

The Human Side

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES □ WINTER 2002-03

The mission of the Georgia Department of Human Resources is to assist Georgians in achieving healthy, independent and self-sufficient lives.

Taking care of loved ones

When you're a parent, you can assume that your child will eventually become independent.

But, when you're the caregiver for a disabled parent or spouse you know that as time passes their dependence upon you will probably become greater. Many DHR employees, like other Americans, experience this challenge daily.

The look on his face when he speaks of her pulls at your heart-strings, it's so sincere and touching. "I don't look at it as a burden, I do this because I love her," says **Bill Meszaros**, a senior project director at DHR, who has been the sole caregiver for his wife, Nancy, for the past nine years. Nancy worked for the Division of Family and Children Services for 28 years before becoming disabled.

Willene Ingram, a procurement officer for DHR, feels relieved when she comes to work these days. Her mother, Earlene Smith, who has Alzheimer's disease, receives personal support services three times a week and can also participate in an older adult day care program that includes transportation. DHR's Division of Aging Services Community Care Services Program provides these services to Ingram's mother through the Clayton County Aging Program.

Nearly one fourth of all American households (22 million people nationally) take care of a relative or



Willene Ingram (r) and her mother, Earlene Smith (l), at home

friend who's 50 or older. That number is expected to increase as the nation's baby boomers grow older and experience more chronic conditions. Congress is considering legislation to help caregivers, but the Division of Aging Services has already begun looking for ways to help and is also promoting a nationwide toll-free telephone number for caregivers.

Caregiving in Georgia, a report available on the division's web page at <http://www2.state.ga.us/departments/dhr/aging>, provides information on a collaborative focus group study and how the division is addressing the issue.

The National Association of State Units on Aging and Area Agencies on Aging sponsors the Eldercare Locator, which provides a way for older Americans and caregivers to

find the help they need so that elders can live at home and in their communities for as long as possible. For more information call the toll-free Eldercare Locator number: 800-677-1116, visit <http://www.eldercare.gov>, or call your local area agency on aging, which is listed on the division's web page.

— Lola Russell

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Commissioner's corner

Looking back, looking forward

It is customary and natural to look back and take stock at the beginning of a new year. It is also a natural instinct to look ahead and make promises to yourself and to make promises to others. This is true for organizations and individuals.

As an organization, the Department of Human Resources can look at 2002 with pride for the accomplishments and growth that occurred during the year. Our best work in 2002 was characterized by teamwork and by coordination across functional lines of authority. Although there are many examples of this spirit of cooperation, two areas stand out. These were the aggressive implementation of new initiatives in Child Protective Services (CPS) and in the restructuring of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases (MHDDAD).

Protecting children

The challenge of protecting and nurturing Georgia's children is one that requires the caring and cooperation of all Georgians. It cannot be done by us acting alone. During 2002, many organizations and individuals worked with us to improve our ability to protect children. We developed and implemented a Child and Family Program Improvement Plan. In doing so we involved public and private agencies that serve children, the Governor's office, the state's Child Advocate office, advocacy groups, providers, parents and families.

We developed community child protection projects in nine Georgia counties to prevent child abuse and neglect. We worked with the Family



Connection sites and community organizations to improve our ability to prevent child abuse. We worked with the GBI, local law enforcement, advocacy centers and others to improve the investigation of serious injuries and child deaths.

We closed the Fulton County emergency shelter and began to transform the Fulton County and DeKalb County emergency facilities into assessment and family support centers. This was made possible by cooperation with providers and by the development of a new Level of Care system that generated needed specialized placements.

We demonstrated our intent to keep our promises to children when, around Labor Day, we coordinated special visits with every child for whom we have responsibility. Staff made face-to-face contact with 21,000 children receiving protective services and 16,000 in foster care.

Restructuring MHDDAD

The other initiative I want to cite as a good example of teamwork is the restructuring of our services to persons with mental illness, developmental disabilities and addictive disease. House Bill

498, which passed during the 2002 session of the General Assembly, not only changed the name of our division responsible for these disabilities; it changed our service system.

The legislation was an attempt to preserve the reform by preserving consumer and family involvement in decisions, local planning, and consumer choice of providers. It improves accountability by clarifying responsibility and by creating a single point of accountability for hospital and community services.

