

HHS A Connection

FEBRUARY 2009 A Monthly Newsletter for the Employees of San Diego County Health & Human Services Agency

Ribbon Cut on New Edgemoor

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS A) new Edgemoor Skilled Nursing Facility was unveiled in late January at an event showcasing the state-of-the-art complex that will provide residents with the highest quality of care.

The new facility, built on 15 acres of the County's 326-acre property located in Santee, replaces the original Edgemoor. Some of the original buildings were built in the 1920s.

"Edgemoor is home to both long-term patients and those able to rehabilitate and return to other living arrangements," said **Nick Macchione**, Director, HHS A. "We care for people who have experienced life-altering events such as car crashes, brain injury or strokes. Our dedicated staff provides them with the best care possible."

The County determined it would be more cost-effective to completely rebuild Edgemoor than to renovate the old facility. The new Edgemoor is a 167,000 square foot facility that features climate-control and energy-efficient technology, a wireless computer environment, mod-

ern medical technology and patient-friendly furnishings.

"The new Edgemoor speaks volumes to our County's commitment to our friends and neighbors that face adversity and challenges in everyday life," said **Dianne Jacob**, Chairwoman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. "This new facility allows us to compassionately deliver the most modern treatment and rehabilitation services available while still saving valuable taxpayer resources in tough economic times."

The annual operational savings for the new building is \$4.1 million. Edgemoor's energy-saving building will save the County approximately \$207,000 in utility bills every year. The construction of the new facility cost an estimated \$123.5 million -nearly half covered by the federal government as a result of Senate Bill 1128.

The new facility will open to patients when the state completes its licensing process. It will accommodate 192 patients. Edgemoor currently houses 175 patients.



Above is one of the courtyards at the new Edgemoor. In the photo below, from left to right, County Chief Administrative Officer **Walt Ekar**, Agency Director **Nick Macchione**, County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman **Dianne Jacob**, Supervisor **Ron Roberts** and Board Vice-Chairwoman **Pam Slater-Price** cut the ribbon on the new Edgemoor Skilled Nursing Facility.

HHS A Multimedia

VIDEO



DIVERSITY

All Together...Different

Leveraging the Power of our Individual Strengths

From the Director's Desk

As President Barak Obama reminded us during his inaugural address, "...our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this earth..." This statement rings true – not only for our country - but for our team of Agency employees.



Nick Macchione

While the vast majority of organizations in the United States believe that diversity in the workplace is important, only 30% have actually defined 'diversity', according to a recent report by the Society for Human Resource Management. There's no doubt that the concept of workplace diversity has evolved significantly in recent years. Traditionally, diversity has been defined narrowly in terms of gender and race. However, in today's work environment, diversity can mean everything from personality and work style to religion, socioeconomics and education – in addition to the more conventional definition that includes culture, ethnicity, age and gender.

I take pride in the fact that the County of San Diego, and in particular our Agency, is one of the most diverse groups of County employees. When a customer enters an HHS facility she or he connects with someone who wants to assist them ---not necessarily someone who looks similar, although that's

common as well, but someone who will value him or her as a customer. Much like the customers we assist, we draw from a vast array of skills, experiences and backgrounds. This helps us to respond to customers as they are, not as we want them to be.

Take, for example, the experience of **Savanith Leng** who works at our Family Resource Center in Kearny Mesa helping customers apply for assistance. Leng is Cambodian and she works with a team of Lebanese, Pilipino, Ethiopian, and Hispanic coworkers, among others. It's a very diverse group. In fact, staff at the Kearny Mesa Family Resource Center speaks 26 different languages...not to mention that staff provides some of the best multicultural potluck lunches at their employee gatherings!

Leng remembers talking with her colleagues about how customers from certain Asian countries will often avoid eye contact. For some staff, this was puzzling. However, Leng knew, based on her own cultural background, that avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect and looking someone in the eye can be seen as a challenging gesture in some Asian cultures. By sharing this knowledge with her peers, Leng increased understanding and ultimately improved the interaction between customers and staff.

In return, Leng learned from her coworkers that individuals from Somalia will often refer to people who share

their name or originate from their village as "relatives" – regardless of whether they are biologically connected. These, and other pearls of cultural wisdom, are priceless when it comes to delivering exceptional customer service and supporting one another in the workplace.

Bottom line, merely stating that "diversity is a priority" does not make it so. That's why our verbal commitment is accompanied by action. We "walk the walk" and "talk the talk" by considering diversity in leadership positions; promoting an atmosphere that is receptive and open to varying viewpoints; including diversity objectives in our strategic planning; and utilizing diversity training with our staff. You may also consider taking the County's "Leveraging Diversity" training.

