

Employee Experience

A MAGAZINE FOR EMPLOYEES, BY EMPLOYEES

VOLUME 2 ~ ISSUE NO. 01 ~ WINTER 2021

Office of Workforce Engagement

Department of Human Resource Management



Engage

Be present and involved

Connect

Link colleagues and resources

Recognize

Our employees are incredible

Contents

- 02 OWE Re-Branded
- 03 Learning Together
- 04 W.O.W.
- 06 Coordinators' Corner
- 08 Anxious about COVID
- 10 Governor's Honors
- 15 Bucket Challenge
- 16 Recognize Co-worker
- 17 Hike with Mike
- 19 Send in Submissions
- 20 Wellness...P. Leister
- 21 Workforce Dev.
- 22 WW
- 23 Cooking with CH
- 24 Overcomer
- 25 Plank It Out
- 26 Reboot
- 28 Financial Wellness
- 30 Congratulations



Presenting the Winners

Individual Awardees from the 2020 Governor's Honor Awards



Recognize a Co-Worker

Take a moment to read about some of the incredible Commonwealth employees, then consider submitting something for someone you know!



Cooking with CommonHealth

Yummy muffins and a hearty soup--perfect to help you warm up this winter.



Financial Wellness

Opportunities and strategies from OWE and VRS to help you find financial wellness.



Enhancing the employee experience through a culture of engagement, wellness, diversity, equity and inclusion that leads to overall employee well-being, productivity and retention.

We are excited to announce a new look for the Office of Workforce Engagement (OWE). This new look reflects the fresh, exciting, engaging programs and approaches we are bringing to the employees of the Commonwealth of Virginia while remaining true to our longstanding reputation.

Having so many specialties under one umbrella, the Office of Workforce Engagement created a logo to help employees identify the services offered to employees that help make Virginia a great place to work. The office is tasked with enriching the employee experience through a culture of employee engagement, giving, wellness, diversity and inclusion, fairness, and equity. This enrichment is reflected in the new logo's message, "Powered by WE, Investing in YOU". This team not only created the office's first logo but also developed detailed infographics for each specialty to allow employees to access the services that they need to thrive. The materials will soon be available in hard copy form for employee onboarding and health fairs but are also digitized, so they can have a spot on the DHRM website. We hope you find them helpful and informative and enjoy the Office of Workforce Engagement's new look.

[Awards & Recognition](#)

[Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#)

[CommonHealth](#)

[Financial Wellness](#)

[CVC](#)

Learning and Growing Together for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Written by W. Brazier, OWE Staff Writer

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.

--Abraham Maslow



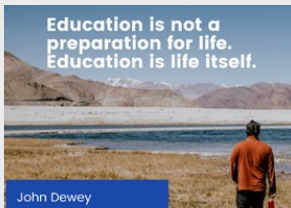
Even during the pandemic, it is well-known that the United States has an incredible work force.

In 2020 and up to today, people across this country—and in our own Commonwealth—have been working hard in many ways to keep families afloat, to keep people healthy and safe, and to keep people, especially our young people, learning every day.

Those of us in the workforce, and those who are desperately trying to get back into it during this pandemic, have great skills, knowledge, and abilities that we want to put to good use. Part of our challenge is to make sure we apply the right skills and knowledge in the right time and place. This requires that we know answers to “when” and “how” questions, AND an understanding of what skills and knowledge we possess. Thinking about Abraham Maslow’s words above, it is imperative that we realize when our knowledge is called for, and when we need to learn something different to accomplish an element of our work. If we only have a “hammer” when what is needed is sawing or planing, we need to develop different “tools” in our brains! What’s more, our organizations, agencies, schools, and communities need to work together to make sure we can become “equipped” with a saw or a plane, and how to use them best, when the task we face demands these.

This is why education and continuous learning are so important. No one knows everything they need to know to do a job from day 1 and forever. Jobs change, times change, and work can always be improved.

In fact, we need to remember the words of John Dewey. Education and learning are not things that



Education is not a preparation for life. Education is life itself.

John Dewey

end. We’re never “finished” with learning. Life itself is what learning is; when we don’t learn, can we really say we’re taking part in *life*?

