**Upcoming Events**

**October 2017**

- September 15–October 15: Hispanic Heritage Month
- National Disability Employment Awareness Month
- National Indigenous People’s Day
- Columbus Day: October 9
- Out & Equal Workplace Summit: October 9–12; Philadelphia, PA
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities 31st Annual Conference: October 28–30; San Diego, CA

**Message from the DAS**

*By Georgia Coffey*

I was proud to be a part of the leadership team to recognize the outstanding work of VA employees and teams who made sustained achievements in the areas of diversity and inclusion (D&I) and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) at the Sixth Annual Secretary’s D&I Excellence and ADR Excellence Awards Ceremony held on September 28, 2017, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center in VA Central Office.

Mr. Harvey Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Resolution Management, and I co-hosted the ceremony while Mr. Peter J. Shelby, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, and Ms. Vivieca Wright Simpson, Chief of Staff, provided remarks.

Winners’ photographs and descriptions of their accomplishments will be posted on the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion website](http://www.diversity.va.gov) and the [Office of Resolution Management website](http://wwwresolution.va.gov) and you can read more on page 2. Congratulations again to all our award winners for their outstanding achievements in support of diversity and inclusion, and alternative dispute resolution! *(Continued on page 3.)*

**ORM**

**Steps Toward Conflict Resolution**

**Alternative Dispute Resolution**

202-461-0280

**Resolution Support Center or Harassment Prevention Program**

1-888-56-NEW VA

(1-888-566-3982)

To file a discrimination or harassment complaint, you must contact the [Office of Resolution Management](http://www.resolution.va.gov) at (toll free) 1-888-737-3361 within 45 calendar days of the date of the alleged discriminatory incident.

**Commemorate**

**National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

VA joins the Nation in observing National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) this October. This year’s theme is “Inclusion Drives Innovation.” VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to support events and activities that recognize the many contributions of individuals with disabilities to America’s workforce. For more information about VA’s Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program, contact [Ms. Nanese Loza](mailto:nanese.loza@va.gov), VA’s National Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program Manager, Office of Diversity and Inclusion. *(Continued on the next page.)*
Diversity and Inclusion, Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards
Sixth Annual Secretary’s Awards Ceremony Held in Central Office

The Sixth Annual Secretary’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Excellence and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Excellence Awards Ceremony was held on September 28, 2017, in VA Central Office to honor the individuals and groups selected by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs as recipients of these prestigious awards.

The Secretary’s Annual Equal Employment Opportunity Award was established in 1988. It was redesigned in 2009 as the Secretary’s D&I Excellence Award and now aligns with the goals of VA’s D&I Strategic Plan: to grow a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects all segments of our society and values all aspects of our human diversity; to cultivate an inclusive work environment and create an engaged organization that leverages diversity and empowers all contributors; and to facilitate outstanding, responsive public service through principled leadership, shared accountability, and educated stakeholders. This year, the D&I Excellence Award was given in four categories: Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/D&I Practitioner, Manager/Supervisor, Nonsupervisory Employee, and Team. The awardees were:

- Kara Merendo, EEO Manager, Workforce Management and Consulting, EEO/Affirmative Employment Office, VHA (EEO/D&I Practitioner)
- Mary Allen Austria Lausman, Administrative Officer, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service, Gainesville VA Medical Center, VHA (Manager/Supervisor)
- Monica Jones, Patient Services Assistant, Jackson VA Medical Center, VHA (Category: Nonsupervisory Employee)
- VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network VISN 6 Transgender Treatment Team, VHA (Category: Team)

The ADR Excellence Award was established in 2007 to recognize exemplary efforts by individuals and programs in managing conflict, thereby saving time and precious resources through creative solutions to workplace disputes. This year, the ADR Excellence Award was given in five categories: Individual Effort by an Employee, Individual Effort by a Manager, Individual Effort by a Certified Neutral, Individual Effort by An Office of General Counsel Employee, and Team - Workplace ADR Program. The awardees were:

- Jeffrey Kager, Chief, Learning Resources Service, Durham VA Medical Center (Individual Effort by an Employee)
- Karen Maye, RD, Assistant Chief, Nutrition and Food Services, Battle Creek VA Medical Center (Individual Effort by a Manager)
- John Jones, ADR Specialist, Office of Resolution Management, North Atlantic District II, Fayetteville, North Carolina (Individual Effort by a Certified Neutral)
- David G. Fagan, Office of General Counsel, District Contract Law National Practice Group, Portland, Oregon (Individual Effort by an Office of General Counsel Employee)
- VA Northern Indiana Health Care System EEO/ADR Team, Fort Wayne/Marion, Indiana (Workplace ADR Program)

Winners’ photographs and descriptions of their accomplishments as well as instructions for making a nomination for the Seventh Annual Awards Program will be posted on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion website and the Office of Resolution Management website.