I strongly encourage you to share your knowledge and unique perspective with those around you. We have much to gain, collectively, by leveraging the richness of our differences.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

Main Entry: di-ver-si-ty

Function: noun

Date: 14th century

1: the condition of being diverse : variety ; especially : the inclusion of diverse people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization <programs intended to promote diversity in schools>

2: an instance of being diverse <a diversity of opinion>



DIVERSITY

Diversity in the Workplace

By Rene Santiago
General Manager,
East and Central Regions

The workforce of the 21st century is increasingly more diverse and multicultural. As part of achieving an excellent workforce, our County has long recognized and invested in diversity initiatives. For example, all of us participated in “Respect in the Workplace” sessions that foster an inclusive environment of respect throughout the organization. Additionally, world-renowned experts such as Dr. Edwin Nichols have been invited to speak to County leadership and human resources managers about the importance of diversity as a core competency for an organization.

Ultimately, these efforts promote not just a greater understanding of diverse cultures as a strength and opportunity, but also as a necessity to foster positive and effective teamwork. This is the emerging importance of diversity training and education programs. To achieve effective teamwork in the 21st century, all employees will need to have a deeper appreciation for diversity. This will help us to sustain vibrant and dynamic teams that can continue providing superior customer service in an efficient and effective manner even as conditions change.

This may sound very complicated and lofty, but it's really based on basic human values of listening, respect, and openness to learning about each other and our customers. As an Agency, we are one of the most diverse groups both in our employee base as well as our customers. This is truly a strength that continuously offers opportunities for greater learning and personal growth. In this manner, diversity is a strategic strength that creates organizational capacities and abilities to continuously adapt to changing environments—whether it's the ebb and flow of government finance or the changing demographics of our customers.

Employee Spotlight

“Three’s Company” Means Comfort for Diverse Clients

Josefina Dar, Pauline Tulppo and Jean Alexander-Jackson head to work each day not sure of the new challenges they will face, but the three of them - the Immunizations team at the Central Region Public Health Center (PHC) - probably wouldn't have it any other way.

“The clients are very grateful (for the services we provide),” said Josefina Dar. “They want to hug you.”

The Central Region PHC is located at University Ave. and 52nd St., amid an ethnically diverse population. They see Mexican, Vietnamese, Sudanese and Somali clients, among others. There has also been a recent influx of Burmese individuals. “We see Swedish and Russian immigrants, too,” Dar noted.

Tulppo says she appreciates the diversity of clients. “I enjoy them and I'm able to learn from them as well as them learning from us.”

The staff at the Center is as diverse as the clients they serve and work very well together as a team. “We're all good team players,” said Alexander-Jackson. “Everybody's well-informed of their job duties and (we) help each other out.”

“From the nurses to the HIV counselors to doctors and clinicians, we're all very sensitive to cultural issues,” said Dar.

“Sometimes when they come in, there is no one that speaks English or no interpreter with them,” said Dar. If necessary, staff can call the Language Line to provide interpretive services or contact another County employee who speaks the customer's language.

Besides vaccinations, the three nurses do STD testing and TB Control. “It's prevention,” said Tulppo. “It's going to help them.”

The nurses stay busy because the County's Immunization Branch does a good job of getting information out to clients. “The Immunization Branch really goes out there with free clinics, brochures and information,” said Dar.

Alexander-Jackson, Tulppo and Dar can go home each night knowing they are making a difference in the community they serve. The proof is in the award hanging on the wall for 100 percent of children immunized - a great feat considering all the cultural barriers they work to overcome.



Left to right: Pauline Tulppo, Jean Alexander-Jackson and Josefina Dar work with a vast array of clients - Vietnamese, Mexican, Sudanese, Somali, and many more - every day as part of their nursing work at the Central Region Public Health Center.

A New Lair for the San Pasqual Dragons

The Health and Human Services Agency's San Pasqual Academy (SPA) celebrated the opening of six new residential cottages in late January. SPA, the first residential education campus for foster youth in the nation had a capacity of 136 students. The new living quarters will allow for an additional 28 foster teens to call the Academy home.

"These cottages will be great new homes for our foster children and provide an environment to help them continue on their path to independence," said County Supervisor **Greg Cox**.

"Careful planning went into creating an environment for foster teens that is not only a home in name, but also in the way it looks and feels to these kids," said County Supervisor **Ron Roberts**.

The cottages feature six living units that can each house eight foster teens and house parents. Each cottage features a large recreation room and each living unit will eventually have donated flat-screen televisions, DVD and Blu-ray players. There is also a central gathering spot known as the "Red Barn."

