
Message from the DAS

Continued from the previous page.

Finally, please learn more about VA’s efforts during Suicide Prevention Month on page 7 and join me in commemorating Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) from September 4–6, Yom Kippur from September 13–14, National Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Week from September 22–28, and National Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM) from September 13–October 15. Be sure to read more about some of these observances beginning on page 1. Just in time for this year’s HHM observance, VA has released a Hispanic Employment, Retention, and Outreach Plan. That plan can be accessed online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/hispanic.aspx. I hope you have a chance to read it as it outlines strategies developed to address low participation rates and identify and address any barriers to the full inclusion of Hispanics in the VA workforce. The Plan serves as an operational framework to promote VA as a model equal opportunity employer for Hispanics. ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

VACO/Field Notes

“...To Care for HER Who Hath Borne the Battle...The Rural Woman Veteran”

The Rural Health Professions Institute (RHPI) on behalf of the VA Office of Rural Health is pleased to make available the July 2013 live broadcast on rural women Veterans online at http://www.myvehucampus.com/fast/evt4140. This presentation’s purpose is to highlight those needs through a discussion of a brief history of women in the military; the juggling of multiple roles by women; barriers to care such as clinic operating hours, transportation, and childcare issues; disparities in care of problems such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, immunizations, and vaccinations; issues including high risk pregnancies, homelessness in rural areas; and diagnoses like musculoskeletal and chronic pain, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, and Traumatic Brain Injury. Care for rural women Veterans is best accomplished using a full toolbox approach that includes community collaboration, Veteran outreach, rural Chaplain Service and outreach to rural faith-based communities, and the Women Veteran Program Managers within the Veterans Health Administration.

Utilizing the New 2010 EEO Tabulation—Free Webinar!

Now that the new Census EEO Tabulation is available, participate in a live demonstration navigating the Census Bureau’s American Factfinder tool to retrieve data necessary for MD-715 reporting purposes. The Webinar, “EEO Tabulation Webinar for Federal Agencies,” will be held on Tuesday, October 1, 2013, from 2 to 3:30 p.m. (EST) via AT&T Connect iMeeting. Visit http://eeoc.uc.att.com/eeoc/SyncEvents/EnterEvent.asp?flink=1&campus=eeoc&campusURL=eeoc.uc.att.com&Lang=1&external=OMN0DW to enter the iMeeting a few minutes before the scheduled start time. For audio, dial 1-888-390-0721, passcode EEO TAB.

Diversity Internships

2013 Summer Program Ends

The 2013 summer session of the National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP) ended on August 9, 2013. This program, supported by ODI, hosted a total of 124 Interns from various colleges and universities from around the country and Puerto Rico. The NDIP helped interns gain valuable experience while working at VA. Throughout the summer session, sponsor offices offered various challenging activities related to either the intern’s degree program or selected career path. This allowed the interns to take the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom and apply it to the workplace. Continued on page 4.
Training

HBCU Week Conference

The White House Initiative on Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) will host a two-day national conference commemorating National HBCU Week and highlighting the significant contributions HBCUs have made to the Nation on September 26–27, 2013. The conference will be held at the Washington Hilton in Washington, DC. This year’s theme is: “HBCUs Facing Forward: A New Paradigm for Educating the 21st Century Student.”

The Initiative’s authorization comes from Executive Order 13532, which calls for Federal agencies to strengthen the capacity of HBCUs through increased participation in Federal program initiatives and to provide the highest-quality education to students. For more information, contact Trina Faison, VA’s National African American Employment Program Manager, ODI, at Trina.Faison@va.gov or visit http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/whhhbcu/2013-hbcu-week-conference.

Prevention of Workplace Harassment/Whistleblower/No FEAR Act Training (TMS #8892)

ODI, in collaboration with the VA Learning University, Employee Education System, Office of Resolution Management, Office of General Counsel, and Office of Inspector General revised the VA mandatory training Prevention of Workplace Harassment/Whistleblower/No FEAR Act Training as a special initiative to ensure that the VA workforce has the latest information and requirements. Course objectives include: (1) Identifying the type of conduct that constitutes employment discrimination/workplace harassment including sexual harassment; and (2) Identifying rights with regard to employment discrimination, whistleblower protection, and prohibition of retaliation. Updated course material includes the addition of Federal equal employment opportunity laws, executive orders and VA policy statements; protections against retaliation; types of illegal discrimination; clarification of workplace and sexual harassment prevention; and recent whistleblower and No FEAR Act protections. The course will be submitted to the VA 508 Compliance Office for review and the next step will be to upload to TMS for functionality testing. A 20-day notification will be issued to current users, and then the course will be placed on TMS. The revised mandatory course should be available no later than September 6, 2013. For more information, contact Carolyn Williams, Diversity Training Specialist, ODI, at Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov.

