Message from the DAS

February honors African American history and I am honored to host this important observance of the inspiring journey of African Americans in our history on February 6th at noon in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center in VA Central Office (VACO). The theme this year is “Civil Rights in America” and marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. For more information on this commemoration and on the VACO observance, be sure to read the article below.

The weather here in Washington, DC has been chilly but the work in VA’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is just beginning to heat up! We are beginning to develop VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2013. The purpose of the report is to chronicle the Department’s progress toward realizing the goals of VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, in alignment with VA’s Strategic Plan for 2011–2015. A copy of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan is available online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/plan.aspx. The Annual Report will provide a comprehensive view of the state of the agency with respect to workforce diversity and workplace inclusion with relevant accomplishments and initiatives identified for each administration and staff office within VA. For your reference, a copy of the FY 2012 report is available at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/diar.aspx. I encourage each of you to ensure that your organization’s accomplishments are captured in this year’s report. Continued on the next page.

Commemorate
National African American History Month

VA joins the Nation in commemorating National African American/Black History Month during the month of February. Marking the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, this year’s national theme is: “Civil Rights in America.”

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), established in 1915 by American historian Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson, sets the annual theme for African American/Black History Month. This year the ASALH recognizes some of the greatest advocates of social justice in American history and culture: Frederick Douglass; W.E.B. Du Bois; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and Fannie Lou Hamer. VA is proud to join the Nation in recognizing the contributions of these legendary individuals and the many others who struggled for equal rights. Continued on page 3.
ODI is requesting that VA Diversity Council representatives (http://www.diversity.va.gov/council) collect information from their respective organizations for inclusion in the Annual Report and submit information by February 14, 2014. To receive guidance on preparing submissions or for questions, contact Thomas Middleton, ODI, at (202) 461-4036 or Thomas.Middleton@va.gov.

ODI recently updated VA Directive 5975.1, Processing Requests for Reasonable Accommodation Requests From Employees and Applicants with Disabilities. The revised directive is now available at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/files/pwd/Handbook_5975-1.pdf. Please be sure all managers and supervisors are aware of their responsibilities and associated procedures for providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities.

Finally, Women’s Health Services (WHS) is collaborating with the American Heart Association (AHA) to celebrate American Heart Month in February. On February 7th, VA will Go Red for Women by asking Veterans and VA staff to wear RED in support of heart health. At noon on February 7th, WHS will host a national VA Goes Red event that will be broadcast from VACO Room 230 across the VAKN network and live Web stream. For more information, contact Patricia Hayes, PhD, Women’s Health Services, at (202) 461-0373. ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

New VA HR Leader

Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration Appointed

VA is pleased to welcome retired Major General Gina S. Farrisee as the new Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (ASHRA). The Honorable Gina Farrisee was sworn in on January 10, 2014. Prior to assuming ASHRA duties, she served as VA’s Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.

Before joining VA, Major General Farrisee served as the Commanding General of the United States Army Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, Kentucky. In this capacity, she provided leadership, operational and managerial oversight to more than 4,000 HRC employees (military, civilian, contractors) who provided worldwide human resource services to a customer base of more than 1 million people comprised of Active and Reserve Soldiers, Veterans and family members including but not limited to human capital management, professional development, and human resources management. She led the Command in managing a complex, high-volume customer service and geographically dispersed service delivery network.

Ms. Farrisee’s military service of more than 30 years included numerous and significant assignments, including, Director, Military Personnel Management, Pentagon, where she was responsible for overall Army personnel readiness through the development, implementation and execution of all personnel policies for the Total Army during a time of war with respect to global personnel policy covering all aspects of human resources management. Additionally, she was the principal agent for the integration of manpower, personnel, training and resourcing plans, and policies as they impacted annual budget submissions for Military Pay appropriations. From 2004-2006, Ms. Farrisee was the Commanding General, Soldier Support Institute, Training and Doctrine Command, Department of the Army, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where she was responsible for tactical and technical training of officer and enlisted Soldiers and civilians in the career fields of Human Resources, Finance, Recruiting and Retention, and School of Music. She also was responsible for the health, morale and welfare of a staff and faculty of 650 and an annual load of 18,000 initial entry and career development students.

