The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) joins the Nation in commemorating Women’s History Month this March by celebrating the achievements of women and their contributions to our Nation’s history. The National Women’s History Alliance (NWHA), which petitioned for the 1987 congressional designation of March as Women’s History Month, announced that this year it will be celebrating a Women’s History Month theme of “Valiant Women of the Vote: Refusing to be Silenced.” Women, sometimes at the risk of their careers and personal life, have spoken up for themselves, promoting real change in the world, first through the voting rights movement, but even continuing today with #MeToo, a social movement against abuse and harassment. Women have made tremendous strides since obtaining the right to vote. We celebrate the accomplishments of all women including the election of our Nation’s first female Vice President. We also join civic organizations and the general public in honoring the work of contemporary women leaders such as Eleanor Holmes Norton, U.S. representative of District of Columbia; Marie Foster, nicknamed “mother of the voting rights movement”; and Dr. Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, a Chinese advocate for the women’s suffrage movement in the United States.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, women have faced many challenges, such as childcare, work-life balance and increased burnout. The Bureau of Labor Statistics highlighted how women have been more heavily affected by the current economic toll caused by the pandemic. For instance, during heavy December job losses, women accounted for most job losses, in fields such as education, hospitality and retail. Continued on page 4.
External Affinity Conferences Approved for Department-Wide Participation
Fiscal Year 2021 Memo Signed

The list of external affinity conferences approved for VA-wide participation for fiscal year 2021 [PDF] has been signed in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 41 and 5 C.F.R. § 410.404; Executive Order 13583 on Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce; VA Directive 5975, Diversity and Inclusion; and VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.

Affinity conferences are national meetings convened by external private or public nonprofit organizations representing diverse segments of the population for the primary purpose of promoting equal employment opportunity (EEO) and providing career development, education and employment outreach services. VA strongly supports leveraging external partnerships with affinity conferences for professional development and recruitment outreach purposes in support of our common aim of promoting EEO, diversity and inclusion in the Federal Government.

VA employees who plan to attend any of the conferences are responsible for obtaining supervisory approvals. Please note that centralized funding is not available for attendance to these conferences. Funding for both registration and/or travel must come from the employee’s benefitting program office. Following supervisory and budget approval, attendees who wish to participate in the conference must also register through the affinity organization’s conference website.

For questions, contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist, ORMDI.

Federal Relay Conference Captioning
RCC Service Available to Federal Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees

Relay Conference Captioning (RCC) is a free service to all Federal Employees and is dedicated to providing functional equivalency to deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in conference calls and/or multi-party calls. The service uses high-quality captioners that deliver live, real-time text streamed to an Internet-connected computer anywhere in the world. During captioned conference calls, participants can follow along with the dialogue by reading it on-screen as it is spoken and captioned. To submit a request for RCC Service, visit the Federal Relay Conference Captioning website.

Register for Virtual Harassment Prevention Training
Learn to Recognize Potential Workplace Challenges and Effectively Manage Unprofessional Conduct

The Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion hosts “Overview of the Harassment Prevention Program (HPP)” the first Wednesday of each month from 10-11 a.m. and 2-3 p.m. (EST). Participants will have the opportunity to learn tips for creating and maintaining a civil work environment. Register on the Talent Management System (VA 4563938).
Greetings from the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System (NAVAHCS)! Over the past year, one of our strategic goals has been to reinvigorate all of our Special Emphasis Programs in order to ensure that we have an environment that supports diversity and inclusion, affirmative employment and conflict resolution. In addition, we have successfully transitioned all our events to a virtual format which has allowed us to invite speakers from across the country. An additional success is that former presenters return as guests and congressional staff assistants have begun attending our events which has expanded our community beyond Northern Arizona.

For several years, our facility was not in the tradition of celebrating Martin Luther King Day but we have now held two incredibly successful events tied to this observance with the highlight on January 19, 2021, being the surprise guest of a lifetime, Mr. Martin Luther King III. Mr. King shared the following message to inspire hope, and to remind all of us who we are as Americans, “We must work together and not separately. United we stand, divided we fall. We must only find ways to stand.

What we do know, is that when we look at the average American, or Americans in general, the best of America we often see in severe crisis. When we see tsunamis around the world, when we see tornadoes, hurricanes, natural disasters, often times Americans roll up their sleeves and just come to respond. They don’t ask you what color you are, they don’t ask you what your sexual orientation is, they only help to assist in getting you through the crisis. That is usually the best of what America offers. Somehow, I used to say, while I don’t hope we are always in crisis, but while we are in those types of crisis, we see the best of who America is. That kind of condition we have to create without crisis. So that we are helping our brothers and sisters, and our friends every day.”

The theme this year as we honored Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s legacy was, “Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On...Not A Day Off.” We also honored the passing of the Honorable Congressman John Lewis who stated, “Freedom is not a State it is an Act.” In addition to Mr. King, NAVAHCS celebrated with three other special guests: Arizona Serve; United States Army Officer, Major Michael Taylor; and Women Veterans Business Center (WVBC) Founder and Executive Director, Ms. Marylyn Harris. This is the second year Arizona Serve partnered with NAVAHCS as a Special Guest Speaker.