Naturally, as a part of life, our professional and personal “work” can’t be effectively done without continuous learning. For a long time in our Commonwealth, in our country, and in our society, we’ve been doing “work” with some basic, operating assumptions. Due to important social events and experiences, our consciousness has been raised, and we now know these assumptions need to be

questioned, or even replaced. One of those assumptions is that our institutions always act out of fairness, equity, and respect for all people and all labor. Unfortunately, no matter how hard we may try, some of our practices, attitudes, and behaviors fall short of fairness and equity, and even more unfortunately, the unfairness and inequity we either experience or maintain fall along lines of human identity characteristics. Race, national origin, sex, gender, language, ability status, age and religion all have an effect on how we interact, think, and behave, whether we are conscious of this or not. Our Governor and our state leadership have recognized this and have pledged action to address the learning we must all undertake in order to make our Commonwealth a more equitable and fairer environment and home. In the *One Virginia Plan**, our state government is pledged to:

*“Engage employees in professional development in the learning of varied perspectives of domestic and international diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.”**

In the weeks, months, and years ahead, our state workforce will learn and grow together in the areas of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). The Department of Human Resource Management will work with all state agencies to facilitate and advance this effort in professional development. We know that a happy, healthy, productive workforce, and a trusting, supportive social environment across the Commonwealth both depend on us being ready and willing to learn in the areas of DEI. We know it will not be easy and it will not be fast, but change is necessary and will happen. Be confident that we all have learning and growing to do when it comes to including and respecting all identities that have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the local, governmental, and neighborhood communities across the Commonwealth. And so, we leave you with this thought below from author Brian Herbert:

*The capacity to learn is a gift;
The ability to learn is a skill;
The willingness to learn is a choice.*

[*Click to view a summary version of the goals of the One Virginia Plan](#)

W.

O.

W.

**Winning over whatever is great –
I know now, I just can't wait!
It's time to look ahead for a good thing;
Whether it's love or just a great mood swing!**

WOW!

**W is for winning in everything you're going to try and take a chance at;
O is for overcoming, even if you, more than once, have to try that!
W is for whatever you take on and decide to do, while doing your best;**

Now say WOW! - giving your face an exciting look ready to try all the rest!

**We should look forward to changes in the season;
But weather nowadays has no rhyme or reason!
And like a child, imaging being anybody you want to be;
Still thinking about, places to go and new things to see!**

WOW!

**Let the days ahead wow you and be your best days ever;
Turning them into memories that you'll cherish forever!
Winning over whatever, yes, you'll see;
I know you will be the best you can be!**

WOW!

**© January 2021
By Necil B. Oliver
Published Author
VADOC, Court & Legal**

COORDINATORS' CORNER

Info & Tips for CVC and CommonHealth Coordinators



Take a Minute with CommonHealth: Weekly Wellnotes have a new look in 2021

CommonHealth's weekly email communications, distributed through our network of Agency Coordinators, will help you stay well – all in about a minute.

The uncertainty of the past year has certainly challenged everyone. The CommonHealth Weekly Wellnote is all about building resilience so we can take the best care of ourselves, no matter what comes our way. Each Monday we will deliver an article with tips, an original video or a recipe from our partners at WW (formerly Weight Watchers) to your inbox. These messages are specifically crafted to reinforce the most essential health habits related to sleep, activity, diet and stress. **Join us as we set aside what we can't do and focus on what WE CAN DO to be well – every Monday.**

If your agency is not receiving the Weekly Wellnote, please let us know so we can add your workplace to our distribution list. Reach us at wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov.

Learn more at www.commonhealth.virginia.gov and follow us on social media @CommonHealthVA.

CommonHealth
OFFICE OF RESILIENCE & WELLNESS

Ready, Willing & Able
EAT WELL MOVE MORE SLEEP BETTER STRESS LESS

Bust stress with your breath

Just focusing on your breath or changing the way you breathe can make a big difference in how you feel. Breathing techniques can calm your body and your brain in just a few minutes. You can use your breath as a tool anytime. So whether you're in a stressful meeting or trying to get some sleep, breathing exercises could be key to reducing your stress.