As The Adjutant General of the Army; Commanding General, Physical Disability Agency; and Executive Director, Military Postal Service Agency, Alexandria, VA, from 2002-2004 she provided worldwide human resource services to a customer base of more than 900,000 people comprised of Active and Reserve Soldiers, Veterans and family members including but not limited to Casualty and Mortuary Affairs, awards, promotions, physical disability processing, officer/enlisted personnel records and evaluations, personnel automation systems, Army Continuing Education System and Department of the Army awards. Continued on page 6.
Commemorate

Continued from Page 1

As of the end of fiscal year 2013, African Americans/Blacks represented 23.82 percent (80,068) of VA’s permanent workforce. This is a significant accomplishment considering African Americans/Blacks represent only 12.77 percent of the Civilian Labor Force. VA employs (108,319) Veterans, of which 31.31 percent (33,910) are African American/Black. African American/Black men showed significant improvement by meeting and exceeding promotion expectation at the GS-13-15 pay levels, and African American/Black women met and exceeded promotion at this GS-14 pay levels; however, each group continue to have less than expected participation at the these middle to senior level grades. VA will continue to advertise and market its career development and leadership programs and ensure that all employees, including members of groups with less than expected participation, are encouraged to apply.

All managers and supervisors are encouraged to support attendance at events and activities to recognize and honor the contributions of African Americans/Blacks. VA will continue to lead the effort to create a diverse, results-oriented, high-performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve and the diversity of our Nation. By eliminating barriers to equal opportunity and cultivating an inclusive work environment, all employees can realize their full potential and VA can provide the best possible service to our Nation’s heroes—our Veterans.

For additional information, please contact your local EEO Manager or Trina Faison, VA’s National African American/Black Employment Program Manager, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, at (202) 494-6013 or Trina.Faison@va.gov.

On February 6, 2014, the Black History Month committee will celebrate the Black History Month Kick-off program at VA Central Office in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center from noon to 1:00 p.m. The featured guest and keynote speaker will be Brigadier General Linda Singh, the first female and African American candidate chosen to serve as Commander of the Maryland Army National Guard. General Singh recently returned from a deployment to Afghanistan and served in Kosovo in 2006 and 2007. She was an enlisted soldier for eleven years; her military decorations include the Bronze Star Medal. Brigadier General Linda Singh will speak on the 2014 Black History Month theme: “Civil Rights in America.” Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion, will serve as the senior host for this event.

On February 13, 2014, the Black History Month committee will host a Veteran program featuring a panel of African American Organizations (Triple Nickel and Buffalo Soldiers). Ms. Barbara Ward, Center for Women’s veterans will serve as senior host.

For more information, contact Tynnetta Lee, Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator, ODI, at (202) 461-7968 or Tynnetta.Lee@va.gov.

Focusing on Performance

Addressing Performance of Employees with Disabilities

As recently published in a JAN E-News article (http://askjan.org/ENews/2013/Enews-V11-I4.htm#2), addressing employee performance in the workplace can be difficult in itself and addressing performance of employees with disabilities is no different. Good employee performance is critical to the success of any business. This is why it is important for managers to have performance standards and to be consistent in applying those standards to all employees.

Employers have the right to define the essential functions of a job, to require that all employees meet qualitative and quantitative standards, and to evaluate employees according to those standards in a way that is consistent and uniform—which is essential when it comes to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act) compliance. Regardless of medical impairment, employees must be qualified, be able to perform essential job functions, and can be expected to meet qualification standards that are job-related and consistent with business necessity. Continued on the next page.
Focusing on Performance
Continued from Previous Page

A qualified employee with a disability is someone who can perform the essential functions of a job (with or without accommodation) AND meet the required performance standards of his or her position. The Rehab Act is designed to give workers with disabilities an equal opportunity to succeed on the job, not a greater opportunity. Thus, employees with disabilities should be held to the same performance standards as other similarly situated employees.

