

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE MAGAZINE

VOLUME 4 - ISSUE 6
JANUARY 2024



Harvesting Innovation: Spotlight on Breakthrough Ideas and Projects

OFFICE OF WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Discover

Innovate

Engage

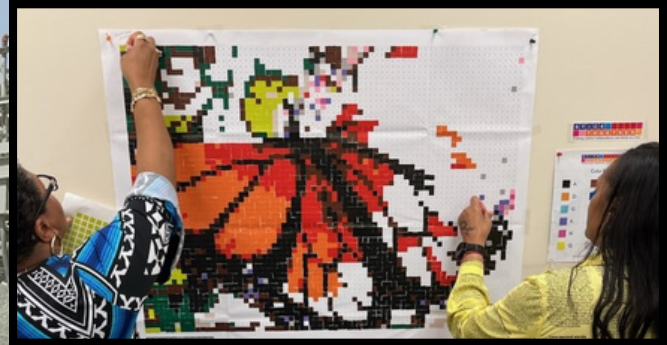


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EDITOR LETTER



Dear Readers,

As the vibrant hues of the fall and winter season surround us, it is with great excitement and pride that I welcome you to Volume 4, Issue 6 of our Employee Experience Magazine, "Harvesting Innovation: Spotlight on Breakthrough Ideas and Projects".

In the spirit of winter, a season that symbolizes change, growth, and the culmination of efforts, this magazine is a celebration of the innovative spirit that defines our organization. Within these pages, you will find a tapestry of stories woven from the threads of creativity, resilience, and a commitment to pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

Our teams have been hard at work, sowing the seeds of innovation throughout the year, and now is the time to reap the rewards. This edition serves as a harvest, bringing to light the breakthrough ideas and projects that have not only shaped our present but also paved the way for an inspiring future.

As you turn the pages, you will encounter the faces and stories behind these innovations. From the brainstorming sessions that sparked the initial ideas to the challenges overcome in their execution, each article is a testament to the dedication and ingenuity that thrives within our organization.

We have chosen the theme "Harvesting Innovation: Spotlight on Breakthrough Ideas and Projects", to reflect the idea that innovation is not a solitary event but a continuous process, much like the changing seasons. These pages spotlight the diverse and groundbreaking projects, employee-led programs, acts of service, and helpful wellness tips that have grown out of our collective creativity. Innovation, after all, is not just about technology or products; it's about the way we think, collaborate, and solve problems. It's about finding new paths and embracing change. It's about daring to dream and then making those dreams a reality.

I invite you to immerse yourself in the stories shared in this magazine, to be inspired by the remarkable achievements of your colleagues, and to consider how your unique perspective and skills can contribute to the ever-evolving narrative of our organization.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue, from the writers and photographers to the innovators themselves. Your collective efforts have made this magazine a showcase of the incredible talent and potential that defines our workforce.

As we celebrate the winter season and the bountiful innovations within our organization, let us also look forward to the opportunities that lie ahead. May this magazine be a source of inspiration, a reminder of what we can achieve together, and a catalyst for even more breakthroughs in the seasons to come.

Happy reading!

CHRISTINA H. HIGGS, MPH, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANT/VSEAF PROGRAM MANAGER

NOTE FROM OWE DIRECTOR



Greetings, Readers!

On behalf of the Office of Workforce Engagement (OWE) here at DHRM, thank you for taking time to peruse this edition of the Employee Experience magazine. I have the distinct honor of working alongside the amazing staff behind this edition, to which I would like to give a major kudos. I would be remiss if I also did not express my gratitude for those of you who submitted content. Thank you! The Employee Experience Magazine would not be possible without the many submissions demonstrating the incredible work you all are doing in your agencies around the Commonwealth.

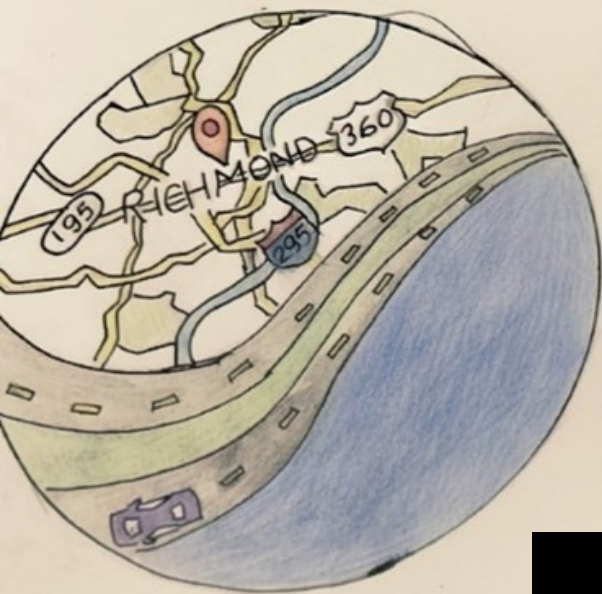
This year has been driven by the call for innovation and change within state government. I certainly can attest to the level of innovation we have experienced here in OWE, as I am sure many of you can. From transition within our statewide workplace giving campaign, known as the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign, to implementing new programs and initiatives around Equal Employment Opportunity Compliance, the OWE team has gained a deep appreciation for the work, collaboration, and efforts that make effective growth possible. Innovation and breakthrough initiatives are wanted on every level in state agencies, which can be exciting as well as difficult, depending on how it is initiated. I offer the following advice that has been demonstrated by the content highlighted in this issue:

- 1) Cultivate and listen to curiosity from all levels in your agencies.
- 2) Honor the past work and acknowledge the great parts of past initiatives and projects.
- 3) Be able to articulate the need for change.
- 4) Just start somewhere and lay out a path forward.

As we move into 2024, I wish the best for all our readers and encourage you to keep up the amazing work we are doing to make the Commonwealth better.

Best,

JUSTIN SHREVE
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT



INNOVATION AND BREAKTHROUGH PROJECTS

“This is My Vision when I think of the DMV. Fast driving services information for everyone, with a smile. The Logo reminded me of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnels and just how far and wide of an area that we cover to service our customers. We pride ourselves on Secure information, using the best tools, constantly upgrading services to make the customer service experience better each time.”