The Promise of Assistive Technology
New Interactive Guide to Selected Assistive Products and Technologies

Assistive products and technologies hold promise for enabling people with disabilities to enter or return to the workforce. Being aware of the available options—as well as ways to fund their purchase and necessary workplace conditions—is an important step in accessing the products and technologies that will best suit a person’s needs.

A new interactive guide gives a broad overview of selected assistive products and available funding sources. Based on a report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the interactive guide allows the user to compare the benefits, limitations, and physical requirements of products in four major categories. For more information, contact VA’s National Reasonable Accommodation Team, ODI.
Commemorate
Continued from page 1

U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta said, “Smart employers know that including different perspectives in problem-solving situations leads to better solutions. Hiring employees with diverse abilities strengthens their business, increases competition, and drives innovation.”

According to the United States Census Bureau, nearly 60 million people or approximately 19 percent of the population of the United States are individuals with disabilities. In VA alone, as of August 2017, individuals with disabilities represent 16.72 percent of the VA workforce, including 2.54 percent with targeted or severely limiting disabilities. In addition, Veterans with service-related disabilities represent 7.35 percent of the VA workforce. In fact, although disability employment today is not solely focused on Veterans with disabilities, in many ways, Veterans played a major role in employment rights and benefits individuals with disabilities of all backgrounds appreciate today.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990; however, the work began long before that to ensure equal access to employment of individuals with disabilities. According to the Department of Labor’s Disability & Employment Timeline, starting in World War I returning wounded military members with physical disabilities began the fight for employment opportunities and in 1920 the Smith-Fess Act was passed to establish the Vocational Rehabilitation program for Americans with disabilities. In essence, we have Veterans—the very population it is our VA mission to serve—to thank for the first strides in creating job opportunities and equal rights for individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities have contributed tremendously to society, and we have very talented individuals with disabilities within the VA workforce. Yet, despite what they bring to the table, they still face discrimination by employers, in hiring and within internal organizational processes such as promotions, receipt of awards, participation in leadership development programs, or exploring reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, retaining individuals with disabilities is a major challenge when these individuals do not feel valued, included, or engaged.

We must continue to ensure equality in selecting qualified individuals for job vacancies, promotions, participation in career development opportunities, and other areas of employment and engage in communication and practices to assure inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. We must also break down the stigma and psychological safety barriers that may exist and inhibit employees or applicants identifying they have a disability. Show the value added by identification of that information, along with specific funding for reasonable accommodations.

For more information, visit VA’s Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program webpage.

Message from the DAS (Cont.)
Continued from page 1

On Wednesday, September 20, 2017, I attended the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA) 13th Annual Training Workshop and was honored to receive the AAFEA 2017 Career SES Ebenezer Bassett Award. This award recognizes a senior federal official for notable leadership accomplishments that have significantly advanced the objectives of AAFEA, which is to promote the development and advancement of African-Americans into and within the senior ranks of the United States Government.

Finally, VA joins the Nation in observing National Disability Employment Awareness Month this October. Please read more beginning on page 1.
Policy Alert
Resurvey of the Workforce 2017

The Resurvey of the Workforce 2017 is a government wide initiative for ALL federal employees to review the revised Standard Form 256 and self-identify or update their disability information. In order to identify barriers, to adopt best and promising practices, and to document progress in achieving our employment goals for individuals with disabilities, we rely on accurate and up-to-date information and data about our workforce. We need your help in collecting this data—we need ALL employees to self-identify or update your disability status.