Give these a try and see what you think:

- Breathe in through your nose and watch your belly fill with air. Count slowly to three as you inhale. Hold for one second and then slowly breathe out through your nose as you count to three again. Try this a few times.
- Breathe in through your nose and imagine that you're inhaling peaceful, calm air. Imagine that air spreading throughout your body. As you exhale, imagine that you're breathing out stress and tension.

If you'd like to learn more about your breath and stress management, check out [CommonHealth's Re-learn To Relax booklet](#).

TAKE A MINUTE WITH

CLICK TO WATCH

WWS Lamin Chicken with Broccoli

Here's a super weeknight dinner the whole family will love—and it's ready in just 30 minutes. Thinly slicing the chicken will ensure it cooks quickly and evenly. Covering the pan when the broccoli cooks will help build up steam, bathing the florets in heat and cooking the tops that aren't in contact with the hot pan. You'll need 1 small to medium head of broccoli to produce enough florets and 1 lemon to yield enough zest and juice for this recipe. Round out the meal with a side of angel hair pasta, rice, or couscous to soak up the sauce.

READY TO TRY THIS RECIPE?

Visit [commonhealth.virginia.gov](#) for more recipes, videos, and tips made especially for Virginia's state employees and their families.

Ready to try 2021 this year?
Sign up that amazing mind-blowing productivity feeling with the 60-90 minute WW's Original Bookends 60-minute meal. Includes tonight's program even.



CVC Corner

Agency Spotlight, VITA

In these unprecedented times, giving to the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign has never been more important. Agencies and universities throughout the Commonwealth have come up with many creative ideas to inspire their employees to give. One agency that really stepped up to the plate this year is VITA- Virginia Information Technologies Agency.

With nearly everyone working from home during this year's Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign, VITA needed to find creative ways to pivot to virtual events to raise money.

Several ideas emerged, including:

- ◆ VITA Gives Day: a virtual, 24-hour campaign to raise money for several selected charities. They raised over \$3,000 for three staff nominated charities through this campaign.
- ◆ Virtual Yoga: twice-weekly virtual yoga sessions held; CVC-slated donations were welcome. They raised \$260 through this campaign.
- ◆ VITA Store Donations: employees purchased VITA branded merchandise; a portion of the proceeds benefitted a chosen CVC Charity. VITA raised \$190 through this campaign.

Several VITA staff also donated items to the new CVC Online Auction. VITA employee Marcy Thornhill's "Homemade Applesauce and Cider Gift Basket" was one such item and brought in \$30 in donations.

Special thanks to VITA's Agency Coordinator, Julie Fuentes for leading the charge!

CVC Announcements

- ◆ Anyone can donate! The public & Commonwealth of Virginia (COV) Employees can use the DONATE (Public) button at any time to donate at <http://cvcgives.org>.
- ◆ It is not too late to start a fundraising campaign for your charity of choice! Contact the Support Team at support@cvcgives.org for more information.

Anxious about COVID-19?

Written by Mary Louise Gerdes, OWE Staff Writer



We are living in a moment in history. In the future, many will ask what it was like living through the greatest pandemic in the last 100 years. So, how are you doing?

There is so much out of our control right now. Many of us are working from home (and others are wishing they could) and, at the same time, we are figuring out how to best help our kids learn from home. We are worried about our health and the health of our loved ones, the unrelenting spread of the virus and the likely devastating economic fallout. And sadly, we have no idea how long this will go on. We have a lot to cope with and understandably, many are feeling overwhelmed.

If you feel overwhelmed and anxious, it's important to know that you're not alone; many of us are right there with you. It's also important to understand that no matter how disheartened and

can take to try to reduce your anxiety and restore your sense of hope and confidence.

The graphic on the next page is designed to help you overcome uncertainty by reminding you to refocus your mind on those things you can control and setting aside worry about those things you can't control. For example, while you cannot control the spread of the virus, you can do your part by regularly washing your hands, maintaining physical distance, wearing a mask and looking out for others who are more vulnerable. And remember, even in circumstances where there is little within your control, you can always control your attitude and response.

For more information about COVID-19 resources available to employees, including the Employee Assistance Program, please visit <https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/covid-19>.

Stay well.

ANXIOUS ABOUT COVID?