SAN PASQUAL ACADEMY
NEW RESIDENCE GRAND OPENING



County Supervisor **Ron Roberts**, holding scissors, and Supervisor **Greg Cox**, third from right, cut the ribbon at the San Pasqual Academy new residence grand opening.

HHSA Multimedia VIDEO



Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Behavioral Health

Mental illness does not discriminate. Substance abuse is not limited by demographics. They are equal opportunity challenges and frequently an individual can suffer from both. Add in different ages and lifestyles, and effective prevention, treatment and recovery become very complicated.

The Behavioral Health Services (BHS) team knows this well. In efforts to best treat the mental health and alcohol and drug abuse needs of San Diego County residents, services begin with a variety of options to suit the unique needs of individuals, including community-based prevention, day treatment and short-term and long-term residential services, as well as both individual and group therapy.

BHS takes the notion of tailored services one step further, by working with a variety of programs, aimed at all ages. There are programs designed to meet the needs of everyone, including those with special needs such as seniors, homeless, mothers, and adolescents. Guided by cultural advisory committees, services are also designed with diversity. Programs are located throughout the County, to serve people in their communities. Prevention activities are tailored to the unique demographics, culture and needs of residents throughout the County.

Like many other County employees, BHS staff has first-hand experience serving diverse clientele. That enriching experience



broadens understanding and increases capacity to meet community needs. In pursuit of healthy behaviors, variety is the best option.

In addition to the HHSA web pages, more information can be found on sandiego.networkofcare.org/mh, or by calling the BHS Access & Crisis Line at 1-800-479-3339.

South Region Employees Save Co-Worker's Life

A South Region Family Resource Center (FRC) employee did not think the pain he felt in his left arm was a serious matter. That all changed as he was leaving for lunch two days before Christmas. He collapsed in the middle of the FRC.



Fortunately, a group of five employees - **Jennifer Orena, Cathy Silva, Cris Acayan, Elvira Agustino, and Paulina Bobenrieth** - came to his rescue and saved his life.

Immediately after his collapse, the security guard started performing CPR while other employees called 911 and ran to get the defibrillator in the building. His heart had stopped completely and it wasn't until the second set of shockwaves went through his body that he regained consciousness. Thanks to the quick action of colleagues, he is expected to make a full recovery.

"The paramedics told us the CPR and defibrillator bought him time and helped save his life," said Bobenrieth, Public Health Nurse Manager. "It was a team effort. I am proud of all of us. We did everything we had to do to save his life."

The incident, said Bobenrieth, serves as a reminder of the importance of seeking help immediately when not feeling well. It also demonstrates the value of safety and emergency preparedness training that can, at any unexpected moment, save a life.

"We encourage everyone to take the trainings available to County employees; especially CPR and First Aid," said Bobenrieth. "We encourage everyone to revisit their office emergency preparedness plan and make sure that everyone knows where all the emergency equipment is located in their building and everything is working properly."

Are you having a heart attack?

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense - the "movie heart attack," where no one doubts what's happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort.

Here are some symptoms and warning signs:

- Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- Other signs: Cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

If you think you're having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 immediately.

HEALTH NEWS

Heart Health VIDEO



To nominate someone for the Employee Spotlight, simply send an email to: Connectioneditor.hhsa@sdcounty.ca.gov with Employee Spotlight in the subject line



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Agency Helps Put Money Back in Residents' Pockets

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS) 2009 Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Campaign kicked off this month. In an effort to get more people to claim their EITC, about 600 volunteers are filing income tax returns at no cost for low-income families. The tax assistance is offered at 80 sites throughout the County.

Supervisor **Bill Horn**, together with **Nick Macchione**, HHS Director, joined community service providers and working families to encourage more San Diego County residents to file their taxes and claim their EITC.

"These are difficult economic times. This is an important opportunity for working families and individuals to add money to their piggy banks and pocket books," said Macchione.

Established in 1975, the EITC is the federal government's largest cash assistance program designed to lift low-income families and individuals out of poverty by helping them keep more of their hard-earned wages. However, the IRS estimates that about 20 to 25 percent of eligible individuals don't claim the credit. This year, about a dozen agencies and organizations—including United Way, the IRS, and the AARP—will provide free tax assistance until April 15. Individuals and families who worked in 2008 and earned less than \$12,880 and \$41,646 respectively could qualify for as much as \$4,824 in tax credit. However, they must file a tax return to qualify for the EITC.



HHS Director **Nick Macchione**, right, speaks at the 2009 EITC Campaign kick off while District Five Supervisor **Bill Horn**, left, looks on.