MHDDAD has worked closely with stakeholders to effect system change. Services are being reorganized within seven regions. All of the regional planning boards have revised their rules and procedures to reflect their new role as planning bodies that help families and communities shape policy. Members of these boards have received training. Regional coordinators have been hired who will oversee and integrate hospital and community services in their respective regions.

I believe these efforts show the value of teamwork, and I think we can be proud of these initiatives and the other hard work we have done. There are other success stories in public health, aging, child support collection, adoptions and regulatory services. As we look to the future, we must work to continue our existing efforts for all Georgians.

A new governor

We will be working under the leadership of our new governor, Sonny Perdue. Governor Perdue is the first Republican elected in Georgia in more than 100 years. Our job is to make a smooth and efficient transition. We want to

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Commissioner's corner

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make the transition in a way that validates our reputation and that is worthy of the quality work we have done in the past year.

Governor Perdue supports community services and human services. In his speech to legislators at the Biennial Institute for Legislators in Athens in December, the then governor-elect indicated that his budgetary priorities were education and human services. He said that human needs would come first in his administration. Our new governor said, "We don't buy a new car when our children are hungry. We are going to take care of the things that we need to take care of."

Governor Perdue believes in modern business practices that are based on keeping promises and accountability. Embracing these practices, I have confidence that we will make good promises and keep them in the coming year.

Jim Martin

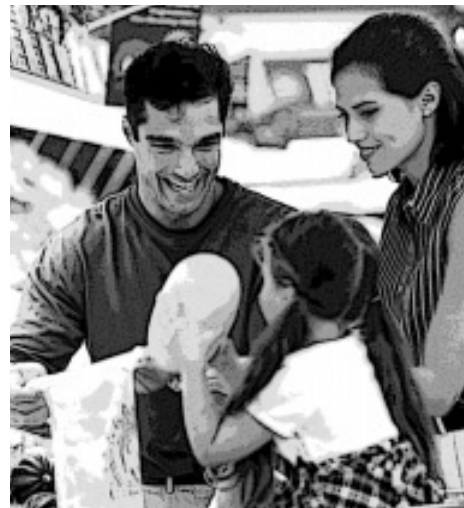


Rosetta Smith, program assistant for the Council on Maternal and Infant Health, enjoys a hug from our favorite ghoul (a.k.a. Commissioner Jim Martin) at a Halloween fundraiser for the charitable contributions drive.

DHR battles hunger

(The following is adapted with permission from an article in "Foodsharing," the newsletter of the Atlanta Community Food Bank.— ed.)

We owe a debt of gratitude to many of the state's decision makers for the continuing funding of the State Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Despite a tight budget and many competing demands, DHR allocated \$4 million to the Georgia Food Bank Network this fiscal year. Strong support came from the governor's office and the General Assembly. The eight Georgia food banks are using the money to purchase nutritious foods for distribution to



low-income families with children.

SNAP has become a central part of the Atlanta Community Food Bank's service to member agencies.

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Human Side goes electronic

This issue of the Human Side reaches you using 21st century technology! We no longer mail it to you from Atlanta. Instead, you are reading it on the Internet or in a PDF file sent by email, or on a paper copy that was printed from a PDF by your local office.

We are proud that we could "go electronic," because we believe we will reach more people than we did through our old, fragmented system. What's more, we are saving thousands of dollars in production and postage costs, which is important in this time of budget tightening.

With the help of a team of Payroll, HROD, Office of Communications, and – especially – IT people we came up with the new distribution system.

- A message has gone out on GroupWise alerting employees with access to the Internet that a new issue is up on the DHR web page at dhr.georgia.gov, as usual and also in PDF format.
- The commissioner has asked every division and office director to help us reach employees who do not have access to computers by directing worksite managers to print and distribute paper copies for them.
- We also sent the Human Side on CDs to county DFCS offices so they could print and distribute paper copies.

I would like to know how you feel about our new electronic distribution system (or any other aspect of the Human Side). Also, if you know anyone who did not have access to the Human Side in some form this quarter, please ask them to contact me and we'll try to do something about it. You can reach me by email at brjoye@dhr.state.ga.us. or call me at 404-657-1385.