By: Kerri Boyd Gurr, Program Support Tech Sr, Department of Motor Vehicles

AMERICORPS: A CULTURE OF SERVICE

Our purpose as individuals and agency
Is to serve
By providing all Virginians with the resources
They deserve
We work every day to help
And listen
To reach all who need us
With none missing
We partner with communities and nonprofits
Our boots on the ground
Together we put our effort against needs
Using whatever can be found
But there are gaps we have not closed
The work can feel unending
We know our mission's importance
And try to stop from bending
When we reach our limit but want to do more
Many turn to AmeriCorps
Every year thousands of Virginians right here
And across the nation
Choose to give a year of their time
And make service their vocation
In Arlington, Carroll, Smyth, Danville, Richmond,
Petersburg, Hampton, Hopewell, Henrico, and Newport
News

They provide literacy tutoring for students at risk
Without their dedication
That service wouldn't exist
In Richmond they provide recovery services
For those affected by the opioid epidemic
And offer workforce development
For communities hardest hit by the COVID pandemic
Across the state they work
to resettle refugees
As important extra hands
For the International Rescue Committee
They serve in State Parks
Conserving our natural resources
They protect our native wildlife
From different damaging sources
In 63 Title 1 high schools they are
College Advisers
Working towards college access for underserved
populations
Overcoming education's biggest dividers
This is the impact we are proud to enable
and we invite everyone
To join us at the table
As together we Serve Virginia

By: Alexander Vanik, State Service Plan Coordinator,
Department of Social Services

ART ENHANCEMENTS IN REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION CENTERS



A new initiative is slated this fall to enhance the aesthetic of Old Dominion Universities' Regional Higher Education Centers with art from the ODU Baron & Ellin Gordon Art Galleries located in Norfolk, Virginia.

Dr. Tish Szymurski, Associate Vice President, wants to extend the University in supporting ODU associates through collaborations and partnerships. "This opportunity would feature ODU students, faculty, alumni and related artists from the area through creative use of the Centers", says Szymurski.

"When I met with Charlotte Kasic, the Executive Director of The Barry Art Museum to brainstorm collaborative opportunities, we talked about enhancing the Centers with art," Szymurski said. "The Centers currently hold small pieces of art, but we have ample space to showcase University-owned and affiliated work. Charlotte suggested a visit with Stirling Goulart of the Baron and Ellin Gordon Art Galleries to investigate the possibilities, so here we are!"

An art selection team was assembled from the ODU Tri-Cities and Peninsula Centers including Media Specialists Eric Robinson and Erwin Farrow who visited the Gordon Art Galleries October 24, 2023.

Also on the team was Jeanne Yates, Executive Office Manager, Hampton Roads Biomedical Research Consortium located in the same building as the Tri-Cities Center in Portsmouth, Virginia. "The artwork shows we are open to multiple groups," Yates said.

Goulart, Assistant Director of Operations for the Gordon Art Galleries, says at the heart of the artwork is generosity. "With an art program you have alumni and faculty wanting to give back to the University. Most of our collections are donations," Goulart said. "It's really cool."

Goulart is scheduled to install loaned artwork at the Tri-Cities Center, 1070 University Blvd. in Portsmouth, and the Peninsula Center 600 Butler Farm Road in Hampton, Virginia the first week of December.

By: Eric Robinson, Media Specialist III, Old Dominion University

FAMILY NUTRITION PROGRAM



To address the youth poverty rate in Central Virginia, averaging 24.2% for the areas in region 2000, the Family Nutrition Program (FNP) partners with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank (BRAFB) to offer fresh fruits and vegetables to youth and families who participate in our nutrition education programs.

In addition to providing ingredients to support our ongoing nutrition education classes, offered at both in and out-of-school settings, the BRAFB also provides fresh produce in bulk and family-sized, locally sourced produce boxes. These additional resources are offered at a variety of events, such as the Back to School Night at Appomattox Elementary School, see photos. The FNP staff assists youth and families in choosing the various fresh offerings, shares nutrition information and recipes for the produce, as well as provides information on additional resources, such as BRAFB's Food Finder at <https://foodfinder.brafb.org>. This website allows families to locate supplemental food in their area and is offered in several languages to increase accessibility.

The FNP provides a wide range of nutrition education programs for youth, adults, and seniors, promotes physical activity, supports local community and school gardens, and works to increase healthy food access through partnerships with farmers markets, local stores and food pantries. For more information, visit <https://eatsmartmoveva.org/>

By: Jeanell Smith, SNAP-Ed Agent - Region 2000,
Virginia Cooperative Extension

VMFA'S

NEW PERSPECTIVES INITIATIVE

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is a beacon of cultural enrichment and artistic diversity. As part of its ongoing effort to sustain an inclusive community and workplace culture, the museum launched the “New Perspectives Initiative” in January 2023. This initiative is a testament to VMFA’s dedication to advancing an innovative environment where diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords but embedded in the DNA of organizational practice.

Marna Kalman, Gallery Associate, conceived the New Perspectives Initiative, developed by Diana D’Amato, Assistant to the Chief Diversity Officer. The initiative hosts casual, educational chats at the museum’s Best Café every second Thursday morning to engage in meaningful employee dialogue.

VMFA’s Best Café’s casual environment is an ideal platform for these important conversations. Resources are disseminated to help employees interact with individuals with disabilities. After each talk, attendees can stay for coffee to encourage discussions and practice new skills.

In line with VMFA’s commitment to nurturing an innovative and inclusive environment, the “New Perspectives Initiative” aligns with national disability awareness events and focuses on the understanding and acceptance of diverse disabilities such as Autism, Williams Syndrome, and Down Syndrome, contributing to the museum’s broader goal of creating an inclusive and forward-thinking organization.

This strategic alignment ensures the content’s relevance while providing employees with the essential knowledge and skills to engage sensitively and effectively with a diverse audience of museum visitors.

VMFA underscores its commitment to a culture of continuous innovation and improvement by integrating the New Perspectives Initiative into its operational blueprint. The initiative is an evolving resource that empowers employees, enriches visitor experiences, and enhances the institution’s reputation of inclusion.

By: Patrick C. Patrong, Chief Diversity Officer and Assistant Deputy Director for HR, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts





VA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FAIR



The VA Dept of Health, Norfolk District held its 2nd Annual Emergency Preparedness Fair on September 27, 2023. In Honor of National Emergency Preparedness Month, staff were engaged in fire safety simulations and hands only CPR demonstrations. Attendees were also provided with literature and safety items promoting first aid, vehicle safety, and general preparation checklists. Employees from State agencies share delicious recipes prepared using only non-perishables and manual appliances. The loss of power doesn't have to equal loss of taste! [Check it out here.](#)

By: Melissa Dozier, Virginia Department of Health

In September 2023, Serve Virginia launched the Virginia Community Engagement Index (VCEI), a first-of-its-kind report that identifies what Virginians believe to be the most pressing challenges facing our communities—Education, Health & Well-being, Housing, Public Safety & Economic Security, to name the top five—and provides tools to connect diverse sectors in cultivating volunteerism as a socially and economically significant opportunity and asset for improving lives.

Virginia Community Engagement Index (VCEI) results have been breakthrough work by the entire team at Serve Virginia. This report represents the culmination of more than a year of work—and will guide our work going forward. It is an exciting opportunity to showcase insights gathered from more than 6,000 Virginians, filling in gaps in national studies of this sort.

Further, the VCEI represents an innovative partnership between Serve Virginia, AmeriCorps, and the national non-profit Points of Light, coming together to design a study that would positively impact Virginians, while also serving as a model for other states to use in the future.