Image National Training Program

National Image, Inc. will hold its 41st Annual National Training Program (NTP) September 9–13, 2013, at the BWI Airport Marriott in Linthicum, Maryland. The Image NTP qualifies as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C Chapter 41 and is open to all Federal employees.

In conjunction with the NTP, ODI will be conducting its 3rd Annual Hispanic Employment Program (HEP) Managers’ Training and Policy Summit on Monday, September 9 from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. as part of the Pre-NTP agency professional development forums. The summit will be a no-cost training opportunity designed for VA HEP Managers who are in the local area or attending the NTP. Participation in VA’s summit will be limited to the first 49 employees who register in TMS: https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERING_DETAILS&scheduleID=2600478. Please note that registration via TMS does not constitute registration for the main conference.

Prior to registering for the NTP, each employee must receive appropriate approval, including travel approval, from their organization. Costs associated with attending the main conference must be authorized by the employee’s organization. Additional conference and training information such as conference registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules are available at http://www.national-image.org. For additional information or to request a disability accommodation, contact Aurelia Waters, HEP Outreach Manager, ODI, at (202) 461-4124 or Aurelia.Waters@va.gov.

Diversity News: An Online Training Resource

The September/October 2013 edition of Diversity News focuses on VA’s National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP) and features Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion, and an interview with a few of VA’s 2013 NDIP Interns. Diversity News is available both on the internal VA Knowledge Network and on ODI’s external Web site. To view current and past episodes, visit http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx.
Employee Retention

*Best Practices for Reducing Turnover of Employees with Targeted Disabilities*

Is your facility or office hiring people with targeted disabilities, only to see them resign or be terminated? Are you struggling to meet the two percent on board goal because existing employees with targeted disabilities are leaving almost as fast as new people are hired? Perhaps it is time to consider a re-evaluation of your practices.

In the first three quarters of FY 2013, VA hired 911 people with targeted disabilities into permanent and temporary positions. Of these new hires, 676 employees have psychiatric disabilities and the majority of these individuals are Veterans. During the same time frame, 656 employees with targeted disabilities left VA, 522 taking voluntary separations and 134 being involuntarily separated. Of these separations, employees with psychiatric disabilities were 313 of the voluntary separations and 100 of the involuntary separations. Again, the majority of these employees are Veterans.

There are several things that can be done to reduce the attrition rate:

1. When making a job offer, explain the conditions of employment, including the probationary period. Explain the importance of timeliness, decorum, etc.
2. At the first sign that an employee (new or long-standing) is having problems, the supervisor should have a one-on-one, off the record meeting with the employee. The supervisor should clearly articulate what s/he is seeing and what is expected. Then ask the employee if anything can be done to help the employee meet the expected parameters.
3. If the employee indicates that a disability is preventing full performance or the desired conduct, the supervisor should contact the facility’s Local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator and begin the interactive discussion to identify an appropriate accommodation. Please know that the interactive process is required by law; it is not optional.
4. If a Veteran with a psychiatric disability is having work or conduct issues, s/he can be reminded that the VHA Mental Health Services are a resource that can be used. Any employee with psychiatric issues can be referred to the Employee Assistance Program. Most cities also have a state Office of Vocational Rehabilitation that may offer assistance.
5. Some employees will benefit from a mentor. The mentor should be an employee who is at a higher level and can communicate clearly. It is preferable to give an employee who is a Veteran a mentor who is a Veteran. Sometimes the employee will have to try more than one mentor to find a good fit.
6. One VA facility voluntarily transferred an employee with a targeted disability to a different unit because the first supervisor was displaying retaliatory behavior. Human Resources staff will need to be alert to situations where the supervisor is ignoring or mistreating the employee.

All of these suggestions require a little “extra” work on the part of VA supervisors and HR staff. However, they are easier and cheaper than recruiting and hiring new employees with targeted disabilities. Please consider these options.