One method for determining progress in implementing an affirmative action plan is through the production of reports analyzing our workforce. The Final Rule on Affirmative Action for People with Disabilities in Federal Employment specifies we commit our agency to the goal of ensuring that no less than 12 percent of employees at specified levels are individuals with disabilities and no less than 2 percent of employees at specified levels are individuals with targeted disabilities.

It is important to note, employees who do not identify with a targeted disability or serious health condition or other disability or serious health condition, still have other options (Codes 01, 05, 06) to select and participate in the Resurvey of the Workforce 2017. Additionally, an individual’s disability status may change over time. Thus, periodically, to ensure we have the most current, accurate data, employees are encouraged to self-identify, review, or update their disability status.

Look for VA's campaign to resurvey the Department’s workforce on disability status over the next few months! For more information, contact Ms. Nanese Loza, VA’s National Disability Employment Program Manager, ODI.

UMUC Career Mentor Program
Calling All UMUC Alumni

On behalf of the Department, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion recently signed a memorandum of understanding with University of Maryland, University College (UMUC) to establish a robust collaborative working partnership in order to coordinate and implement outreach to UMUC’s diverse student population for employment and educational opportunities within VA.

UMUC is looking for VA employees who are UMUC alumni to join their Career Mentor Program which connects UMUC students and alumni. This is an excellent opportunity for employees who would like to meet up and coming talent; share their expertise and unique insights about VA; exchange ideas or perspectives regarding issues in their field; or strengthen their professional communication and leadership skills.

The Career Mentor Program matches UMUC alumni and industry professionals with UMUC students and alumni who are looking for career guidance and mentorship. With its online profile-matching system and guidance tools, UMUC can help you start a valuable and rewarding mentor relationship that puts professional success front and center. The matching feature allows students/alumni to engage in one-time, short-term speed mentoring, as well as more formal six-month long mentorships.

The Career Mentor Program is also part of UMUC’s CareerQuest platform which connects alumni to the university’s professional community. In addition to serving as a mentor, alumni can also utilize CareerQuest to post internship and job opportunities; register for events, including online webinars; and network with UMUC's global alumni community.

VA employees who are UMUC alumni and are interested in becoming a mentor or learning more about the Career Mentor Program can do so by visiting the UMUC Career Mentor Program webpage.
**Training**

**Out & Equal Workplace Summit**

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates will host its annual summit October 9-12, 2017, at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown in Pennsylvania. The theme is “Perspectives on LGBT Workplace Equality.” Employees who wish to attend the Workplace Summit must preregister. Employees are responsible for securing authorization to attend from their respective supervisors before registering on the Out & Equal website. For more information, contact Mr. Sterling Akins, VA’s National LGBT Program Manager, ODI.

**HACU Conference**

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) will host its annual conference October 28-30, 2017, at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel in California. It will provide a unique forum to share information and ideas for the most promising practices in Hispanic education. Employees are responsible for securing authorization to attend from their respective supervisors before registering on the HACU website. For more information, contact Ms. Edith Perry, VA’s National Hispanic Employment Program Manager, ODI.

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**Affirming LGBT Protections in the Federal Workforce**

*By Mr. Sterling O. Akins, VA’s National LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager, ODI*

VA continues its fervent mission of serving our valued Veterans, and in tandem, supporting our diverse workforce that faithfully executes that mission. Included in that daily mission is VA’s objective in building workforce diversity and cultivating workplace inclusion, including our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) employees.

The pursuit of these goals are in accordance with its established employee protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, in our VA-wide EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, and No Fear Policy Statements as well as associated VA Directives and Handbook 5975.4. The Handbook will serve as a resource for policy and procedures on facilitating a smooth and supportive transition for transgender and gender non-conforming employees undergoing gender transition in compliance with all applicable workplace laws, regulations, and directives.

VA has remained, and will continue to remain, steadfast in its commitment to our Veterans, our workforce, and our welcoming and inclusive environment, remaining free from discrimination or harassment based on the protected classes, including sexual orientation or gender identity.

For more information on VA employment, contact Mr. Sterling O. Akins, VA’s National LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager, or visit VA’s LGBT Employment Program webpage.

For more information on VA patient care and promotional toolkits, contact the LGBT Health Program, Office of Patient Care Services, or visit VA’s Patient Care Services LGBT Veteran Care webpage.