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL



EAT HEALTHY



MOVE MORE



STAY IN TOUCH



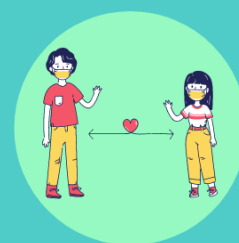
GET OUTSIDE



WEAR A MASK



WASH YOUR HANDS



DISTANCE



YOUR ATTITUDE

NOT WHAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL



ACTIONS OF OTHERS



CLOSURES



DURATION



ECONOMIC IMPACT



VIRTUAL SCHOOL



TELEWORKING



RESTRICTED TRAVEL



QUARANTINE

The 2020 Governor's Honor Awards



DHRM's Office of Workforce Engagement in partnership with the Virginia Credit Union honored excellence in state government with the annual Governor's Honor Awards virtual event in December. These are the most prestigious awards presented by the Commonwealth recognizing noteworthy accomplishments that significantly contribute to the advancement of the Commonwealth's strategic goals, mission, and overall administrative excellence.

Read on for stories about this year's individual awardees and their honorable achievements.

SUPPORT SERVICES AWARD

EARL TAYLOR

Virginia Department of Health

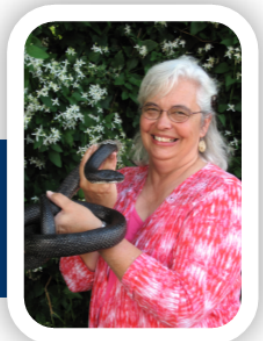


During the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to completing his daily duties as an Office Service Specialist, Mr. Taylor volunteered to assist Crater Health District with COVID-19 testing in multiple locations, including Saturday clinics. Mr. Taylor has demonstrated an exceptional level of service to the Crater community through his dedication to ensuring that testing sites are appropriately set up and traffic is efficiently routed through the stations. Mr. Taylor is truly one of the unsung heroes of this pandemic who is going above and beyond in providing support service.

PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

SUZIE GILLEY

Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources



Suzie is the National Project WILD State Coordinator for DWR. She became Virginia's Project WILD coordinator in 1982, when the Commonwealth became one of the first eastern states to provide materials to educators. Project WILD was established to assist learners of all ages in developing awareness, knowledge, skills, and commitment resulting in responsible behavior, informed decisions, and constructive actions concerning wildlife and the environment upon which all life depends. Thanks to Suzie, thousands of Virginia students have exposure to these ideas and educators have the tools they need to teach them.



COURAGEOUS LEADER AWARD

DR. DENISE TONEY

DGS — Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services

Under Dr. Toney's leadership, DCLS provided extensive and far-reaching support for the Commonwealth's COVID-19 response. Dr. Toney led efforts to distribute testing resources to high-need communities, helped launch a critical public/private partnership to enhance public health testing capabilities beyond the current pandemic, and served as a subject matter expert in various capacities. Her actions led members of the Governor's Testing Advisory Council to declare: "Leaders like Denise exemplify the Virginia way and the Commonwealth is better for their service."



PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

DEBORAH BUNDY-CARPENTER

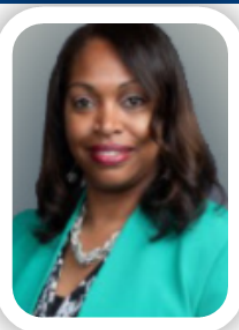
Virginia Department of Health

Mrs. Bundy-Carpenter has worked successfully to establish public health teams that protect and improve health within our communities. Through mentoring, promoting continuous education, quality improvement and teamwork, she has established an organizational structure that not only supports ongoing population health needs but also is also able to support the response to a global pandemic. Her ability to retain and build a competent and valued workforce directly supports the pillar goals of the agency. The foundation that she has established for public health nursing has proved successful for the district and has served as a model for the agency.

CHAMPION OF CHANGE AWARD

ALANA TUCKER

VDSS - Division of Child Support Enforcement



In response to the multiple challenges of continuing uninterrupted delivery of child support enforcement services, while making immediate, pandemic-induced alterations to our in-person availability, and managing an increased demand for certain services due to the economic crisis, Alana Tucker led numerous service delivery innovations that met the needs of Virginia's families at a critical time. Rather than approach the changes as temporary responses, Alana has been a visionary of permanent and truly transformational service delivery for DCSE.

CREATIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD

JOE GRIFFITTS

Virginia Tech

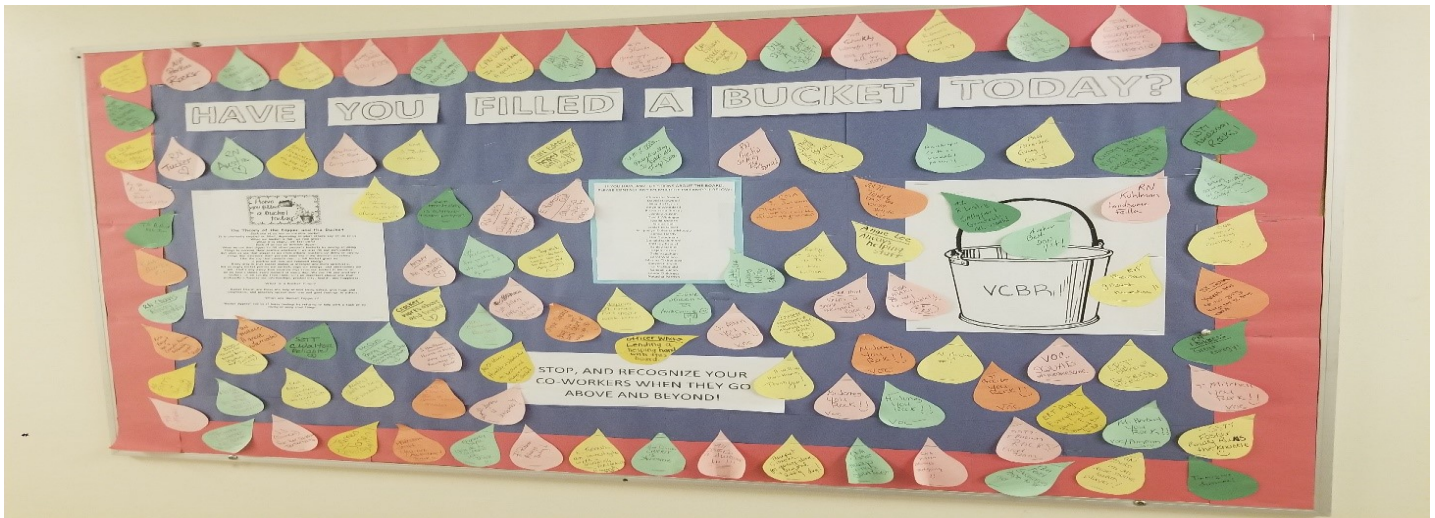


Joe has spearheaded technological innovation and automated processes to serve students more efficiently and his out-of-the-box thinking has allowed the university to safely deliver outstanding orientation and ID card services for students despite the COVID-19 global pandemic. He actively creates positive change for inclusion, diversity, and civic engagement with his employees and those he serves. Joe anticipates challenges, and he consistently overcomes them through strong leadership, a collaborative spirit, and an adaptable approach to problem-solving.

Congratulations to the 2020 Awardees!



**Watch for the group award winners in the next issue of
the EmployeeExperience for more inspiring stories of
hard working Virginia employees!**



VCBR's Bucket Filling Challenge

Written by Steven Puryear

The Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation (VCBR) in collaboration with Virginia Tech's School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) developed a facility specific leadership and management pathways program (LAMPP). LAMPP, an idea of VCBR's Assistant Director of Administration, Stephanie Pechura, was developed to address issues with recruitment, retention, development, and retirement vulnerabilities across all employment disciplines within Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation. LAMPP also outlines pathways of Leadership and Management so that we develop committed staff who will be the champions of growth and change. Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation is expanding and this provides an opportunity to develop staff skills which will be essential to managing its physical and programmatic growth.