— Barbara Joye



Valuing diversity

Georgia's population has become much more multi-cultural in recent years. In response, DHR now has a diversity workgroup, whose task is to focus on staff recruiting, training and retention measures that will help us better manage and value this diversity in our 21st century workplace. The diversity workgroup is charged with development of the first DHR diversity plan.

Increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees, as well as people from all parts of the American continent, are coming to Georgia to work, study or retire. They bring new ideas and add more life to our mosaic of cultures and people. The largest immigrant group in Georgia is the Spanish-speaking population, who live in many areas of the state. The second largest is Vietnamese, followed by Korean, Chinese, Sudanese and Bosnian, all mostly located in metro Atlanta, Augusta and Savannah.

All state agencies, and particularly DHR, need to adjust our policies to make sure that we are delivering services to these new customers in a consumer-friendly manner. This is no easy task, especially with the current job freeze, budget cuts and spending restraints that affect all our programs.

To advance a common agenda of managing and valuing diversity, we have to form good working relationships, both internally and externally. We need to conduct community needs assessments by county to improve customer service. We also need to develop col-



Christian Del Rosario of Summitlink.Com teaches DHR employees "survival Spanish language skills" during Hispanic Heritage Month in October. This "lunch and learn" was sponsored by HROD and the DHR Office of Communications, as part of a workforce diversity program.

laborative relationships with community groups, nonprofit social agencies, and health and consumer advocacy organizations.

The incoming governor is interested in seeing "relationship marketing" take place in state government. This includes increasing our current personnel strengths, especially to help immigrant and refugee clients who have limited English proficiency.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires states to ensure that non-English-speaking people are provided with equal and fair access to services. DHR's implementation plan to comply with this legislation was approved by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights this year. During the past 16 months, DHR has been striving to improve its delivery of services to all Georgians, especially immigrants and refugees. The Office of Civil Rights has been monitoring us and working with us on corrective actions.

Some of the necessary action steps will be introduced in 2003 by the diversity workgroup and DHR's Office of Human Resource Management. They will include recruitment, training and cultural workshops for our staff, department supervisors, county directors, service providers and contract vendors.

Recruitment efforts include attending multicultural job fairs, providing easy access to job vacancies at www.dhrjobs.com and establishing links to community organizations.

The diversity workgroup has recommended developing training modules for classes both at Two Peachtree and on CD-ROM for distance learning, to make possible cross-cultural competency and diversity training on a statewide basis.

— Antonio Flores



“We put me back together”

A consumer advocate's story

In 1985, Julie Spores tried to kill herself by using a lethal combination of alcohol and Valium. She had been drinking and taking drugs since she was 13, and she was prone to depression. Finally, when her suicide attempt failed, Spores sought help.

What she didn't know until after she got sober and had two years of counseling at Gateway Community Services Board (CSB) in Brunswick, was that she had been sexually abused at various times in her life and suppressed it. Telling her parents did no good. They just shuffled her back and forth between them. Her counselors tried what they knew how to do, and Spores pulled herself together to go to Valdosta for school.



Julie Spores, in Atlanta for a conference of fellow MHDDAD consumers.

Two years later, ill and overcome with powerful memories, Spores went back home and back to Gateway CSB. She asked for a particular counselor, who special-

ized in sexual abuse, who diagnosed Spores with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Spores had a hard road in front of her. It was two years before she started trusting her counselor. But the therapist patiently chipped away at Spores' repressed memories for nine years. She helped her find a good support system and discover her spiritual side. She also affirmed her intelligence: she told her she should go to school.

“After the long time of dredging and discussing memories, of reliving situations and learning to get better, we put me back together again,” says Spores. She went on to get an LPN and an RN with a bachelor's degree. Spores' mother also went to therapy with her – a cornerstone in her success and the mending of their relationship. “All things considered,” Spores says, “my parents did the best they could with the resources available in the 60's and 70's.”

In 1996, Spores began a career in mental health consumer advocacy. Soon after, she became a certified peer specialist and now works in Glynn County helping people in recovery to learn life skills and attain their GEDs.

“I don't know what I would have done if someone around me had not been able to diagnose the post-traumatic stress syndrome from all the abuse. I might be dead,” Spores says. “Even though I went through a lot in my early life, I have the kind of life I've always wanted now. I've learned to forgive. It just took getting to the problem and getting help from an experienced therapist.”

