Commemorate
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month

VA joins the Nation in observing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month in June. This year’s theme is “Serving Our Veterans...Past, Present, and Proud.” VA Central Office will hold an event on Wednesday, June 26, 2019, from noon to 1 pm in room C-7 that will feature a round table discussion by several guest speakers who will address numerous topics pertinent to Title VII and federal protections for the LGBT community in the federal sector; future implications of the U.S. Supreme Court’s pending review of Title VII; and other related issues impacting our Veterans, VA LGBT employees, and allies.  Continued on page 4.
Special Emphasis Program Observance Toolkit
Toolkit Developed to Assist with Planning Special Emphasis Program Events

VA commemorates designated days, weeks, and months as reflected in the VA schedule of Special Emphasis Program (SEP) Observances for fiscal year (FY) 2019. Observances are held each year in compliance with Executive Order 11478, 29 CFR Part 1614.102(b)(4), joint Congressional Resolutions, Presidential Proclamations, and the VA’s Diversity and Inclusion goals as articulated in the VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2017-2020.

All managers and supervisors are strongly encouraged to be on the forefront of these invaluable outreach and retention SEP observances by supporting activities and establishing strategic partnerships focused on addressing identified challenges faced by the group(s) the specific observance is focused on. The Department will benefit through participation by helping to address specific challenges, leading to increased participation in groups with historically low participation in the VA’s workforce, higher retention of talented staff, and increased positive outcomes for Veterans health and benefits services. These activities directly support the goal to attain and maintain a diverse, inclusive, and engaged workforce.

VA’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) developed a new Special Emphasis Program Observance Toolkit that gives guidance on preparing and planning a SEP event, available online at https://www.diversity.va.gov/tools/event-planning.aspx.

Information about SEP observances may also be found online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar/default.aspx. Each SEP has a designated national program manager who can answer questions about specific observances and activities. These individuals may be contacted via email addresses found on ODI’s website or calling (202) 461-4131.

For questions about the toolkit, contact Ms. Sehar Minhas, ODI, at Sehar.Minhas@va.gov.

Employee Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion Tree
SAC-F Mural Represents Facility’s Diversity and Inclusion

On a recent trip to VA’s Strategic Acquisition Center in Frederick, Maryland (SAC-F), Ms. Carolyn Wong, Director of Training and Communications, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, noted a mural of a tree had been painted on one of the walls.

Mr. Efrain J. Fernandez, Director of SAC-F, reports that, “This was an employee-imagined and crafted tree designed from the bottom up! I provided the white wall…they did the rest.” Everyone in the organization receives a leaf that they sign and put on the tree where they see themselves. The roots have emblems from branches of the armed services, “the foundation and why we are here at VA” says Mr. Fernandez.

“The trunk and branches hold us together. The leaves represent individuals. The whole tree represents our diversity and inclusion.”

Artwork by David Hunley and Jaime Belletto, Contract Specialists in Frederick.
Seventh Secretary's D&I Excellence and ADR Excellence Awards

Congratulations to the Winners

VA recognized 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 Seventh Secretary’s D&I Excellence and ADR Excellence Awards Ceremony held on Thursday, May 30, 2019, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center in VA Central Office. Mr. Harvey Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management and Acting Executive Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, emceed the ceremony hosted by Mr. Daniel R. Sitterly, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness, and the Honorable James Byrne, General Counsel, Performing the Duties of the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, provided remarks.

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: Nonsupervisory Employee, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) or D&I Practitioner, Manager or Supervisor, and Team. The awardees were:

- James W. Zipadelli, Technical Writer, Office of Construction & Facilities Management (Category: Nonsupervisory Employee)
- Alaina Taylor, Administrative Officer, Behavioral Health Service, Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) (Category: EEO or D&I Practitioner)
- Fernando O. Rivera, Medical Center Director, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, VHA (Category: Manager or Supervisor)
- VA Western New York Healthcare System, Health Equity Committee (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 a Manager, Individual Effort by a Senior Executive, Individual Effort by a Certified Neutral, Individual Effort by an Office of General Counsel Employee, and Team - Workplace ADR Program. The awardees were:

- Paula Webb, Equal Employment Opportunity Program Manager, West Haven VA Medical Center, VA Connecticut Healthcare System (Category: Individual Effort by a Manager)
- Jason C. McClellan, Director, Muskogee Regional Office, Veterans Benefits Administration (Individual Effort by a Senior Executive)
- Steven Goldman, ADR Specialist, Saint Petersburg, FL (Individual Effort by a Certified Neutral)
- Kimberly Jacobs, Attorney, Office of General Counsel, CT (Individual Effort by an Office of General Counsel Employee)
- The Iowa City VA Health Care System ADR Workgroup/Team (Workplace ADR Program)

Congratulations again to all our award winners for their outstanding achievements in support of diversity and inclusion, and alternative dispute resolution! Winners’ photographs and descriptions of their accomplishments as well as instructions for making a nomination for the Eighth Awards Program will be posted online at https://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx and https://www.va.gov/adr/Awards.asp.

Resource: Economic News Release

Employment Situation of Veterans

The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently published an Economic News Release on the employment situation of Veterans available online at https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.toc.htm. This information was obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 eligible households that provides data on employment and unemployment in the United States. Data about Veterans are collected monthly in the CPS; these monthly data are the source of the 2018 annual averages presented in this news release. In August 2018, a supplement to the CPS collected additional information about Veterans on topics such as service-connected disability and Veterans’ current or past Reserve or National Guard membership. Information from the supplement is also presented in this news release. The supplement was co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service.
Training
SAIGE NTP

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) National Training Program (NTP) will be held in Niagara Falls, New York, June 10-13, 2019, at the Seneca Niagara Resorts and Casino. During this training American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) leaders across government will address updates AI/AN progress in different tribes and equip attendees with resources that elevate the AI/AN community. Costs associated with attending must be authorized by each employee’s organization. No centralized funding is available to pay for registration or travel. Employees who plan to attend the SAIGE NTP should follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. For additional information, contact Ms. Sehar Minhas, VA’s National American Indian and Alaskan Native Program Manager, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, at Sehar.Minhas@va.gov. Additional conference information including registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules is available online at https://saige.org.

Policy Alert
Compensatory Time Off for Religious Observances Final Regulations

The Office of Personnel Management issue final regulations to amend its current regulations on compensatory time off for religious observances: https://chcoc.gov/content/compensatory-time-religious-observances-final-regulations. The final rule provides information on employee coverage, employee and agency responsibilities, scheduling time to earn and use religious compensatory time off, accumulation and documentation, and employee separation or transfer. These regulations also serve to highlight an important flexibility that can be used to help agencies recruit and retain employees who want to attend religious observances.

Commemorate
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Despite the adversities that the LGBT community has often weathered over the course of time, it is their continuous contributions which speaks to the continued strength and diversity of our workforce, and further demonstrating the Department’s “I CARE” values consistently in the provision of outstanding services to our Nation’s Veterans.

The LGBT community is an integral part and growing segment of our workforce diversity. VA continues to demonstrate its commitment to building this workforce diversity and cultivating workplace inclusion, in accordance with its established and enforced employee protections from sexual discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, in our VA-wide EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, and No Fear Policy Statements and associated Directives.

VA’s commitment is also evident in its foundation of policy guidance, training on LGBT cultural competency, consultation, and survey-based needs assessment in this area. To this end, the VA LGBT Workgroup, through the Offices of Diversity & Inclusion and Resolution Management (ODI/ORM), continues its purpose of establishing a Department-level framework to develop strategies and recommendations to identify and eliminate systemic barriers to our LGBT community. The Workgroup aims to ensure VA has an inclusive environment that is free from discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) and the Veterans Health Administration’s Veteran Care Coordinators (VCCs) across VA continue implementing programs and services to create inclusive work and customer service environments for LGBT Veterans and employees. For information on these initiatives or on the VA LGBT Workgroup, contact Sterling Akins, VA’s National LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager, at Sterling.Akins@va.gov. SEPMs should seek local management approval, and consult the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs and/or regional counsel as deemed necessary by local management, to ensure that use of VA resources in support of a SEP activity is authorized. Visit VA’s LGBT Program Web page at https://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/lgbt.aspx for more information.