Medical impairment often has no bearing on performance, but when it does, employers should be prepared to handle such situations. When disability contributes to performance issues, reasonable accommodation may be required to assist an employee in meeting a uniformly applied standard. Reasonable accommodation can play a key role in preventing or improving performance problems. The objective, however, is to enable the employee to meet the standard as opposed to changing, removing, or ignoring the standard.

The first step is to identify the problem. Managers should address performance issues as soon as they develop—with all employees, not just employees with disabilities. Having uniformly applied standards in place allows employers to consistently evaluate employees and to more easily identify and respond to problems that develop. If an employee has a known disability, the manager should not assume that the performance problem is disability-related. Similarly, if an employee has not disclosed a disability, a manager has no obligation to ask whether a disability is impacting performance.

The next step is the same; once the problem has been identified, meet with the employee to discuss the issue. When discussing the performance related issue with the employee, the manager should be direct, let the employee know what the issue is, that it must be addressed, and explain the consequences of not addressing it. In some cases, the employee may be unaware that a problem exists. Offer clear expectations regarding the standard of work that must be met.

To successfully manage performance issues in the workplace, HR professionals, supervisors, and managers should be trained to:

- apply standards consistently;
- focus on performance when discussing the problem (not on disability);
- offer clear expectations for how the employee must improve in order to remain qualified for the position; and
- rather than ask about disability or if an accommodation is needed, tell the employee, “If there is anything we can do to help you meet the required performance standard(s), please let me or your direct supervisor know.”

Why this approach? The manager is putting the employee on notice that he or she can ask for help—basically, an accommodation—and how to go about doing this. If the employee indicates that the problem is related to a disability, then the manager should initiate the interactive process to determine whether the Rehab Act applies and if there are accommodations that will resolve the problem.

The overall message is that it is best to deal with performance issues as soon as they develop, rather than ignore them. There is no benefit to the business or employees in disregarding performance standards. Ignoring standards can do an injustice to employees by not holding them to clear expectations and giving them an equal opportunity to succeed and can also negatively impact business operations. The key is to be uniform and consistent. Employers who have concerns about any perception of discrimination can avoid an EEO complaint by being consistent in their practices and documenting efforts to enable employees to meet required standards through accommodation, when appropriate.

For questions about the reasonable accommodation process, contact your Local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator (LRAC) for assistance. The LRAC list is at [http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#lrac](http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#lrac).

Training

Cultural Competence and Your Career at VA

ODI served as subject matter experts for development of VA Learning University Web-based Talent Management System course #VA3866746: “Cultural Competence and Your Career at VA.” This training will be launched in the second quarter of fiscal year 2014. The purpose of this training is to:

- Raise awareness among VA employees of the strategic importance of cultural competence and inclusivity to VA.
- Provide resources and tools to support VA employees in their efforts to increase their cultural competence.
- Encourage VA employees to reflect on their own biases and inspire them to undertake efforts to increase their own cultural competence.

ODI encourages supervisors to assign this course to their direct reports’ individual learning plans. For more information, contact James Blockwood, Chief, Diversity Learning and Development, ODI, at James.Blockwood@va.gov.

New Barrier Analysis Training

Barrier elimination is an important step in VA becoming a model employer. To achieve this status, VA has to create a barrier-free environment where all applicants and employees have the opportunity to compete and work to their fullest potential. This training course covers all aspects of the barrier analysis process under EEOC Management Directive 715 (MD-715) to include: analysis and interpretation of workforce statistics, trigger identification, barrier analysis investigation, action plan preparation, and action plan follow up. Each VA facility has to identify barriers and create action plans on eliminating those identified barriers. This training is intended for employees who work with the MD-715 report and for all managers. Virtual classes will be offered on the following dates from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. (EST):

- Tuesday, February 25, 2014
- Thursday, March 6, 2014
- Thursday, March 27, 2014

Each session will be conducted via Microsoft Lync. Register at https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=ITEM_DETAILS&componentID=3844925&componentTypeID=VA&revisionDate=1368106800000. Sign into TMS, click on “register now”, and register for the class you want. Spaces are available on first-come, first-served basis.