— Iris McIlvaine



Board of Human Resources Chair Todd S. Jarrell, M.D. gets a flu shot from DeKalb County Board of Health nurse Mary Jane Burke, R.N., at the DHR board's December meeting. In December the Public Health Laboratory reported the first confirmed case of influenza for this season in Georgia. It's not too late to get your flu shot! It takes two weeks to build up immunity after the shot, so do it now — contact your medical provider or county health department. Most county health departments have the vaccine.

Keeping warm with help from DHR

Winters may be milder in Georgia than in much of the country, but the cost of heating on those cold days can have a very serious effect on people in need. To help those folks, Commissioner **Jim Martin** announced a federal award of \$1,100,000 to help 300 needy families in DeKalb County.

“The grant provides assistance through a variety of methods to demonstrate how education, advocacy, and weatherization can make a difference for Georgia families who need help with their heating bills,” said Commissioner Martin.

The bulk of the funds will go to the Partnership for Community Action, Inc. (PCA) of Decatur to help low-income families with energy and personal budgeting education, advocacy with utility companies for clearing past-due energy bills and restoring service to customers, and weatherization of the



150 most needy homes.

PCA also will offer energy service grants to some households, supplementing its regular low-income assistance program that began on Nov. 1 for those ages 65 or over. These grants are available to qualifying homebound residents of any age. Some 300 customers who are behind on their heating bills may receive up to \$150 in additional funds paid to their energy supplier to get them reconnected to utilities that heat

their homes. This is in addition to other small grants available through DHR programs at PCA.

Another DeKalb County program, called Project Energize!, may make additional utility payments on behalf of participating households in steps up to \$200 for completing phases of the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge (REACH) grant education workshops, and other programs as they are offered.

An evaluation of 300 families will prove how effective these kinds of services are in making families self-sufficient and which ones make a real difference for them. The grant will run for three years, under the direction of the DFCS Energy Assistance unit, with the help of nationally recognized energy consultants.

REACH grants are designed to promote self-sufficiency by targeting energy assistance to individuals who are most in need. They minimize health and safety risks that result from high-energy costs for low-income people; prevent homelessness caused by inability to pay energy bills; and increase the efficiency of energy usage by low-income families.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families awards up to \$1,000,000 per grant for the REACH program in five or six states submitting winning proposals. In addition to the REACH grant, DHR also won an additional grant of \$100,000 for educational programs.

For more information on energy assistance, call toll-free 1-800-869-1150 or contact **Joyce Hull**, state energy coordinator, or Energy Assistance program staff at 404-657-3426.

— Mary Elizabeth Wilson

World AIDS Day

Veronica Hartwell, director of Public Health's STD/HIV Section, Prevention Services Branch, talks with Darryle Burton of Atlanta at DHR's World AIDS Day event in the lobby of 2 Peachtree. The day's theme was “Stigma and Discrimination.”



“We have made great progress in Georgia in providing individuals with HIV/AIDS the services and support they need. But even as we take pride in this record and continue to improve on it, we must reflect that discrimination against those living with the disease is a worldwide problem,” said Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., director, Division of Public Health.

Who's news

We apologize for omitting the following Georgia Public Health Association annual award winners from the listing in the fall issue of the Human Side: **Melanie Yarborough**, program associate for the North Central Health District's Infectious Disease Unit won the Janet Stancliff Award, and **Anne Wheeler**, of the Southeast Health Unit's Chronic Disease Prevention program, won the Nutrition Extra Mile award.



Jed S. Nitzberg is DHR's new Director of Communications. A long-time public relations practitioner, he worked

most recently as director of portal relationship management, programming, and strategic integration for WebMD. He also has worked with the Arthritis Foundation (national headquarters) as vice president of interactive communications and public relations, as well as the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Hospital for Sick Children in Wash-

ington, D.C.. Nitzberg has served on the board of directors of the Public Relations Society of America, Georgia Chapter. A graduate of Brandeis and Columbia Universities, Nitzberg lives with his family in Marietta.



Natalie Thomas, legal services developer for Aging Services, has been selected as the first recipient of the National Aging and Law Award, which honors individuals who have made significant contributions to justice for older people. The award is sponsored by the AARP and a variety of elder advocacy organizations.