While the report itself is an exciting landmark for Serve Virginia, the innovative work that will come next is yet more exciting. Using VCEI data, organizations will be better able to plan volunteer programs that are inclusive, accessible, and engaging to all Virginians.

"Service that is equitable and accessible can also be the most impactful for the communities that we serve," shared Sonali Nijhawan, Director of AmeriCorps State and National, at a recent VCEI launch event held in Richmond. This event was a fun opportunity for the Serve Virginia staff to celebrate with partners and to host AmeriCorps leaders for roundtable work sessions.

As Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi, Deputy Director of AmeriCorps State and National, also shared at that event, "We want to turn inspiration into action." We hope you'll join us by visiting servevirginia.org/why-serve to learn more!

By: Sarah Lawson, Communications Coordinator, Virginia Department of Social Services

VA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INDEX



V C U Q U E S T 2 0 2 3

A quest for knowledge
a thirst for truth
the journey begins with wide-eyed youth
enrolling in a university
Dreaming of a life of discovery.
But soon the reality sets in
the coursework
the lectures
the deadlines begin
Student's strain to stay afloat
Juggling classes projects and notes.

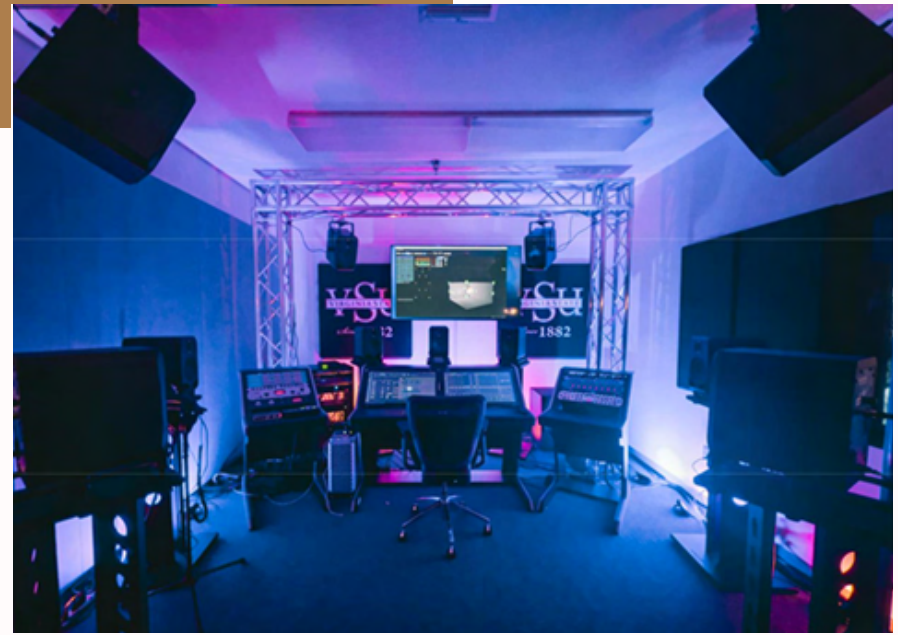
Yet, some seek more
a deeper dive
into research that makes them feel alive
They turn to faculty hoping for a chance
To participate in their academic dance.
But the struggle is real
the challenge profound
To convince professors to take them on and be around
To trust their skills their potential to grow
And let them contribute to show what they know.

The fear of failure
the weight of expectation
The pressure to succeed and avoid rejection
All of these factors and more in play
As students navigate this uncharted way.

So let us remember
as we work towards progress
That undergraduates bring much to the process
Their curiosity, their passion, their fresh eyes
Can lead to breakthroughs and scientific highs.
And let us urge faculty to open their doors
To welcome these students and see what they can explore
To mentor, to guide, to nurture and inspire
And watch them soar as they reach ever higher.



VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S DOLBY ATMOS PRODUCTION STUDIO



This past fall, Virginia State University Sound Recording Technology Professors Dustin Painter and Wellington Gordon achieved the completion of an advanced Dolby Atmos studio. The studio boasts a state-of-the-art 7.1.4 speaker array comprising ADAM Audio S-Series speakers, a Grace Design m908 monitor controller, and a Pro Tools HDX system. This development represents VSU's dedication to delivering a top-tier education in audio technology.

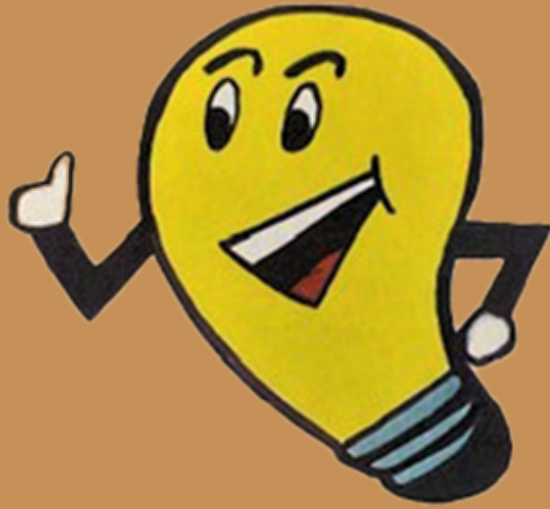
This cutting-edge facility will benefit students in both the Sound Recording Technology program within the Music Department and the Contemporary Sound Production track in the Mass Communications Department. It serves as an invaluable resource for instruction in music mixing, film post-production, video game sound design, and immersive audio applications, equipping students with essential skills for today's evolving media landscape.

With this studio, Virginia State University students gain the opportunity to produce music in the highly sought-after Dolby Atmos Music format, found on platforms like Apple Music, Tidal, and Amazon Music Unlimited. This positions VSU students at the forefront of music production. Additionally, Dolby Atmos provides the advantage of compatibility with older formats, enabling students to offer versatile audio assets for diverse professional projects.

This studio marks a historic milestone for Virginia State University. It stands as one of the first, if not the very first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the nation to feature a Dolby Atmos studio, underscoring VSU's commitment to innovation in sound recording technology education.

Virginia State University's completion of its Dolby Atmos studio signals a remarkable advancement in audio education, enhancing the opportunities available to its students and positioning the institution as a trailblazer among HBCUs in the realm of advanced audio technology. Thanks to Dr. Kawachi Clemons, Executive Director of the Center for Creative & Entertainment Arts, and Dr. Samuel Rowley, Music Department Chair, for their support in this endeavor. The new Dolby Atmos studio is located on campus in Davis Hall. The studio boasts a state-of-the-art 7.1.4 speaker array comprising ADAM Audio S-Series speakers, a Grace Design m908 monitor controller, and a Pro Tools HDX system based on the Avid Pro Tools MTRX Studio interface.

By: Dustin Painter, Assistant Professor of Sound Recording Technology and Wellington Gordon, Coordinator of Sound Recording Technology, Virginia State University



DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES

**SHINES A BRIGHT LIGHT ON INNOVATION
WITH 'WATTSON'**

Wattson

With medical and technology advancements, as well as policy changes, Disability Determination Services (DDS), a division of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), must continually innovate to make accurate, prompt decisions on disability claims and provide customer service excellence.

