



DIVERSITY@WORK

A PUBLICATION OF THE OFFICE OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT & EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY,
A PROGRAM OFFICE WITHIN VA'S OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES & ADMINISTRATION

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 6

<<http://www.va.gov/dmeeo/ca/daw.htm>>

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005

Q&A: LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

In this issue we talk with Ron Cowles, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Labor-Management Relations. Look for more of our interview with him in the September 2005 episode of Diversity News, airing on the VA Knowledge Network's Communications Channel.

Q: The Office of Labor-Management Relations is responsible for "providing leadership in the establishment of a positive and effective labor-management relations program at all levels of the agency."

[Source: www.va.gov/lmr/docs/Labor_Relations_Directive_5023.doc] That's a pretty big job for such a small office. How do you do it?

Mr. Cowles: Well, I have a lot of help. I have a very talented staff here in our VA headquarters. We are about eight people strong—labor relations consultants and program specialists—and we provide advice and guidance to all of our VA facilities around the country on promoting a good and strong labor relations program. Our office is



responsible for the agency's directive and handbook on labor-management relations. We have a National Partnership Council made up of VA's five national unions and VA's leaders, to deal with issues related to promoting

cooperative labor-management relations. The labor relations program, in its essence, is a decentralized program. Most of the relationships between management and labor actually occur at the local level; it's there where experienced managers and labor leaders try to craft an environment where they can work well together to represent the interests of employees and veterans.

(Continued on page 3.)

CELEBRATE!

National Hispanic Heritage Month and National Disability Employment Awareness Month

VA proudly joins the Nation in annually celebrating a number of observances this time of year. **Patriot Day** (September 11), **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Week** (September 11-17), and **National POW/MIA Recognition Day** (September 16) are among these.

In addition, **National Hispanic Heritage Month** will be observed from September 15 through October 15. This year's theme is "Hispanic Americans: Strong and Colorful Threads in the American Fabric." Overall, VA employment of Hispanics reached 6.67 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2004. The FY 2003 representation was 6.44 percent. Hispanic employment increased in 21 of 30 major VA occupations, including medical technologist, information technology management, nursing assistant, practical nurse, and nurse. To learn about VA's Hispanic Program, contact Jose Marrero,

Hispanic Employment Manager, at jose.marrero@va.gov.

Also, **National Disability Employment Awareness Month** will be celebrated throughout October. This year's theme is "Workers with Disabilities: Ready for Tomorrow's Jobs Today." Coinciding with this observance is **National Disability Employment Mentoring Day**, which will be observed on October 19 this year. Overall, VA employed 21,177 persons with disabilities—which is 8.96 percent of its workforce—in FY 2004. Targeted disabilities totaled 3,692 (1.56 percent). VA completed 25 facility barrier-removal projects at a cost of \$6,214,894 and VA employed 16,980 disabled-veterans, which is 7.18 percent of the VA workforce. For more information about VA's People With Disabilities Program, contact Wanda Jones at wanda.jones@va.gov. ■

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BOOKMARKS

- ▶ **Asian Diversity Magazine**
www.adiversity.com/magazine
- ▶ **EEOC Training Institute**
www.eeotraining.eeoc.gov
- ▶ **League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)**
www.lulac.org
- ▶ **National Association for the Deaf (NAD)**
www.nad.org
- ▶ **National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC)**
www.nacwc.org
- ▶ **National Black Nurses Association, Inc. (NBNA)**
www.nbna.org
- ▶ **Office of Indian Education**
www.indianeducation.org
- ▶ **World Institute on Disability (WID)**
www.wid.org

FIELD NOTES

News You Can Use

DM&EEO Web Site Update

DM&EEO has recently redesigned its Web site: www.va.gov/dmeeo. The purpose of the DM&EEO Web site is to provide an archive of information and a gateway to resources related to VA's strategic objective to "recruit, develop, and retain a competent, committed and diverse workforce that provides high-quality service to veterans and their families." The Web site is part of VA's process to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued, so that all can reach their potential and maximize their contributions to the Department's mission. Please update your bookmarks!