NDIP

*Continued from page 2.*

Several interns stated that participating in the NDIP was one of the best decisions they have made at this point in their lives. Some interns indicated they had been worried about how they could apply what they learned in the classroom to the real world. For many, this internship showed they could apply their studies to their job at VA and beyond.

Additionally, the NDIP gave interns the opportunity to learn more about VA and the routines and operations of the workplace. Interns in the Washington, DC area toured the local VA Medical Center (VAMC) and the Quantico Veterans Cemetery. The VAMC tour gave the interns a first-hand look at the functions of various VAMC departments and employees who support our Nation’s Veterans. The tour included a visit to a rehabilitation area where patients with brain injuries relearn how to perform daily life activities. At the Quantico Veterans Cemetery, interns learned about the history of the cemetery and how it operates on a daily basis to support our Nation’s Veterans and their families during times of bereavement. *Continued on page 10.*
Need equipment because of your disability?

When you succeed in your job at VA, you succeed for our Nation’s Veterans. That’s why VA offers benefits, services and programs to help you thrive ... including **reasonable accommodations** for employees and applicants with disabilities. Need a sit-stand desk because you have back problems? Want a sign language interpreter to help you communicate with Veterans? Have partial paralysis and need a scooter? VA’s Local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinators can help you. What’s more, VA’s Centralized Fund will reimburse the cost of your reasonable accommodations. To learn more, visit [http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx](http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx). You work hard to help America’s heroes, that’s why **we care for you while you care for our Veterans**.
Policy Alerts

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)

On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is unconstitutional. While this decision was of great significance to many Veterans, VA was nonetheless required to follow statutes in United States Code Title 38 defining "spouse" and "surviving spouse" as persons of the opposite sex. On September 4, 2013, VA received word that the President has accepted the Attorney General’s recommendation that the Executive Branch of government cease enforcement of the definitions of “spouse” and “surviving spouse” in Title 38 to the extent that they limit Veterans’ benefits to couples of the opposite sex. VA’s commitment to Veterans and their families will continue to be the Department’s focus as VA works to implement changes to comply with the recent Supreme Court decision and the President’s announcement. VA is working to promulgate changes to policy documents and update information technology systems in a timely and efficient manner. In the days and weeks to come, VA employees will be hearing from their senior leaders who will help make certain that they have the tools and information they need to provide quality benefits and services to Veterans, their dependents, and survivors.

Historical 462 Data

Beginning October 1, 2013, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) will move to a new system for collecting complaint processing data via our Form 462. Please note that the prior Form 462 Web site, https://egov.eeoc.gov/form462/form462prod12, will permanently close September 30, 2013. Agencies should retrieve any of the last five years of reports not yet in the agency’s own archive before that date. Agencies will submit the fiscal year 2013 Form 462 Report via EEOC’s FedSep portal. Agencies will submit xml files created by completing the EEOC’s free Excel tool or through their vendor’s application. Further instructions and webinar training will be forthcoming and EEOC will keep you updated as events unfold. Registration for Form 462 Report submissions may begin on the portal, https://egov.eeoc.gov/FedSep/jsp/login.jsf, October 1, 2013. As with all new applications, EEOC requests your patience and feedback as they strive to make this process easier for all.

Alternative Workplace Arrangements (Telework)

VA Handbook 5011, Part II, Chapter 4, has been revised and will be incorporated into the electronic version of the handbook. Significant changes include:

a. Allows staff to utilize personally owned computer equipment;

b. Requires written telework agreements for any telework arrangements, including ad hoc;

c. Shortens the process for establishing a telework agreement;

d. Requires local telework coordinators to maintain records of approved telework agreements; and

e. Issued a standardized Telework Request/Agreement form, VA Form 0740. The form is accessible on the VA forms Web site.