After DARS introduced Innovation as a core value in 2021, the DDS Continuous Improvement Team (C-IT) took a lead in bringing it to life. Led by Betsy Slease, DDS Training and Quality Manager, and her team, Michael Racz and Christen King, C-IT consists of employees across districts and roles, who serve for two years, to improve business processes or the work environment, based on employee suggestions.

C-IT rebranded itself from the “Continuous Improvement Team” to the “Continuous Innovation Team.” This positive focus shifted the association of “improvement” with “problems” to “innovation” with “problem-solving and possibilities.” C-IT also wanted to create a mascot to remind employees that we can innovate. The lightbulb went off with a DDS “Name the C-IT Mascot” contest, yielding 54 name submissions. C-IT narrowed it to the top five, and employees voted for their favorite name, Wattson. The contest brought innovation to the forefront as employees engaged in naming the mascot.

Wattson is a sign of innovation at DDS. Wattson is on our C-IT emails, flyers around the offices, and articles in our monthly newsletter. Wattson brings a smile and helps us imagine a future full of possibilities as we embrace innovation.

The Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)' mission is to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. The DARS Values are Accountability, Customer Service, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Engagement, and Innovation.

Wattson was created / illustrated by Derek Drumgo, a former C-IT member. “Wattson” won the naming contest.

By: Elizabeth “Betsy” Slease, DDS Training and Quality Manager, Department for Aging & Rehabilitative Services

VA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SCIENCE OF HOPE FRAMEWORK

The Science of Hope is well established as a vital coping resource and protective factor for children, adults, and families across the lifespan, and has a strong research record for being one of the best protective measures for psychological well-being, and there are a multitude of studies that demonstrate the positive associations that it has for both the agency workforce and the end user of programs and services. Therefore, in the Spring of 2023, VDSS's Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy began leading a multi-phase process for VDSS to become a Hope-Centered and Trauma-Informed organization, aiming to infuse hope into the agency by way of organizational culture, organizational policies, and organizational services.

In May, thirty-two VDSS employees participated in a two-day training to become certified as Hope Navigators. This group, which makes up the agency's newly formed Hope and Resilience Transformation Team (HARTT), have been working with Dr. Chan Hellman, Director of the University of Oklahoma's Hope Research Center and his colleague, Dr. Angela Pharris, to develop the first phase of a strategic plan for implementing the Science of Hope framework.

In October, Drs Hellman and Pharris facilitated training for the agency's senior leadership team, which will provide guidance and support to the Navigators as they enter the next phase of implementation, geared toward infusing the science of hope in the VDSS workforce and the array of programs and services that they represent.

To learn more about the Science of Hope, view Dr. Hellman's Ted Talk [here](#).

By: Laurie K. Crawford, MPA, Director of Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy, Virginia Department of Social Services



The COVA Internship Connection

Internships continue to become a vital talent pipeline for employers, both in the private and public sectors. In response to the growing need for support surrounding internships, the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management Workforce Development team and the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia's Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership team piloted the 2023 COVA Internship Connection Program. This pilot, designed to provide centralized development support and programming for Virginia state agencies and interns, hosted events for over 25 state agencies and 100 plus interns.

Virginia Capitol Tour

The COVA Internship Connection Program hosted a Virginia Capitol Tour to expose interns to the legislative branch of state government. During these tours, interns learned about the Capitol, Virginia's legislative history, and the legislative process.



Supervisor Lunch & Learn

This event provided support for intern supervisors, ensuring they felt prepared to host Summer 2023 interns. The session focused on guiding intern supervisors on how to best manage assigned interns during designated internships.



Virginia Intern Day

For the final culminating event, the COVA Internship Connection invited all state agency interns and supervisors to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Guest enjoyed light refreshments and a free tour of the museum.



Intern Lunch & Learn

The COVA Internship Connection Program facilitated two sessions for state interns. During the first session, Career Readiness Competencies, interns explored how to recognize, develop, and use the National Association of Colleges and Employers Career Readiness Competencies in both their internships and throughout their professional careers. The second session, Resume, Cover Letters, and Interview Preparation, provided guidance on writing a professional resume and cover letter and preparing for an interview. During this event, Secretary of Administration, Lyn McDermid, Secretary of Labor, Bryan Slater, and Deputy Secretary of Administration, Joyce Reedy, joined interns to answer questions and discuss their experiences working in state government.



The COVA Internship Connection 2023 Pilot was very successful, garnering additional support from agency leaders. Our team has begun support for agencies preparing for Summer 2024. If your agency is interested in creating a cohort-like experience for your interns or needs guidance on developing internship programs, please contact us at workforce.development@dhrm.virginia.gov

EXPERIMENT AND INNOVATE @ YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY!



Do you have a library card from your local public library? The Library of Virginia's Library Development and Networking division supports all Virginia public libraries in a variety of ways and wants you to make the most out of your local library!

Experimentation, creativity and exploration are important activities in maintaining good mental health and increase levels of happiness and energy. Your local library can help you:

- Learn a new language through an online digital platform (ODP) called Transparent Languages.
- Learn a new skill, hobby or subject through another ODP, Universal Class, which features everything from drawing to dog training to IT and coding skills.
- Experiment with sewing, coding, 3D printing, laser cutting, and so much more in Maker Spaces in many libraries across the Commonwealth.
- Check out eBooks and eAudiobooks to broaden your personal experiences, learn something new, or escape into another world.
- Meet new people in language conversation groups, skill building and hobby-based groups, and book discussion groups.
- Beef up your resume and get a career coach at the ODP called JobsNow.
- These are just a few ways your local library can engage your experimentation, exploration and creativity. Find your public library here: <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/libraries.asp>

By: Nan Carmack, Ed.D., M.L.S., M.Ed., Director of Library Development & Networking, Library of Virginia

Compliment circle

SUPPORT GROUPS & POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE



FOCUSING ON POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE AT VIRGINIA EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION (VEC) CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTER

350 miles and 916 feet above sea level from Richmond, a team of positive, energetic Virginia Employment Commission Customer Contact Center (CCC) employees in Vansant, Virginia start their day in a team huddle celebrating accomplishments and taking a moment to problem-solve challenges from the prior day. Team huddles, which seem rather unassuming, provide an opportunity for staff to engage, align, and prioritize.

“Our overall goal is to create excitement, connection, and keep our team in the loop,” said Chris Hagy, Director of Customer Contact Center Operations.

Despite the secluded mountain abode, where the occasional elk can be seen grazing, the CCC buzzes with activity. Customer service representatives (CSR) orchestrate a symphony of calls, answering 1,500 by day’s end (421,545 year to date). Amidst this flurry, floor supervisors stand ready to compose a resolution in the customer’s first call.