ADA 2005 Advocate of the Year Award

Katherine Alford, Police Service secretary at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi, received the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 2005 Advocate of the Year Award from the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities. "This recognition was a complete surprise. It was a great honor to receive such an award. However, this is really a group effort," said Ms. Alford, chairperson of the medical center's Persons with Disabilities Committee. "We have some great committee members who have worked

hard on disability awareness programs." The Disabilities Committee is active in increasing awareness at the hospital. Currently, it's hosting American Sign Language classes. The Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities recognized Ms. Alford at the Mississippi State Capitol during a daylong conference. The conference took place on the 15th anniversary of the ADA. The ADA, enacted in 1990, prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, state and local government services, public accommodation, transportation and telecommunications services. For more information about the ADA and other disability-related issues, visit www.DisabilityInfo.gov, a one-stop Web site for disability-related information and resources. Congratulations, Ms. Alford!

Diversity News Back on the Air!

Look for the September 2005 episode of DM&EEO's monthly news program, *Diversity News*, on the VA Knowledge Network's Communications Channel. September's broadcast includes work-life initiatives and workplace flexibility; an interview with Ron Cowles, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Labor-Management Relations; and the diversity calendar. ■

WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT

The Generation Gap

www.pbs.org/americanfamily/gap

"Dealing with diversity in the workplace means understanding and relating effectively with people who are different from you" (Marci Tarrant, EEO & Diversity Program Manager, Eastern Kansas Health Care System). Though the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 protects individuals who are 40 years of age or older from employment discrimination based on age, another aspect that is often neglected is generational diversity. This is particularly important in today's workplace because up to four different generations must now work side-by-side: Veterans (1922–1945), Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), and Generation Y (1981–2000). Because people from one generation share similar social and economic experiences from a specific and exclusive time period, they are also likely to share distinct beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors. This commonality among members of one generation can create a barrier, or "generation gap," between generations. But the more one generation learns about another—about the ideals they hold and the experiences that determine why a generation thinks or feels a certain way—the closer individuals can be to overcoming dividing differences and to effectively dealing with diversity.

Content: The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is a private, non-profit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations. PBS has created a Web site for its "American Family" series. Generations United, a national membership organization that promotes intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies, has contributed essays, each of which explores a different but related facet of generational issues facing families like the Gonzalez clan in "American Family". Through these essays and an interactive poll, visitors heighten their awareness of misconceptions or stereotypes that they might have concerning other generations.

Must-See Feature: The interactive poll asks visitors to agree or disagree with general statements made about generations different from their own and allows visitors to compare their responses to responses of those in their own age group and those in other age groups. Explanations are then provided as to why one generation may have a misconception about another.

Contact Info: KCET, Producer, 4401 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90027 (323) 666-6500. ■

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

VA's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential service available to all employees at no cost. It is staffed by professional counselors who will help employees address problems that can adversely affect job performance, reliability, and personal health. The counselor may also refer employees to other professional services and resources within the community for further information and assistance. Every agency provides free EAP services to its employees. These programs are staffed by experienced counselors who are available to discuss problems in a confidential, helpful manner. The EAP is voluntary, free of charge, and strictly confidential. Employees are not charged annual or sick leave during assessment or treatment through the EAP.

Services provided by the EAP include: individual short-term counseling for job performance or personal and family issues; individual psychological education on mental health issues; linkage to internal agency organizations such as the Early Mediation Program, EEO, union, Alternative Dispute Resolution, human resources, personnel, and Career Transition Center; community referrals;

wellness programs such as stress management, domestic violence, smoking cessation, self defense, anger management, anxiety screening, elder care, depression screening, parenting, and time management; follow up and case management; orientation to EAP services; and management consultations and seminars on issues such as employee absenteeism, difficult relationships, violence prevention, respectful attitudes in the workplace, substance abuse, and using EAP with a Performance Improvement Plan.