VA Child Care Subsidy Program

VA Handbook 5009, Part I, VA Child Care Subsidy Program will be amended to revise the following:

a. Establishes VA Form 0730i, Change in Child Care Provider for employees who change their child care provider while actively participating in the program;

b. Revises VA Form 0730h, Child Care Subsidy Program Benefit Payment Request Form instructions to clarify the employee’s responsibility and timeframe for submitting monthly benefit payment requests and invoices;

c. Clarifies the age limitation for covered children;

d. Adds procedures for the Child Care Records Management System;

e. Adds clarifying instructions on the extension of Child Care Subsidy Program benefits to same-sex domestic partners;

f. Increases the total family income threshold and modifies income criteria; and

g. Establishes administration of the day-to-day functions of the program under the title Child Care Subsidy Program Service. Continued on the next page.
Modification to the VA Speed of Hiring Model

Changes were made to VA Speed of Hiring Model. Effective September 1, 2013, the target job opportunity announcement open period is being reduced from 20 calendar days to 10 calendar days except as required by bargaining unit or other agreements. This allows for extending management selection time from 17 calendar days to 27 calendar days. The total speed of hiring time for each new hire remains 60 calendar days. The memorandum was released on August 8, 2013, and can be found on the VA USA Staffing User Community of Practice, in the VA Speed of Hire (SoH) library. VA Human Resources (HR) leadership professionals (i.e., HR Officer, and/or Assistant HR Officer) may send questions pertaining to this update to: Judith.Naquin@va.gov.

Non-competitive Hires in PAID

Starting August 2013, the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) began monitoring all non-competitive hiring actions processed in the PAID personnel/payroll system. In turn, starting September 2013, the Human Resources Offices (HROs) in the Administrations and Staff Offices will be informed of the number of non-competitive hires processed in the PAID personnel/payroll system. HROs must ensure that the number of non-competitive hires submitted in their monthly Speed of Hiring (SoH) data to OHRM is consistent with the number of hiring appointments processed in the PAID personnel/payroll system. This process will help to identify discrepancies in reporting non-competitive hires for the SoH metric. The memorandum was released on August 16, 2013, and can be found on the VA USA Staffing User Community of Practice, in the VA Speed of Hire library.

Purchase and Hire (P&H)

This revision to VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 2, addresses proper use of the Schedule A, section 213.3127(a)(1) appointment authority to fill P&H vacancies. Revision 5005/69 includes the following significant changes:

a. Places an emphasis on compliance with 5 CFR, part 213 appointment limitations and a prohibition on non-competitive movement between appointments;
b. Adds an emphasis on compliance with Veterans preference and pass over procedures; and
c. Requires that selecting officials submit appropriate justification and project-specific details with recruitment action for each P&H appointment or extension.

Suicide Prevention Month 2013

VA Collaborates with Communities to Help Veterans Access Mental Health Support

In recognition of September as Suicide Prevention Month, the Department of Veterans Affairs is mobilizing people and organizations nationwide to support Veterans in crisis and spread the word about VA mental health services. Throughout the month, VA suicide prevention coordinators at all 151 VA medical centers will organize community events, host health fairs, lead training sessions and work with VA Voluntary Service to improve Veterans’ lives. VA is also launching a new Suicide Prevention Month public service announcement, “Talking About It Matters” nationwide in September.

“VA’s highest priority is the mental health and well-being of the brave men and women who have served our Nation. Even one suicide is one too many,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “VA is a leader in providing high-quality mental health care that improves and saves Veterans’ lives. We know that treatment works, and there is hope for Veterans who seek mental health care.”

This year’s theme, “It Matters,” emphasizes the people, relationships and experiences that matter to Veterans and their loved ones, reinforcing their personal connections and giving their lives hope and meaning. Continued on the next page.
Suicide Prevention Month 2013

Continued from the previous page.

To spark conversation about the difficult topics of suicide risk and prevention, VA will unveil a photo-sharing campaign, “Show Us What Matters,” and will invite Veterans and their loved ones to upload photos of the special people in their lives to http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/SPM/Gallery.aspx.

“When a Veteran is in crisis, even one small act can make a lifesaving difference,” said Dr. Robert A. Petzel, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “It’s up to all of us to understand the signs of crisis and look out for the Veterans in our lives. And when we are concerned, we need to reach out and tell someone.”

Throughout the summer and through September, VA is holding Mental Health Summits at all 151 VA medical centers to further engage community partners, Veteran Service Organizations, health care providers and local governments, and to address the broad mental health needs of Veterans and their families and show them they matter. VA is calling on supporters to educate their networks to recognize suicide warning signs and encourage Veterans in crisis to call the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and press 1), chat online at http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx?account=Veterans%20Chat, or text to 838255—even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. All Veterans Crisis Line resources are optimized for mobile devices.