When the CCC concept began in 2003, it was receiving 160 calls a day using “technology” from the 1870’s known as none other than carbon copy. Today, with current leadership’s focus on providing best-in-class service, cutting-edge tools like Interactive Voice Response (IVR) exist. The IVR, accessed over a million times in 2023, empowers customers in 10 languages, swiftly delivering tailored information without the wait.

Technology drives CCC’s progress, but it’s the people who truly shape its success. Through cross-training and strategic resource allocation, CCC extends assistance to various VEC units, enabling agile responses to shifting demands. United by a shared belief in the agency’s mission and a desire to help Virginians, everyone is working towards the same goal whether in Vansant or Richmond.

“I made the five-and-a-half-hour trip to Vansant my second week on the job,” said Commissioner Mitch Melis. “I felt it important to let our Vansant team know they’re appreciated and acknowledge the great work they’re doing every minute of the workday.”



BY KERRI O'BRIEN, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS,
VIRGINIA EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION

HEALTHY COLLEGE

INITIATIVE

In the post-COVID era, fostering a sense of camaraderie among employees is crucial. Strong teamwork enhances productivity, boosts morale, and ultimately contributes to a more successful organization. As a faculty grassroots endeavor supported by Mark L'Esperance, Dean of College of Education of James Madison University, the college has been part of the Healthy College Initiative since Spring 2022. This initiative focuses on team-building exercises through affinity groups created and led by employees with the goal of forging lasting bonds that go beyond the daily grind.

Affinity groups come in various forms, from physical activities, i.e., yoga, bowling, hiking, and fitness, to cooking, book club, painting, and arts appreciation. Some affinity groups meet monthly while others once or twice a semester. The common goal is to encourage communication, collaboration, and trust among employees. Engaging in such activities helps faculty and staff get to know each other on a personal level and build a sense of unity that transcends their professional roles.

The impact of the Healthy College Initiative has been profound. It continues to improve communication within the college, breaking down barriers, and encouraging open dialogue. Creating an exercise routine with colleagues through bowling, yoga, or fitness activities promotes healthy habits that further support employees' socio-emotional well-being and positive outlook on life. These team-building initiatives also have a ripple effect, as employees bring the positive energy and collaborative spirit back to their work.

By: Dr. Katya Koubek, Professor of Teaching English and Dr. Ann Wallace, Professor of Mathematics Education, James Madison University

VCU CANCER CENTER

ERGS

VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center has started 3 Employee Resource Groups (ERG's)! Employee Resource Groups are voluntary, employee led, and employee driven groups whose aim is to help promote diversity and inclusion with the organization they support while fostering community. We have started:

- Massey Pride
- Minorities in Oncology
- Disability Action Network

These groups may be new to Massey but they have been BUSY! In the few months since their inception, they have reviewed Massey's onboarding to ensure inclusion, hosted a mixer for all three ERG's (the focus was how to bring about not just diversity and inclusion but a sense of belonging at Massey), organized a school supply drive for local schools, and provided donuts to parents and staff in the NICU unit. They have a lot more planned in the months ahead!

They have been a massive success not only for the employees but in helping the organization be the best most inclusive organization it can be.

By: Vanessa McCauley, Employee Experience Specialist, Virginia Commonwealth University

PATS FOR PATRIOTS AT GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Pats for Patriots is a free and easy way to thank, recognize, and show appreciation for a Mason colleague or student who has taken the time to do something kind, generous, or thoughtful toward others. The community at George Mason University wants to encourage quick shout-outs and recognition throughout the Mason Community for students, faculty/staff, and Alumni. Kindness does not need to be a grand act to be recognized. Small actions make a world of difference to those who receive them. Adding up all the small shows can create a culture of positivity and kindness.

Pats for Patriots was started in October 2021, during the height of the pandemic, to contribute to the Mason Chooses Kindness campaign. Since the Pats for Patriots program began, over 500 Pats have been submitted. The Mason Chooses Kindness Committee aims to have over 2000 Pats submitted by July 1st, 2024! Philip Wilkerson (pictured) is an Employer Engagement Consultant at George Mason University Career Services who assisted with this initiative.

The benefit of receiving recognition is that someone will be encouraged to continue their small acts of kindness. Kindness yields more kindness. We want to make this process seamless and easy for others. Sometimes, people say it is too much to submit nominations for large-scale awards, so we wanted to create an alternative to complement the pre-existing, more prominent awards on campus. GMU Human Resources shares Pats publicly on their website, and the Fourth Estate (GMU's Student-Led publication) also does. Both links are below:

Pats for Patriots on GMU Human Resource Page: [Pats for Patriots Recipient Roundup – Human Resources | George Mason University \(gmu.edu\)](#)

Pats for Patriots on Fourth Estate: <https://gmufourthestate.com/category/opinion/pats-for-pats/>

For more information, visit: <https://forms.office.com/r/HRZGvhdJEA>

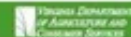


By: Philip Wilkerson, Employer Engagement Consultant, George Mason University

VA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES FARMING INITIATIVES

In the Fall of 2022, the VDACS Office of Dairy and Foods, Produce Safety Program launched an innovative, brand-new farm registration and exemption web-based portal to assist the Program with farm inventory management, communication and industry development. The Produce Safety Program works to address the growing, packing, holding and dissemination of fresh produce grown on farms and encourages the safe production of fruits and vegetables and promotes understanding and compliance with the FDA Produce Safety Rule and state legislation. The Program does not have the authority to issue licenses or permits so each produce farm must try and be identified by Program personnel and added to the inspection database once they are found. Knowing this, and with the “promote VA agriculture motto in mind,” the Program worked with the software development team at Winwam to create a farm registration and exemption online portal that issues certificates to farms. This web-based portal was designed using \$54,800 in federal grant funding received from the FDA.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES



Register your farm with the VDACS Produce Safety Program

All farms within Virginia that grow, harvest, pack or hold produce intended for human consumption and for sale will need to register their business with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Produce Safety Program.

Register Here
ProduceSafety.VDACS.Virginia.gov

- Create a free, secure account and register your farm.
- Update data elements currently on file with VDACS by annually verifying your farm.
- Print out a registration certificate to use to help market your products locally.
- Get enrolled automatically in the new VA Grown marketing program.
- Apply for an exemption if eligible.
- Receive up-to-date information about the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Produce Safety Rule, new water requirements, educational and training resources, periodic newsletters and guidance.

Learn more about the FDA Produce Safety Rule
www.VAProduceSafety.com



Farms currently in the database can update their farm information and print a newly implemented certificate of registration. This certificate also features the newly designed VA Grown logo and farm registration information is shared monthly with the VA Grown Program to mutually benefit both the regulatory and marketing/promotions aspects of the Agency. The certificates can be used by produce farmers to enter new retail marketplaces, farmer's markets and food service establishments, expanding marketing opportunities and growing the agriculture industry. We anticipate the impact to be significant to assist the farmers and consumers with the buy local movement as well as promote the regulatory partnership and future information sharing capabilities between farmers and government. This innovative idea and mutual relationship are forward-thinking and will positively impact the agriculture industry, VDACS and the Commonwealth of Virginia's growth and success.

