



# DIVERSITY@WORK

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## Q&A Our Greatest Strength is Our People

*Dr. Robert Roswell, VA Under Secretary for Health, runs the Nation's largest integrated health care system; it's also the largest provider of graduate medical education in the country and a major contributor to medical and scientific research. The Under Secretary talked with us recently about diversity in VHA.*



### Q: How important is diversity in the health care industry?

**Dr. Roswell:** VHA is a service industry, so diversity is much more important than in many other sectors. There's evidence in medical literature, for example, that health care outcomes in minority populations may be enhanced when people share ethnic and racial backgrounds with their health care providers.

I'm proud to report that in VHA, racial and ethnic barriers have less of an effect on health care outcomes. But we still must ensure a diverse clinical workforce; that's where the challenge begins. Our goal is to serve veterans, and we provide better health care with a diverse work-

force. Our greatest strength is our people.

### Q: How is VHA addressing critical "people" issues such as shortages of nurses and other health care providers?

**Dr. Roswell:** VHA launched a succession planning task force almost 3 years ago. We're targeting entry- to upper-level employees and

addressing leadership gaps in the SES ranks. We do this mainly through career-ladder building and management training.

Of 183,000 VHA employees, 55,000 are nursing staff—36,000 of whom are RNs. Health care is a very competitive field, so we're recruiting aggressively with diversity in mind. One place we're recruiting is Puerto Rico, and we're excited about the prospect of hiring more Hispanic Americans in VA. Nurses have to be licensed in 1 of the 50 states or by a U.S. Territory.

Overall, we're working diligently to fill our critical personnel gaps.■

## CELEBRATE!

### Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday and Black History Month

VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday and Black History Month in February.

It's important to reflect on the dream Dr. King eloquently proclaimed in his famous speech "I Have A Dream." He stressed that all people, regardless of religion, unite in exercising their rights and liberties without being judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character. Dr. King is one of many

contributors to Black history, and history is still being made. In the current Administration, for instance, President Bush appointed Colin Powell as Secretary of State; Condolezza Rice as National Security Advisor to the President; and Rod Paige as Secretary of Education.

For information on VA's Black Special Emphasis Program, contact National Program Manager Wanda J. Jones at (202) 273-7388.■

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### Bookmarks

- **The African American Mosaic**, [www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html)
- **Women in the Military** [www.wrei.org/projects/wiu/wim](http://www.wrei.org/projects/wiu/wim)
- **Ancestors in the Americas**, [www.cetel.org](http://www.cetel.org)
- **American GI Forum** [www.agifnat.org](http://www.agifnat.org)
- **DisabilityInfo.gov** [www.disabilityinfo.gov](http://www.disabilityinfo.gov)
- **NativeCulture.com** [www.nativeculture.com](http://www.nativeculture.com)
- **AMVETS** [www.amvets.org](http://www.amvets.org)



## FIELD NOTES

### News You Can Use

To join *NewsLink*, our free, weekly electronic news service, send an e-mail to [dmeeo@mail.va.gov](mailto:dmeeo@mail.va.gov) with SUBSCRIBE NEWS in the subject line.

Thanks to our *NewsLink* content partners for providing valuable links:

- Access Board
- Business & Legal Reports
- EEOC
- *Federal Employees News Digest*
- FedNews Online
- FindLaw
- *Government Executive Magazine*
- HireDiversity.com
- *Hispanic Business Magazine*
- *HR Executive Magazine*
- Indian Country Today
- *Newsweek*
- Pew Hispanic Center
- SHRM
- USAToday.com
- Washingtonpost.com
- *Workforce* magazine
- Workindex.com

### Martin Luther King, III Visits VACO

The Office of Human Resources and Administration hosted the Department's Central Office observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday in January. Martin Luther King, III, President and CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and eldest son of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the keynote speaker for the event. Mr. King stirred the standing-room-only audience with words of peace, hope, and responsibility, and he took time to speak individually with audience members and pose for photos. DM&EEO managed the event and coordinated Mr. King's appearance.