“We urge Veterans’ loved ones—and everyone—to show support for Veterans during Suicide Prevention Month and throughout the year,” said Dr. Janet Kemp, director of VA’s Suicide Prevention Program. “Learn to recognize the risk of suicide and let Veterans know that caring, confidential support is only a call, click or text away. Families, friends and co-workers need to work together to provide a network of support for Veterans in our communities. We’re all in this together.”

Anyone can support Veterans by:

- Encouraging a Veteran who needs help to call the Veterans Crisis Line. Remind them that it takes courage to seek help.
- Connecting with a local Suicide Prevention Coordinator and taking part in a local event.
- Watching the new Suicide Prevention Month public service announcement, “Talking About It Matters”.
- Downloading an electronic toolkit to share Suicide Prevention Month web badges, banners, blog posts and social media content.
- Tweeting your friends and loved ones with the following message: “One small act can make the difference. This #SuicidePreventionMonth, help #Veterans access the support they’ve earned: http://www.veteranscrisisline.net.”

VA has implemented comprehensive, wide-ranging suicide prevention initiatives, including a toll-free Veterans Crisis Line, placement of Suicide Prevention Coordinators at all VA medical centers and large outpatient facilities, and improvements in case management and reporting. The Veterans Crisis Line, online chat, and text-messaging services offer free, confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year to Veterans, their families, and friends. Veterans, or anyone concerned about a Veteran, can call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx?account=Veterans%20Chat, or text to 838255 to receive support—even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. All Veterans Crisis Line resources are optimized for mobile devices. Since 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered more than 890,000 calls and made more than 30,000 lifesaving rescues. In 2009, the Veterans Crisis Line added the anonymous chat service, which has had more than 108,000 chats.

To further expand access to quality mental health care, VA has hired over 1,600 mental health clinical providers to meet the goal outlined in an executive order. Additionally, VA has hired over 2,005 mental health clinical providers to fill existing vacancies. VA’s mental health workforce totals nearly 20,300. In fiscal year 2012, VA provided specialized mental health care to more than 1.3 million Veterans. The Department has an aggressive recruiting campaign underway among mental health specialists to ensure Veterans continue to receive the best mental health care anywhere.
Commemorate

Continued from page 1.

As we reflect on our Nation’s rich cultural history and traditions, let us commemorate the contributions of Hispanics to shaping and strengthening our country in Congress; on the Supreme Court; as entrepreneurs; and as brave members of the Armed Forces, defending the United States in every war since the American Revolution. Hispanics have contributed to all aspects of American life, from the Supreme Court and halls of Congress, to police officers and first responders who protect our neighborhoods, to teachers and mentors who guide our Nation’s young people, to physicians and nurses who look after our health.

The 2010 Census revealed that 50.5 million citizens in our Nation identify as Hispanic, up from 35.3 million in 2000. However, Hispanics in VA’s workforce (6.74 percent) are slightly below their participation rate in 2010; VA has not made many improvements in this area. Hispanic women are at only 82 percent of their expected participation rate. When examining VA’s new hires as of June 30, 2013, 2.91 percent were Hispanic men, compared to the benchmark of 3.06 percent (Relevant Civilian Labor Force). 2.98 percent of new hires were Hispanic women, as compared to the benchmark of 4.40 percent. Hispanic men have a lower than expected participation rate at the GS 11–15 and Title 38 equivalent pay levels. Hispanic women have a participation rate that is lower than expected at the GS 12 –15 and Title 38 equivalent pay levels, as well as the Senior Executive Service. The data indicates that VA needs to improve recruitment of qualified Hispanics, especially women, for senior level positions. VA must make every effort to ensure Hispanics are included in every facet of the work cycle—from recruitment to career development to retention.

VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to lead efforts and participate in VA activities that recognize the vast contributions Hispanics Americans have made to America. For more information on VA’s Hispanic Employment Program, contact Arlene Gonzalez, VA’s National Hispanic Employment Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 461-4041 or Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov.

National HBCU Week


The founders of our Nation’s first colleges and universities for African Americans shared a fundamental belief that, with the right education, all people can overcome barriers of injustice to achieve their fullest potential. These pioneers understood that education means emancipation—a path to freedom, independence, and success. More than 150 years later, America’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) carry forward this proud legacy, and this week, we celebrate the profound impact these places of learning have made on the life of our country.