This project, publication, program and website is supported by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award U2FFD007427 totaling \$638,042 with 100 percent funding by FDA/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by FDA/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

WALKING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS



It's no secret that moonshining (manufacturing illegal whiskey) once ran rampant in the mountains of Virginia. The area in and around Fairy Stone State Park was no exception. When looking for an area to set-up his illicit operation, the moonshiner looked for several features. He needed an area with no "visitors" and he needed a good supply of fresh, clean, running water. The moonshiner also wanted a location with a heavy leaf cover. Fairy Stone State Park provided all three. No hunting was allowed in the park, so no one ventured deep into the woods and just about every hollow contained a clear stream. The forest on the Park's almost 5,000 acres provided adequate cover to hide the secret operation. Today, the remains of several old moonshine stills can be found on Fairy Stone's land.

Moonshining became a major part of mountain culture. Making the illegal brew supplemented many mountain family's incomes. Songs about moonshine were sung, books were written, and movies made. Stories about wild car chases, raids conducted by the "revenuers", and violence within the moonshiner's culture were widely circulated.

Many visitors express an interest in this part of our culture. Danny Martin, an Interpreter at Fairy Stone, has capitalized on this interest by establishing a hike through the woods to the remains of two old moonshine stills. The hike is not on a trail, giving the participants the opportunity to "walk in the footsteps" of the old moonshiners. Along the way, stops are made to explain the moonshine process, examine the ruins, and tell stories about local moonshining activities. 'Possums in the mash, poison moonshine, dynamite blasts, and other "secrets" are all part of the stories. Visitors are invited to join the hike, offered weekly at Fairy Stone State Park.

By: Danny Martin, Park Ranger/Interpreter, Department of Conservation and Recreation

VIRGINIA RETIREMENT SYSTEM PAINT PARTY

To build camaraderie, employees participated in a team building activity by having a mini paint party.

Autumn was here and in Operations Accounting/Accounts Receivable they welcomed it with open arms. From left to right, the participants are Debra Brooks, Krystal Adebayo, Kimberly Robinson, Burneele Bates, Victoria Moore and Paris Miller.



Each employee pictured above has been with the Virginia Retirement System for less than a year except Kimberly, who has been with the agency for one year and Victoria for 17 years.

“Creating art that represents the season as well as us personally brings smiles to our faces.”

By: Debra Brooks, Virginia Retirement System

NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (NOVA) FALL 2023 PENDER APPRECIATION DAY!

Just Wow! Over 66 employees at Northern Virginia Community College's (NOVA's) Pender location gathered to celebrate Pender Employee Appreciation Day. Supporting the six campuses, the Pender location houses many of the college's administrative functions. The goal of the event was to thank employees and celebrate all they did and will do to support NOVA Nighthawks.

Activities included listening and moving to festive music; exploring department resource tables; snacking and mingling; participating in raffles; and networking with new and old work friends. After the event, attendees were invited to keep the spirit of the day going by:

- Following through on plans to connect with old friends and new.
- Reaching out to colleagues who mentioned something that caught their interest.
- Acting on opportunities to collaborate on those great ideas that came up in conversations.
- Using NOVA's recognition tool NOVAfy or a quick note to thank and encourage colleagues.

Pender Employee Appreciation Day was a rich collaboration of college, campus and community wellness champions. From the participant feedback, this event was a successful step in bringing us closer together and strengthening our sense of camaraderie. Special acknowledgement to CommonHealth and these NOVA partners— Office of Employee Wellness and Wellbeing (OEWB); the Pender Wellness Committee; Fairfax Info; Auxiliary Service; Business Engagement & Career Services; and Accommodations & Accessibility Services— for their efforts before, during and after the celebration. All were pleased to take a deliberate pause to recognize and applaud those who help to keep the wheels of the college moving.



Celebrating success and achievement in the workplace promotes connection and belonging while also fostering positivity, creativity, and innovation. You can keep the spirit of Appreciation Day going by shouting out a colleague for a job well done or by collaboratively planning your own Employee Appreciation Day. Let them know that you see and value their work.

By: Dahlia Henry- Tett, Ed.D. CHES® Chief Wellness Officer (CWO), Northern Virginia Community College



VOLUNTEERING & COMMUNITY SERVICE

A 25-mile-long creek runs from Fairfax City through Fairfax County, emptying into the Potomac River near George Mason's Gunston Hall.

Friends of the Accotink Creek, a volunteer organization, organizes clean-ups at 12 different sites along the creek twice yearly, usually April and October. In the photo Gene and Sue are posing in front of some of the trash they removed that day near the creek's intersection with Barkley Drive. In addition to the large trash items shown, hundreds of plastic and glass bottles, several bags of fast-food paper and plastic wrappings (including cups, Styrofoam containers, and plastic straws), and other assorted refuse were removed.

By: Gene Shuman, Associate Professor of IT, George Mason University

Transitioning seasons and the spirit of giving through volunteering and financial contributions is in full swing. It's the perfect time to come together as a community and lend a helping hand to others. Whether through your time or financial support, this season is a wonderful reminder of the power of collective kindness.

Did you know that full-time Commonwealth of Virginia employees have paid time off for volunteering? Eligible employees can access up to 16 hours of paid leave per leave year, which they can utilize for volunteering as a member of a service organization or for authorized school assistance. There are so many ways to use this time in the next few months, from volunteering at a local school holiday party to hosting a food drive to support your local food bank or pantry. Consider how you can use this time to volunteer with your family, friends, or coworkers!

There are lots of ways to find places to serve. A fantastic way to discover volunteer opportunities is by visiting the websites of charitable organizations that are a part of the CVC. The Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (CVC) spotlights organizations across the state, offering a way for state employees to collectively make a difference through charitable giving. The CVC guarantees that these participating organizations are inclusive, representing a wide range of missions and objectives that benefit all citizens. In addition to support organizations through giving via the CVC, another meaningful way to demonstrate your support for these charities is by volunteering your time. Whether it's at a nearby food kitchen or by utilizing your skills to contribute to capacity-building initiatives from the comfort of your own home, charitable organizations are continuously seeking volunteers for both direct and indirect service opportunities.

If you're still on the hunt for the right opportunity, you can explore a multitude of options by utilizing the volunteer centers located throughout the state. To easily find volunteer opportunities through a volunteer center, you can access this link: <https://servevirginia.org/get-involved/volunteer-center-networks/>. Your local volunteer center can help point you to existing events and opportunities to volunteer in your community, and ways to get involved through service.

By: Lindsay Sundberg, AmeriCorps VISTA, Virginia Department of Social Services

VA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES VOLUNTEERISM



VA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMUNITY WORK

As the Director of the 13th District Court Service Unit (CSU), Kimberly Russo takes immense pride in the dedication of her team, who embody the spirit of “CSU at Work in the Community.” In her extensive four decades of public service, she’s never witnessed a more actively engaged staff. Over the past year, her team not only extended their service beyond regular working hours, but they have become deeply intertwined with the community.