Jack Burris has been named inter-governmental program manager. He has served in this capacity during several Georgia governors' administrations, and has also worked in the private sector, most recently with Capitol Impact. He will use his extensive knowledge of state and federal government to help DHR

gain greater flexibility and funding for federal programs and maximize federal participation while coordinating these activities throughout the department. Burris and his family live in Sandy Springs.



Bernadette Thomas, MHDDAD Communications Office, won second place for office skills and **Maxine Cook**, MHDDAD Legal and Risk Management Services, won second place for proofreading and grammar skills in the professional skills competition held by the division's annual professional development conference for support staff.



The DFCS Youth Leadership Council (YLC) received a leadership award from the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). YLC was recognized for their work as advocates for education grants for youth in foster care to pay for their expenses not covered by Pell grants and the HOPE scholarship. YLC is a group of current and former foster care youth who advocate for the interests of all children in foster care. The education grants will extend existing educational supports that previously expired when youth reached age 21, so that youth now or formerly in foster care will have up to age 25 to complete a bachelor's degree. No other state in the country offers this extended support.

YLC is supported by DHR's Independent Living Program and a broad range of advocates. The YLC has chapters in DFCS Field Areas 3, 5, 7 and 8.

For more information about YLC, contact state project coordinator **Eddie Gordon** at 404-657-3465 or your local Independent Living coordinator.

WSB-TV producer and photographer Josh Wade mikes Linda & Philip Bassinger of Athens for a taped interview about being foster parents. Linda & Phil, after raising three children of their own, opened their



home to two adolescent girls, now high school seniors. They have also taken in kids on an overnight, emergency basis. The two-part series on foster parenting and the need for more foster parents in Georgia is scheduled to air Jan. 23 and 24 on WSB-TV at the 5 p.m. news hour.

What's news



"Smile, You're On Georgia's Oral Health Prevention Mobile Trailer," by E. Joseph Alderman, D.D.S., director of Public Health's Oral Health Section, won third prize in the 2002 Georgia Public Health Association photography contest. Charles H. Roszel, D.D.S., dental director for the Rome health district, gives children who are uninsured or covered by Medicaid or Peachcare preventive oral health screenings in the district's mobile facility. Fewer than five percent of private providers in the 10-county district serve this population. (This photo also appeared in the Spring 2002 Human Side to announce the new trailers.)

SCANA Energy Regulated Division has contributed three hundred smoke detectors to DFCS, to be distributed statewide through Community Action Agencies. The smoke detectors are equipped with batteries, and will be issued to those elderly and homebound households who qualify for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

For more information, call 1-800-869-1150 and a representative will provide you with the name and telephone number of the Community Action Agency serving your area.



The Office of Adoptions (OA), WAGA FOX 5 News and the Freddie Mac Foundation received the Adoption Exchange Association's (AEA) 2002 "Wednesday's Child

Award." The winning segment featured siblings Sam and Jessica ice skating with FOX 5's Amanda Davis. The awards were presented to OA recruitment manager, Deborah Burrus at AEA's biennial conference in September in Niagara Falls, Canada.

"Wednesday's Child" is a partnership of OA, FOX 5 News and the Freddie Mac Foundation. Together they help Georgia's 250 waiting children find adoptive parents. These children are featured each Wednesday on FOX 5 News at 6 p.m. on a segment hosted by Davis titled "Wednesday's Child," then again on Sundays during the 10 p.m. news. For a listing of featured children and information on adoption, visit the "Wednesday's Child" web site at www.wednesdaychildga.org.



DHR battles hunger

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Many of the Georgia families receiving SNAP food earn low wages and the help of supplemental food may keep them from needing DHR's cash assistance or other services. Being able to depend on the Georgia Food Bank Network for a variety of nutritious, staple foods for grocery distribution or meal service is a new development in our arena. A number of our own member agencies have told us that SNAP foods help with their budgetary, as well as meal, decisions.

And we hear from clients, too. A mother in Fulton County wrote and told us that she was able to give her daughter a "real" sweet sixteen birthday dinner when she served lasagna we had purchased with SNAP money. Other parents have commented that they now sit down and have evening meals with their children — there is now food to create a presentable meal.

Editor's note: The Georgia Foodbank Network includes eight community foodbanks located throughout the state.

The purpose of *The Human Side* is to provide interesting and important information related to DHR employees and their jobs.

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