For generations, HBCUs have provided students with access to higher education and instilled in them a sense of pride and history. Graduates of these institutions have played an extraordinary role in shaping the progress of our Union by championing equality and changing perspectives through the arts. They have strengthened our Nation by building our economy, teaching our children, healing the sick, and defending America as members of our Armed Forces. Today, HBCUs continue to help move our country forward, cultivating leaders in every area of our society. And with each new HBCU alum, we move closer to achieving our goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

During National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week, as we recognize the immeasurable contributions of these institutions, let us recommit to ensuring they remain cradles of opportunity for the next generation. Let us also reaffirm our belief in the power of progress through education—a belief we share with the visionary leaders who established our HBCUs so many years ago.

Read about the HBCU Week Conference on page 3, under Training.
While Times Square doesn’t celebrate the new year in September, this month the Federal government marks the close of one fiscal year and the start of another. In the spirit of new beginnings, September is a great time to focus on revamping and refreshing your career skills.

This new year, resolve to be your own career advocate by honing your interview and networking skills. How? Use CareerPrep, a new resource from MyCareer@VA. CareerPrep provides counsel on how to best promote and enhance your capabilities so you can maximize your opportunities. It gives you the power to prepare for interviews and networking events, get your resume in shape, and overcome challenges. Find CareerPrep at: http://go.usa.gov/jzWd.

CareerPrep focuses on three skill building activities that will kick you off to a great start:

**Interviewing:** Interview Prep

Shine in front of interviewers and showcase the specific skills and experiences you have that will make you a good fit for the job. In this skill-building course, you will learn about Performance Based Interviewing (PBI), a style of evaluation that is used at VA, which allows you to tie your expertise to on-the-job applications. Find Interview Prep at: http://go.usa.gov/jzWF.

**Making an Elevator Pitch:** Elevator Pitch Prep

Make a great first impression to your future employer, no matter the time or place. Learn how to package your expertise and accomplishments into an easily digestible message that you can share quickly in any situation. Find Elevator Pitch Prep at: http://go.usa.gov/jzZ3.

**Navigating Challenges in Your Career Development:** Overcoming Obstacles

Tackle any obstacles that come your way head on. As you pursue these new career ventures, as in any new job search, you may also hit some bumps along the way. Overcoming Obstacles walks you through the elements that make up your challenge, and guides you towards a solution. Find Overcoming Obstacles at: http://go.usa.gov/jzZT.

Regardless of what your career goals are for this new year—whether you are just starting your career, looking to transition between professions, or simply trying to overcome obstacles—use CareerPrep’s resources to help you become your own professional advocate. And, if you have other goals you want to accomplish as well, keep in mind that these are just a few of the tools available at MyCareer@VA, so visit http://www.mycareeratva.va.gov to explore all that MyCareer@VA has to offer to guide your career development. Best of luck as you kick off your new career goals and have a great new year!

**NDIP**

*Continued from page 4.*

Select interns from VA Central Office participated in a round table discussion led by Kenneth Hunter, VA’s NDIP Manager, on their NDIP experience for the September/October edition Diversity News (http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx). The discussion focused on what led them to the NDIP, their backgrounds, and what they hoped to take away from their participation in VA’s intern program. Many of the interns at the roundtable said their intern experience at VA was something they will never forget. They felt that being exposed to challenging activities and applying their classroom knowledge showed they could be successful in the workplace. Many interns expressed their desire to become a part of the “VA Team” and continue the work to support our Nation’s Veterans and their families.

For more information on the NDIP, visit http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/internship.aspx.
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 Hispanic Heritage Month and other observance resources.
► Training resources, guides, and reports.
► Links to professional and community organizations.
► Best practices for diversity management.

D&I In Your E-mail Inbox

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 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 video program co-produced by ODI and the VA Central Office Broadcast Center for you. 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.

2013 Calendar

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

SEPTEMBER

Suicide Prevention Month

Rosh Hashanah
September 4–6

National Image, Inc. Annual Training Conference and Exposition

Patriot Day
September 11

Yom Kippur
September 13–14

National Hispanic Heritage Month
September 15–October 15

Constitution/Citizenship Day
September 17

Equal Opportunity Publications’ STEM Diversity Career Expo

Deaf Awareness Week
September 22–28

National Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Week
September 22–28

2013 HBCU Week Conference