Their approach involves face-to-face, hands-on interactions with the community they serve, creating a profound connection. This not only fosters camaraderie but also strengthens team cohesion as the staff participates collectively. When they return to the workplace, they eagerly share experiences with other colleagues, effectively spreading the word.

Serving the 13th District, which includes some of the state’s most challenging families, staff operates within the very communities they serve. This unique approach allows them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of community needs and the population they aim to support through volunteer projects.



CSU has maintained a longstanding partnership with the Richmond Boys and Girls Club, leading to the formation of enduring connections with familiar faces. Active community involvement has empowered them to drive positive, measurable change. Furthermore, staff’s generosity extends beyond community engagement, as they generously support families by contributing to funeral expenses and stocking food pantries.

By: Kimberly Russo, CSU Director, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

VIRGINIA STATE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE FUND



VIRGINIA
STATE EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE FUND

G R A N T P R O G R A M

Are you a VA State Employee suffering from a financial crisis as a result of an unplanned emergency or unplanned event? We understand this can impact you or family members living in your residence.

That is why VSEAF, a recognized 501c(3) charity member of the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (CVC) is here to assist you! See if you qualify today by clicking the link below. <https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/virginia-state-employee-assistance-fund/vseaf-apply>

By: Christina Higgs, Employee Engagement Consultant/VSEAF Program Manager, Department of Human Resource Management

HEALTH AND WELLNESS TIPS



By: Julie Rogers, Internal and Customer Success Communications Manager, Virginia IT Agency (VITA)

VIRGINIA INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AGENCY

WELLNESS WEDNESDAYS

Self-care may have become a buzzword during the pandemic, but at VITA, it has become an integral part of the culture. An innovative program called “Wellness Wednesdays at VITA” launched at the beginning of the year, providing the time and space for employees to promote their well-being in five areas: physical, social, mental/intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Leadership mandates no meetings after 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and encourages employees to take part in one of the planned events or devote that time to an activity on their own.

Events this year have covered a range of topics, such as: mocktails, self-defense, house plants, sleep apnea, music appreciation, decluttering, board games, canning and more. Yoga is offered regularly, and a car detailer visits from time to time. (A clean car makes everyone happy)!

A highlight this year was the Wellness Happy Hour featuring mocktails, a CommonHealth learning station on reducing sugar in your diet and a demonstration of kickboxing. Brave attendees took a turn with the gloves and learned a few techniques. And speaking of brave, a recent event had many staff facing a very common fear. VITA partnered with the Department of Wildlife Resources on a program to learn about snakes, and several people touched and even held a snake for the first time!



Appreciation for the value that VITA places on wellness in the workplace was evidenced in a recent employee survey: most respondents agreed that VITA leadership cares about their well-being. Taking care of the agency’s most valuable assets - its people - is a win-win. The survey indicated that employees are happier in general, and happy employees are productive employees. Be well!

By: Julie Rogers, Internal and Customer Success
Communications Manager, Virginia IT Agency (VITA)

WELLNESS WEDNESDAYS



Need a lift?

Register Today
<https://forms.office.com/g/GvGeA4wtnz>



Wellness
WEDNESDAYS
healthy, uplifting ideas each week
CommonHealth

By: Susan Perry, Regional Wellness Consultant, DHRM Office of Health Benefits

REGION WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE: HELPING EMPLOYEES LIVE AND WORK WELL!



CommonHealth, Virginia's in-house employee wellness team, brings health education campaigns that span many different topics to state employees multiple times per year. It is even better when agencies have coordinators and employees who get more employees engaged in day-to-day wellness activities.

Some agencies have their own wellness coordinators or teams, like Hetal Challa of the Virginia Supreme Court, who organizes wellness topics for conferences serving court employees. Other agencies have outstanding agency coordinators, like April Witt with the Department of Motor Vehicles, who has organized step challenges on a bulletin board where employees climb mountains or move spaces in a "Candy Land"-like display. Still, other agencies have employees who model a healthy lifestyle, motivate other employees to make health improvements, or implement a policy, practice, or activity to help create a positive wellness culture. CommonHealth calls those employees Wellness Champs. They may start walking groups, offer healthy recipes, organize healthy snack swaps, or lead group stretches. This year, three champs were selected from the 74 nominations across 45 different agencies (see page 35). Perhaps, we should all *recognize the good and encourage each other to live well*—maybe next year, the champ will be you!

CommonHealth Weekly Wellnotes are messages sent to agency coordinators to be forwarded to employees. It provides wellness tips and ideas for personal or agency awareness. If your agency is not currently participating in CommonHealth or doesn't receive these messages, ask your agency coordinator or email CommonHealth at, wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov if you do not have one.

Wellness Wednesday messages are uplifting, brief emails sent to those who register. If you share them, encourage the recipient to register too!

There are many simple and quick ways to bring wellness into the workplace. Strategies like nutritious snacks in the breakroom, a water-drinking challenge, eye breaks from the computer, routine stretches, or walking meetings make a big difference in morale and productivity as well as health. A healthy workplace works WELL!

Check out www.commonhealth.virginia.gov for more information.

By: Susan Perry, Regional Wellness Consultant, DHRM Office of Health Benefits

"DANCING IS EASY, HEALTHY, AND A LOT OF FUN!"

Since the weather is getting colder, this is a great time to start social dancing - especially ballroom, swing, Latin, and line dancing! Dancing has been shown to be great for your physical, social, mental, and emotional health, and anyone can start at *any* age. From the elegance of the Waltz, to the energy of East Coast Swing, to the smooth connection to music in West Coast Swing, to the club energy of Salsa and Bachata, to the camaraderie of line dancing, there's a style and group that fits everyone - and some of us like pretty much *all* of them! Some other advantages:

- You don't need a lot of money - group classes are generally inexpensive and full of welcoming instructors and other students.
- You don't need a partner - most classes and dances have many singles and encourage rotating partners, to improve your skills (though some people will still go with a partner and stick with just that person). Line dancing is popular and doesn't even involve a partner!
- You probably don't need to travel far - there are dance studios, continuing education classes, and dance events a short drive away.
- You don't need to already know how to dance or be athletic or coordinated - everyone starts out not knowing what they're doing and builds up from there. And most people never compete or perform - they just have fun learning and practicing and dancing with new friends!



Search in your area - ballroom, swing, Latin, line dancing - whatever sounds interesting. When you go somewhere, ask others where else they dance. USA Dance is a non-profit organization that can help you get started, with chapters around the country, including a lot in Virginia - <https://usadance.org/page/Chapters>. If you're in the Hampton Roads area, come visit the Williamsburg chapter!

By: Robert Bruntz, Physicist and Research Faculty Member,
Christopher Newport University

VIRGINIA RETIREMENT SYSTEM

myVRS[®] An Abundance of Member Services

This fall, take time to plan a fruitful future with a bounty of resources at myVRS.varetire.org. Project your income in retirement and check out myVRS Financial Wellness to improve your financial know-how.