### Diversity News Program Debuts

DM&EEO has launched a new monthly broadcast program, *Diversity News*. The program covers diversity-related court cases, studies, surveys, and news stories, and it airs on VA Communications Channel 2. For the monthly schedule, bookmark the VA Learning Catalog intranet site at <http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog>. Enter *Diversity News* in the keyword search, select *Satellite* as the modality, then click *Go*.

### Reporting Requirements '03

DM&EEO is responsible for submitting annual Departmental reports to the White House, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. To help the Administrations and staff offices coordinate field input for these reports, DM&EEO issued an Annual Reporting Requirements Memorandum on February 10, 2003. Subsequent guidance will be issued for each of the reports and all will be posted, as available, at [www.va.gov/dmeeo/annualreports.htm](http://www.va.gov/dmeeo/annualreports.htm).

### Our Goal is 17,700

Initiatives under Executive Order 13163, Increasing the Opportunity for Individuals With Disabilities to be Employed in the Federal Government, call for Federal agencies to hire 100,000 people with disabilities by 2005. VA has a goal of 17,700 such hires, which translates to 3,540 per year. Since the July 200 signing of the Order, VA has hired 3,882 persons with disabilities, well below the goal. To learn more about these initiatives, contact Lead EEO Manager Noemí Pizarro-Hyman at [noemi.hyman@mail](mailto:noemi.hyman@mail).



## WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT

### The King Center

[www.thekingcenter.org](http://www.thekingcenter.org)

#### For More Info

To find VA and other government diversity-related Web sites, visit [www.va.gov/dmeeo](http://www.va.gov/dmeeo) and click on *Web Links*.

The King Center Web site is an online memorial dedicated to the life work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The site offers a variety of media to convey messages of nonviolence, justice, equality, and peace. It thoughtfully captures the legacy and vision of Dr. King. More than 650,000 people visit the Center annually in Atlanta—established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King—to learn about the slain civil rights leader.

**Content:** Public outreach and resources such as speech archives, special programs, and media resources.

**Must-see feature:** The Nonviolence or Nonexistence online learning program located under the Programs and Services link. Some pages are offered in Spanish and Korean.

**Contact info:** Provided for special programs, archives, media requests, HR, gifts, products, and the Webmaster.

**Accessibility:** No information offered.

## SPECIAL EMPHASIS

### The Basics of Disability Etiquette

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VA has a special responsibility to accommodate people with disabilities, whether it's a hearing-impaired veteran receiving care at a medical center or an employee with cerebral palsy who serves that veteran. Here are 5 tips for interacting with people with disabilities, courtesy of the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association publication, *Disability Etiquette*.

1. **Ask before you help.** Don't assume that people with disabilities need your help. In an accessible environment, people with disabilities can usually get around fine. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. And if she does want help, ask how before you act.

2. **Be sensitive about physical contact.** Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance, so grabbing them—even if the intention is to assist—could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching his wheelchair, scooter, or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

3. **Think before you speak.** Always speak directly to the person with disability, not to his companion, aide, or sign-language interpreter. Making small talk is great; just talk to him as you

would with anyone else. Respect his privacy. If you ask about his disability, he may feel like you're treating him as a disability, not as a human being.

4. **Respond graciously to requests.** When people who have a disability ask for an accommodation, it's not a complaint. It shows they feel comfortable enough to ask for what they need. And if they get a positive response, they'll likely tell their friends about the good service they received.

5. **Don't make assumptions.** People with disabilities are the best judges of what they can or cannot do. Don't make decisions for them about participating in any activity. Depending on the situation, it could be a violation of the ADA to exclude people because of a presumption about their limitations.



The Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association is a regional chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. For more information and free resources, visit the EPVA Web site, [www.epva.org](http://www.epva.org). The PVA Web site is found at [www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org). ■

## INSIDE STORY

### VA Learning Online Launches

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The VA Learning University conducted a live broadcast officially launching VA Learning Online (VALO) on January 29, 2003, on the VA Knowledge Network Communications Channel. Secretary Anthony Principi presented an achievement award to VA employee Hector Ocasio, who completed the most VALO courses last year. The Secretary also announced an upcoming learning competition between facilities.

Ocasio, who works at the Ponce VA Outpatient Clinic in Puerto Rico, gives VALO high marks. He says, "Employees need to keep abreast of what's going on in the workplace. I finished an MBA in August 2002 at Touro University, then I started taking VALO courses. I've taken online classes in

leadership and change management, among others." He encourages VA staff to participate as well. "The classes are relevant to what we do at VA. Look at them and identify where you have gaps. If you need supervisory skills, for example, you can fill those gaps with VALO courses."

The VA Learning University has been offering Web-based training courses since July 2002. It partnered with two industry leaders—SmartForce and SkillSoft—to provide more than 1,500 personal development courses to VA staff. More than 12,000 employees have enrolled in the free courses.

For more information on VALO, visit [www.vcampus.com/VALO/overview.htm](http://www.vcampus.com/VALO/overview.htm) or contact Gabe Palkuti at [gabriel.palkuti@mail.va.gov](mailto:gabriel.palkuti@mail.va.gov). ■

## Diversity@Work

Newsletter published bimonthly by the Office of Diversity Management & Equal Employment Opportunity. To subscribe or unsubscribe, send an e-mail request to [dmeeo@mail.va.gov](mailto:dmeeo@mail.va.gov).

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Visit our Web site for staff e-mail addresses.

### COMING SOON

- ▶ Part 2 of our interview with Dr. Robert Roswell, VA Under Secretary for Health
- ▶ National Women's History Month
- ▶ 2002 Affirmative Employment Program update
- ▶ Web Site Spotlight
- ▶ More news, tools, and views!

## DM&EEO ONLINE

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



- Black History Month resources
- News You Can Use: Focus on Training
- Diversity magazine links

Bookmark our site; we're here to serve you.



## 2003 DIVERSITY CALENDAR

### Louis Braille's Birthday

January 4

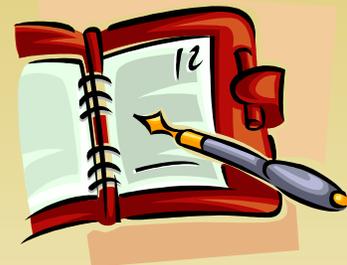
[www.louisbraillecenter.org](http://www.louisbraillecenter.org)

### Dr. Martin Luther King Birthday

January 15 (observed January 20)

"Remember, Celebrate, Act: A Day On, Not Day Off"

[www.thekingcenter.org](http://www.thekingcenter.org)



### Religious Freedom Day

January 16

[www.firstfreedom.org/nrfd2002.html](http://www.firstfreedom.org/nrfd2002.html)

### Black History Month

February

"The Souls of Black Folk"

[www.va.gov/dmeeo/bhm.htm](http://www.va.gov/dmeeo/bhm.htm)

### Chinese New Year

February 1

[www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/festival/newyear/newyear.html](http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/festival/newyear/newyear.html)

### American Indian Science and Engineering Society Spring Leadership Conference

February 20-23

(505) 765-5608

*Looking ahead:*

### National Women's History Month

March

"Women Pioneering the Future"

[www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org)

### National Hispanic Medical Association Annual Conference

March 21-23

Washington, DC

[home.earthlink.net/~nhma/7.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~nhma/7.html)

### African Americans in the Korean War Conference

April 16-19

Baltimore, MD

[www.army.mil/cmh-pg/reference/korea/morganstate/conf.htm](http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/reference/korea/morganstate/conf.htm)