Contact Ryan Pugh at (202) 461-4155 or Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov for more information.

VSSC HR Reporting and Workforce Analysis Tools Training

VA uses the VHA Support Service Center (VSSC) to store human resources (HR) data for all of VA in an easy to use reporting format. This interactive training on the VSSC HR Reporting Tools is designed to alert a wide range of managers and HR, equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity specialists to VSSC’s HR query applications. All managers have a duty to ensure there is equal opportunity in the workplace with regard to hiring, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment. This training provides guidance on how to properly use the applications to conduct various workforce analyses, identify triggers, and define and distinguish between Relevant Civilian Labor Force vs. Civilian Labor Force. Virtual training classes will be offered on the following dates from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (EST):

- Wednesday, March 12, 2014
- Tuesday, May 13, 2014
- Wednesday, July 16, 2014
- Thursday, September 25, 2014

Each session will be conducted via Microsoft Lync. Register at https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=ITEM_DETAILS&componentID=3823179&componentTypeID=VA&revisionDate=1352313600000. Sign into TMS, click on “register now”, and register for the class you want. Spaces are available on first-come, first-served basis.

Contact Ryan Pugh at (202) 461-4155 or Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov for more information.

Section 508 Training

The Section 508 Program Office currently offers nine training classes to help you understand Section 508 including “Creating Accessible Word Documents and Converting to Accessible PDF” and “Converting Scanned Documents to Accessible PDF.” Everyone has a responsibility to create information that meets the Federal Section 508 standards. Section 508 is a Federal law that applies to you. All courses are held live online via Lync. For more information and to enroll, e-mail Section508@va.gov.
Policy Alerts

Hours of Duty and Leave

VA Handbook 5011, Part I, paragraph e, and Part II, Chapter 3, paragraph 2a will be revised as follows: Full-time physicians and dentists appointed under 38 U.S.C. Chapters 73 or 74, the basic workweek will consist of a 40-hour tour of duty during the administrative workweek (i.e., Sunday through Saturday). The workday shall not be less than 2 hours and may not exceed 12 hours. The tour of duty may vary each administrative workweek, but must be determined prior to the beginning of the workweek. The basic 40-hour tour of duty shall be completed within the 7-day period from Sunday to Saturday and must not cross over into the following administrative workweek of the 80-hour bi-weekly pay period.

VACO/Field Notes

Welcome, New ODI Employee!

ODI welcomes Mr. Louocious Hires! Mr. Hires serves as the Director of Outreach and Retention in ODI. In this position, Mr. Hires oversees VA’s special emphasis programs, internships, and the majority of the Department's annual reports to the White House Initiatives Offices, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The team also works to reduce (and prevent) discrimination complaints in the Department, by providing onsite reviews to assess the effectiveness of facility-level EEO programs, and providing training on complaints prevention, diversity awareness, equal employment opportunity, and affirmative employment. Welcome, Mr. Hires!