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 Virginia Retirement System[®]

By: Wendy Jenkins, Senior Public Relations and Communications Strategist, Virginia Retirement System

2023 COMMON HEALTH

Wellness Champions

MAKING WORKPLACES HEALTHIER FOR EVERYONE

Recognizing excellence in individual efforts for workplace wellness

A big congratulations to the CommonHealth Wellness Champions for 2023. These individuals have gone above and beyond in their workplaces to inspire others to lead healthier lives through their everyday actions. Read their stories and think about how you can incorporate some of their best practices into your workplace.

www.commonhealth.virginia.gov



Kyle Newton

**SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA
TRAINING CENTER**

It has been an honor to serve the staff at Southeastern Virginia Training Center as the CommonHealth Co-Coordinator for the several past years. It's important to meet people where they are and be of service to others when it comes to their well-being. It is vital that we build each other up and are there for each other when it comes to both our physical and mental health. I hope that I am an 'on-the-ground' connector for my colleagues and a resource to share information that is well vetted and trustworthy. I hope that I inspire, encourage, and lead others on their journey to a healthier and happier life by sharing a bit of what I've gleaned along the way. I am lucky to work at Southeastern where this growth is fostered!

I have a passion for nutrition and my role as the dietitian here at SEVTC has afforded me the opportunity to reach individuals and staff alike. I am happy to partner with CommonHealth to share the Weekly Wellnotes and the health challenges that are offered throughout the year. In addition, we welcome our Regional Coordinator, Cynthia Duncan, to SEVTC for face-to-face sharing of the Healthy Initiatives that CommonHealth supports yearly. It's been a pleasure to work alongside so many other healthy champions who put wellness in the forefront of their daily focus. Our monthly newsletter here at SEVTC, The Outlook, is filled with healthy ideas, recipes, and articles on wellness and I'm so proud to be a part of it.

My peers inspire those around them, me included, and I plan to be here alongside them for many years to come! Thank you wholeheartedly for this great honor, one I would not be able to accept without the wonderful staff and individuals at Southeastern Virginia Training Center. Here's to a life well-lived, one and all!



Dahlia Henry-Tett,
Ed.D. CPHES®

**NORTHERN VIRGINIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

I am grateful to be recognized as a CommonHealth Wellness Champion. This honor and my selection as one of the *Top 50 Women Leaders in Education for 2023* leave me humbled. As

NOVA's inaugural Chief Wellness Officer in the Office of Employee Wellness and Wellbeing (OEWV), I am dedicated to facilitating a wellness-focused community; implementing capacity-building strategies; and inspiring employees to actively pursue holistically healthful activities, choices, and lifestyles. I am so pleased that my colleagues- my work family and friends- recognize my commitment to promoting a reimagined workplace experience where employees continuously thrive and swiftly access support-systems during times of struggle.

I don't do this work alone, wellness is a group effort. NOVA has a growing network of wellness advocates working to promote a healthier college community. NOVA's mission of "transforming the lives of our students and advancing opportunity in our community" can only be accomplished- well- by a continued collaborative effort to address the whole range of employee wellness needs.

I am confident that by continuing to listen closely to employees and joining with internal and external partners, OEWV will keep moving the needle forward on employee wellness. So, in summary, being a wellness champion to me means doing what I am passionate about! It means showing up, listening, and collaborating. How fortunate that I get to do that every day with and for people that I care about.

Today, recognize the people who make your workplace healthier. Send a quick email or [Team's praise](#). Calling out a job well done is a small gesture that positively impacts employee engagement and enhances a sense of belonging.



Stacey Ellis

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

One of George Mason University's core values is "We thrive together." On our Faculty and Staff Engagement Team, we strive to develop holistic programs that support the personal and professional growth of employees. Through reward and recognition, flexible work, life/work balance, employee engagement, and well-being programs, along with coordinated partnerships, including CommonHealth and Mason wellness and well-being collaborators, our team is working to foster the culture of wellness and well-being among our faculty and staff. Being honored as a Wellness Champion is a testament to the collective efforts of our team and the larger Mason community as we work to make a positive impact in the wellness and well-being space.

Being a Wellness Champion involves advocating for balanced and healthy lifestyles, offering guidance, and promoting well-being practices within the university community. It means introducing innovative well-being initiatives that foster a sense of community and collaboration. It's about encouraging everyone to embrace the importance of well-being, making it an integral part of our collective identity. In doing so, we truly live up to the value of thriving together, ensuring that every member of our community can flourish in a workplace that prioritizes their health, happiness, and overall well-being.

Congratulations!

RECIPES



WW (WeightWatchers) Bacon & Egg Breakfast Cups

You'll love the convenience of this savory handheld breakfast. You can bake these cups ahead and keep them on hand for quick grab-and-go breakfasts; simply reheat in the microwave for 30 seconds to 1 minute. For easiest portability, bake the full 20 minutes to set the yolks fully; for looser yolks, you can bake for less time. Read the full recipe [here](#).

All benefit eligible employees, spouses, and adult dependents get an exclusive discount of 50% off the retail price and can join WW now for as low as \$9.75 per month. The Special Monthly Pricing and The Commonwealth of Virginia discount per month is not open to retirees, their spouses and dependents, wage employees or The Local Choice members. Sign up at [WW.com/us/CommonHealth](https://www.ww.com/us/CommonHealth).

CHICKEN KABOB RECIPE



**4 servings (8 skewers)
407kcal**

Ingredients

For the Chicken

**¼ cup olive oil
¼ cup low sodium soy sauce
3 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
2 cloves garlic
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 ¼ pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts**

For the Vegetables

**2 small or 1 medium zucchini
1 red bell pepper
1 yellow bell pepper
1 small red or yellow onion
1 ½ tablespoons olive oil
salt and pepper**

Instructions

If using wooden skewers, soak them in warm water for at least 20 minutes.

Combine the olive oil, soy sauce, lemon juice, brown sugar, Worcestershire sauce, garlic, Italian seasoning and black pepper in a zip-top bag. Squish bag to mix.

Add the chicken pieces to the marinade. Make sure the chicken is coated well. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Place the zucchini rounds and chopped bell peppers in a baking dish or bowl. Drizzle with the 1 ½ tablespoons of olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss gently to coat. Add the onion to the bowl last and mix in very gently so that the onion layers stay together as best as possible.

Put the chicken and vegetables on the skewers and discard leftover marinade.

Grill over medium heat for 12-18 minutes, turning every few minutes to cook all sides evenly. Kabobs are done when chicken is cooked through to an internal temperature of 165° F.

Notes

To cook in the oven: Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Place kabobs on the baking sheet and bake at 425° F for 24-30 minutes, turning them occasionally, until chicken is cooked to 165° F. I use kitchen tongs to turn the kabobs, as the skewers are hot.

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**By: Permelia L. Graves, Fiscal Technician, Virginia
Department of Transportation**

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