In 2003 the San Diego County Board of Supervisors launched a pilot program to provide no cost tax preparation assistance to low-income workers. The program was expanded countywide the following year. Since the initiative began, more than 52,000 state and federal returns have been filed and more than 23.5 million EITC dollars have been returned to the regional economy.

For more information about the EITC Campaign or to set up an appointment to file a tax return, call 211.

HealthLink Makes a Valuable Connection

HealthLink is a school-health focused, public/private partnership to improve health and education outcomes for San Diego County's school children. Partners include school nurses, community clinics, local and countywide programs, public health nurses and County Health and Human Services Agency staff. **Shahla Abtahi-Sepah** was one of the first Public Health Nurses to work with HealthLink when the nursing component was added.

Four years ago, one of the students Abtahi-Sepah was working with asked her to attend a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) hearing for support. It was an eye-opening experience and led Abtahi-Sepah to become involved helping students who come before the SARB. "The purpose of the SARB hearing is mostly to discipline students for school absences, but I felt there were also a lot of issues around truancy which can be related to physical, mental and psychosocial factors," she said. "As the only medical member of this team, I started advocating for students' access to care and assisting them and their families in getting the appropriate services."

At the end of a hearing the student and/or parent(s) sign a "contract" to follow the law mandating that students attend school. "Although the intention of creating a contract and emphasizing dis-

ciplinary actions seems fair to me, I feel that students and their families need more support," said Abtahi-Sepah. That's where the HealthLink connection comes in. Before they leave the hearing, Abtahi-Sepah makes sure they get information about community resources. She also offers her time as a resource for continued support through home visits.

Statistics indicate that the SARB Program is successful, and HealthLink plays a large role in this success. SARB reviewed 364 cases in 2007-2008, and less than half (164 cases) were referred to court for truancy and delinquency. "With the help of the County probation officer assigned to this task and her support and follow-up with the student and family, 109 cases were closed for improved attendance because they followed the contract," said Abtahi-Sepah. The help of the County probation officer is crucial, because Abtahi-Sepah relies on them for support when she needs an authority figure to make a joint home visit with her.

"I'm so proud of the HealthLink program, I believe this is a valuable service and a great partnership between HHS, the San Diego Unified School District and our community partners," said Abtahi-Sepah.



Dr. Wooten Receives Local Hero Honor

Dr. Wilma Wooten was honored as a “Local Hero” on Feb. 4 as part of Black History Month. She was selected for demonstrating a high level of commitment and community participation.

“This is a great honor, and I see it as a validation of the work that we do in the County Health and Human Services Agency,” said Dr. Wooten, the County’s Public Health Officer since 2007. “Public Health Services employees are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of our residents.”

The Black History Month Local Heroes award recognizes collective contributions of courage and humanity, and encourages others throughout our region to continue this legacy. Individuals are recognized for their outstanding efforts to promote and support the arts, business, community activism, public and social services in San Diego County. This is the 11th year for the program.

Dr. Wooten is a UCSD volunteer Associate Clinical Professor and Adjunct Professor at SDSU, Graduate School of Public Health. She is an active member of the National Medical Association, a founding member of the Network of Ethnic Physicians Association, and she serves on the Advisory Board of the National



County Public Health Officer Dr. Wilma Wooten, left, is interviewed by Kerry Strom of KPBS television. Dr. Wooten was honored as a Black History Month Local Hero for her contributions in the area of public service.

Dairy Council. Since 2000, Dr. Wooten has provided medical services on volunteer missions to countries such as Jamaica, Kenya and Ghana.

Her research interests focus on women’s health and include studies that assess risk factors and prevalence of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis in African-American women. She continues to be involved in these and other research efforts at UCSD.

East Region Rallies to Help Toys For Tots

More than 600 children were signed up to receive gifts from the East Region Toys for Tots program this year. That’s twice the number of requests from last year and HHSA East Region staff knew they were facing a challenge. The Marines had received fewer donations and there was initial concern that not all the kids who had requested a gift would receive a toy. Upon hearing the news, East Region Family Resource Center staff took action to ensure that no child went without a gift. Thanks to their efforts and generosity, hundreds of gifts poured in.

Volunteers, led by Kelly Schadeck and Sharon Bryant, had their work cut out for them. First, the toys were sorted according to gender and age appropriateness. Gifts were bagged for efficient distribution.

East Region staff received twelve bikes and helmets to give out to San Diego County children. HHSA employee Kelly Schadeck recalls the joy and gratitude expressed by one parent who said she was “trying to work up the courage” to tell her son there would be no Christmas. Thankfully, that child received a bicycle and Christmas was saved.

Congratulations to East Region staff for this meaningful success.