EAP counselors can provide a training designed for managers and supervisors on how to maximize utilization of the EAP Program. This training emphasizes "early intervention" in a problem situation before the severity of the problem requires HR involvement.

VACO employees may contact Linda Smith, an EAP Counselor, in Health Unit Room 135 at (202) 273-5015, Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information on the EAP, visit http://vaww.va.gov/ofcadmin/Health_Unit/hlthunit.htm. ■

Q&A: LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS (CONTINUED)

Ron Cowles, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Labor-Management Relations

Q: How important is the relationship between management and labor at a VA facility in establishing a positive work environment?

Mr. Cowles: The relationship between management and labor at an individual facility is absolutely critical important to set the tone and to set an environment for employees to feel that their interests are, in fact, being recognized and—in a serious way—being dealt with. Employees at facilities do sense whether there's a good relationship between management and labor. And where there is a good relationship, employees feel free to go to their supervisors or to their union stewards to raise issues that they know will be taken seriously, will be addressed, and hopefully resolved in a way that improves the work environment for employees. Where there's strife, where there's mistrust, where there's poor communication between labor and management in a facility, it becomes much more difficult for management and labor to work together on improving the work environment. What we hope to do at the national level, through the National Partnership Council, is to set the tone and the example for emphasizing cooperative labor-management relations.

Q: Is there anything else that VA should be doing to support a flexible and supportive work environment?

Mr. Cowles: VA can begin to share more of its success stories. We have an annual awards program, it's a Secretarial award program for labor-management relations. Facilities are recognized for accomplishments that result from a labor and management effort. It could be an improvement in a work place practice, it could be an improvement in a policy that affects employees. What we need to do in VA is to learn more, not only through this program, but other programs, about people that are having successful labor-management relations, and we need to publicize that more. We need to make it more available to employees—through VGuard and through other media like this publication. I think VA can do a lot better job of sharing what we call a "best practice" in labor-management relations. It's certainly something my office is very interested in supporting, and would work very hard to expand throughout the VA. *For more information on the Office of Labor-Management Relations, visit www.va.gov/lmr.* ■

Diversity@Work

Newsletter published by the National Office of DM&EEO, a program office within VA's Office of Human Resources & Administration. To subscribe or unsubscribe, e-mail dmeeo@mail.va.gov.

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Resources Management
and Labor Relations
www.va.gov/ohrm

DM&EEO ONLINE



The mission of DM&EEO is to provide leadership in creating and sustaining a diverse workplace free of discrimination at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Here's a sampling of online tools available on DM&EEO's new redesigned Web site that can help you promote the employment of veterans, women, minorities, and people with disabilities:

- ▶ HBCU Week, National Hispanic Heritage Month, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and other special observance resources
- ▶ 2005 events, conferences, conventions, and programs
- ▶ Links to professional and community organizations

2005 DIVERSITY CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

Patriot Day

September 11

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Week

September 11–17

National POW/MIA Recognition Day

September 16

National Hispanic Heritage Month

September 15–October 15

Constitution Day

September 17

Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) National Conference

September 29–October 2; Denver, CO
www2.sacnas.org/confNew/confClient/current

OCTOBER

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October

Columbus Day

October 10

2005 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

October 17–23; Denver, CO
www.creativeartsfestival.org

Disability Employment Mentoring Day

October 19



Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Workplace Diversity Conference & Exposition

October 24–26; Las Vegas, NV

www.shrm.org/conferences/diversity

Looking Ahead:

NOVEMBER

National American Indian Heritage Month

November

American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) 27th Annual National Conference

November 3–5; Charlotte, NC

www.aises.org/events/2005

CAREERS & the disABLED Magazine's Career Expo for People with Disabilities

November 10; Washington, DC

www.eop.com/exporegistration.html

Veterans Day

November 11

For more events, visit www.va.gov/dmeeo and select the Calendar link.