Arizona Serve shared how we can better exemplify what it means to celebrate King’s legacy through volunteerism and engaging with our community. “It is the mission of Arizona Serve to connect passionate people with transformative community projects to fight poverty.” Arizona Serve is an AmeriCorps program that has over 40 members in Yavapai County of Northern Arizona. Major Taylor shared how his service in the military helped him to overcome many barriers he faced as an African American child in the south and what Congressman Lewis meant when he said, “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

Ms. Harris challenged each of us to take 30 minutes out of our day to encourage, develop or mentor others, “just 30 minutes.” It is the mission of the WVBC “to educate and empower Women Veterans (and Military Families) to start and grow professional careers and “wealth-generating” Veteran-Owned Businesses.” To date, the WVBC has outreached to over 25,000 stakeholders. Ms. Harris and the WVBC are pivotal catalysts in growing the number of Women Veteran-Owned Businesses to over 400,000 in the U.S. today. Over the last decade, Ms. Harris has travelled the country speaking, training and empowering Veterans to pursue entrepreneurship. We have been fortunate to connect with such an incredibly gifted group of speakers. They have helped to escalate the impact of our goals to better serve our community and each other. The poignant words delivered so perfectly by Mr. King will remain an unforgettable echo to the importance of our mission.

NAVAHCS is highly committed to continue to expand our Special Emphasis Programs. At a pivotal moment in our history, an amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, our cornerstone for prevention of discrimination, the House voted to pass the Equality Act prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In alignment with the Equality Act, one of our prime strategic goals is to strengthen our LGBTQ Special Emphasis Program. We are excited to foster an environment that encourages engagement and awareness for all Veterans and employees and continues to build on this momentum towards creating a more equitable workplace environment for all.
Also, the Women in the Workplace report by McKinsey and LeanIn.Org revealed that women increasingly experienced burnout and felt less comfortable in sharing these challenges in the workplace. VA has many resources for both women and men in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the VA Whole Health and programs offered by the VA Worklife and Benefits Service, such as the Employee Assistance Program and Childcare Subsidy Program.

As of December 31, 2020, women represent 61.29% of the overall VA workforce, 11.83% above the National Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) benchmark of 49.46%. Women are already above the benchmark of the National RCLF and have increased representation from 60.62% on September 30, 2019 to 61.29% on December 31, 2020. Including both permanent and temporary employees, women Veterans comprise 14.65% of VA’s women employees. By administration, women make up 36.90% of VA Central Office, 50.04% of the Veterans Benefits Administration, 63.25% of the Veterans Health Administration and 22.35% of the National Cemetery Administration. In VA’s leadership pipeline (GS-12 through GS-14), women hold 64.36% of those positions. Though women are well-represented in the leadership pipeline, women have less than expected representation in holding 40.56% of VA’s executive leadership positions (GS-15 and Senior Executive Service positions).

This month, we also honor women Veterans. In their 2021 Women Veterans Trailblazer Initiative 2.0, the Center for Women Veterans (CWV) highlights women Veteran trailblazers around the Nation. CWV defines a women Veteran trailblazer as a woman who has served and separated from the service and makes an impact by enhancing the lives of other Veterans, Veteran families or Veteran caregivers. Areas where women Veterans may have made an impact can include education, employment, entrepreneurship, homelessness, legal areas and mental health and wellness. CWV also features women Veteran authors on their website through their Women Veterans Book Corner. Visit the CWV website for more information about these and other initiatives.

VA encourages organizations and facilities to organize activities targeted at raising awareness, increasing knowledge and addressing any identified barriers to the full employment and inclusion of women in VA. For more information about Women’s History Month, contact your local Equal Employment Opportunity or Federal Women’s Program Manager or Ms. Sehar Minhas, VA’s National Federal Women’s Program Manager, Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI), at 202-461-4036. For more information on VA’s National Federal Women’s Program, visit the VA FWP page on the ORMDI Web site.

Irish-American Heritage Month

VA also joins the Nation in commemorating March as Irish-American Heritage Month. Congress designated March as Irish-American Heritage Month in 1991 and the president issues a proclamation commemorating the occasion each year (U.S. Census, Irish-American Heritage Month and St. Patrick’s Day: March 2021).

“Irish Americans have played a critical role in our Nation’s history and have made significant contributions to our military, government, and economy. During the Revolutionary War, General Henry Knox, the son of Irish immigrants, helped lead General George Washington's famous crossing of the Delaware River. Years later, more than 150,000 Irishmen fought to preserve our Union during the Civil War, shedding their blood so that others would experience the blessings of liberty” (Presidential Proclamation on Irish-American Heritage Month, 2020).

Irish American soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen have contributed immeasurably to the United States Armed Forces. The Medal of Honor, our Nation’s highest and most prestigious military decoration, has been awarded to more Irish-Americans than any other ethnic group (VA Palo Alto Health Care System).