2014 Workforce Recruitment Program

In keeping with VA's commitment to increasing the employment of individuals with disabilities, including disabled Veterans and to meet the Secretary's three percent goal for hiring individuals with targeted disabilities, ODI is pleased to announce the official start of VA's Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) as announced in a January 9, 2014, memo signed by Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (HR&A) Gina S. Farrisee. The WRP is an internship and candidate referral program coordinated by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Defense's Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity. The program connects Federal employers with pre-screened, qualified, post-secondary students with disabilities who are interested in spring or summer internships, or permanent jobs. The WRP is an excellent program for bringing in highly qualified students and recent college graduates with disabilities into Federal employment. A list of prescreened candidates is available at http://www.wrp.gov. ODI encourages each facility to appoint a representative to become familiar with the WRP program. For the fourth year in a row, HR&A, as a part of the Human Capital Investment Plan (HCIP), will continue to provide a centralized fund to reimburse payroll costs for WRP interns. Applications to request funding are due February 14, 2014, to ODI. The HCIP has made it possible for VA facilities and offices to hire WRP interns throughout the year. In fiscal year 2013, VA hired 48 WRP interns and converted nine to full-time status. VA currently leads the Federal government in the number of WRP students converted permanently. Congratulations VA! Detailed instructions are now available on VA's Disability Program Web site at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#WRP. For additional information regarding the WRP and VA’s centralized reimbursement fund, please contact Aurelia Waters, WRP Coordinator, ODI, at (202) 461-4124 or Aurelia.Waters@va.gov.

VA's New HR Leader

Continued from Page 2

Ms. Farrisee has been awarded numerous military decorations to include The Distinguished Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters, The Defense Superior Service Medal and The Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, and Master of Science, National Resource Strategy, from the National Defense University, Washington DC.
VA Demographics Report

Demographic Report for the Department of Veterans Affairs, December 2013

VA’s workforce diversity remains relatively steady through December 2013. Although the VA workforce increased by 3,421 employees since the beginning of the fiscal year, the changes in representation for all groups in VA’s permanent and temporary workforce were negligible.

Comparing the demographic characteristics of VA’s workforce against the Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF)*, the representation of White women, Hispanic men and women, and Asian men are lower than expected. White women representation is currently at 78 percent of RCLF, Hispanic men are at 79 percent, Hispanic women are at 62 percent, and Asian men are at 94 percent of RCLF.

**Diversity Index**

The Diversity Index is a single measure of workforce diversity that measures the convergence of VA’s aggregate workforce distribution by race, ethnicity, and gender to the Civilian Labor Force (CLF)** or RCLF. Since September 2013, there has been 0.26 percentage point increase in the RCLF-based diversity index and a 0.27 percentage point increase in the CLF-based diversity index.

**People with Targeted Disabilities**

The proportion of people with targeted disabilities in VA’s workforce has increased by 0.04 percentage points since the beginning of the fiscal year. We continue to exceed the Secretary’s 2 percent onboard goal.

The hiring of people with targeted disabilities also increased since the start of the fiscal year. Among all hires, people with targeted disabilities represent 3.82 percent, 0.82 percentage points above the Secretary’s 3 percent hiring goal. Let’s keep up the good work, VA!

For more information, contact ODI’s Workforce Analysis Team at odi@va.gov.

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*Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) reflects all U.S. Citizens 16 years of age or over, excluding those in Armed Forces, who are employed in or actively seeking employment in VA specific occupations. This is based on the 2010 Census and does include Puerto Rico. The RCLF seen here is based on the end of FY13.

**Civilian Labor Force (CLF) consists of all U.S. Citizens 16 years of age or over, excluding those in Armed Forces, who are employed or seeking employment. The CLF contains all occupations and is an accurate comparative basis for Federal Government-wide comparison, the largest employer in the U.S. with all occupations represented. This is based on the 2010 Census which is shown to be a higher benchmark compared with the 2000 Census. The CLF does not include Puerto Rico.
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 African American 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

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


February 2014 Calendar

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

- National African American History Month
- American Heart Month
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion D&I Councils Roundtable
- February 4 (10 am–noon); Washington, DC
  Email: diversityandinclusion@opm.gov
- VA Central Office Black History Month Kick-off
  February 6 (noon–1 pm); Room 230
- VA Central Office Black History Month Veteran Program
  February 13 (noon–1 pm); Room 230
- United States Hispanic Leadership Institute National Conference
  February 13–16; Chicago, IL
  http://www.ushli.org
- Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week
  February 16–22
- Washington’s Birthday (Presidents’ Day)
  February 17
- League of United Latin American Citizens Legislative Conference and Awards Gala
  February 26; Washington, DC
  http://www.lulac.org
- Carnival
  February 28–March 4