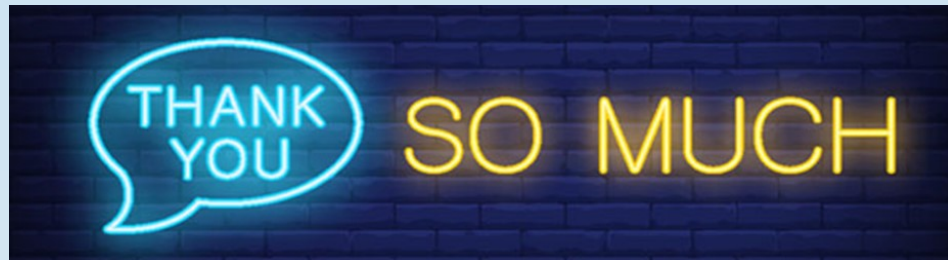
During the first LAMPP cohort, Leisha G. LaRiviere, the Associate Director of SPIA for the Richmond Campus and LAMPP facilitator, challenged the group to "create/designate" a space inside the Facility to place a bucket or design a bulletin board or other space where we, and others, can "fill each other's bucket".

Needless to say the LAMPP participants accepted the challenge and rallied together to create a bucket filling experience within the facility. Pictured above is the completed board. Blank rain drops were placed on the board and any staff member was able to complete a rain drop "filling" someone's bucket. The employees at Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation had the board completely filled within a few days.

Staff enjoyed filling each other's bucket and reading the many different ways employees were recognized for the work they do each day! LAMPP participants are looking forward to creating another opportunity to "fill one's bucket" soon!



This is how the Building and Grounds Department at the Piedmont Geriatric Hospital shows appreciation to the staff as they enter and exit the facility!



Recognize a Co-worker

What a year it has been. As we are tested by concerns related to the pandemic, employees continue to step up to serve. Please join us in celebrating these employees who made a difference since our last issue and thank them for their service. [Click here](#) to read more about these and other outstanding colleagues who have been recognized in the past year.

Debbie Morgan, DARS
Jason Tucker, DWR
Dr. Megan Kirchgessner, DWR
Region 4-Lands & Access Team, DWR
Baxter Bell, DWR
Joe Ferdinandsen, DWR
Conservation Police Dispatchers, DWR
Ali Davis, DWR
Sarah Peltier, DWR
Janet L. Richardson, DWR
Law Enforcement Dispatch, DWR
Molly Kirk, DWR
Tabetha Clay – DWR
James Jones – DWR
Mindy Tucker – DWR
HR Staff, DWR
Dawn Bushley, VEC
IMS (IT) Team, DWR
Elizabeth Martin, Christopher Newport University
Dana Sanders, DWR
96-1 Nursing Team, Central State Hospital
Thomas Odom, Old Dominion University
Institutional Safety Specialists, DOC
VDOT Construction Division
Jolie Latham, TAX
Angela Wethington, DOC, Sussex I State Prison
Angela Pipia, DMV
Justin Jannuzzi - James Madison University
Dr. Mark Hudson, DOE-DJJ
Kellie Hall, Germanna Community College
Joanna Piserchio, DJJ
Kyle Eaddy, DJJ

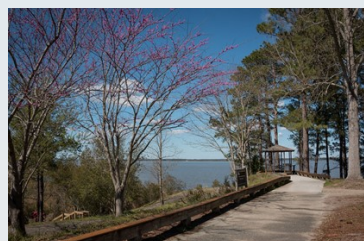
Jackie Crigger, 12th District CSU
All Staff, 12th District CSU
Tracie Haupt, DJJ
Justin Ferrell, VDH
Livia Jansen, DJJ
Dr. Anita Schlank, DBHDS
Dr. Stacy Wilson, SEVTC
April Johnson-Talley, SEVTC
Wanda Edwards, SEVTC
Alex McCrickard, DWR
Statewide Hatchery System, DWR
James Jones, DWR
Vi Liu, DMV

If you would like to recognize any employee (or group of employees) for going above and beyond to help maintain operations, assist co-workers or the public, or ensure safety during these turbulent times, [click here to complete a short form](#). DHRM will continue to post these notes of recognition on our website and/or social media.





Many Virginian's travel along interstate 64 while heading to the beaches or perhaps visiting Colonial Williamsburg, but along this drive lies an outdoor experience that is worth a detour on your next trip. York River State Park is one of Virginia's many state parks and is home to miles of great trails for hiking and biking along with great kayaking or paddle boarding on the river. If nothing else, it's a great place to get a view of the river from the parking lot if you just need to stretch your legs.



York River State Park is a 2,531-acre park that sits along the banks of the York River.

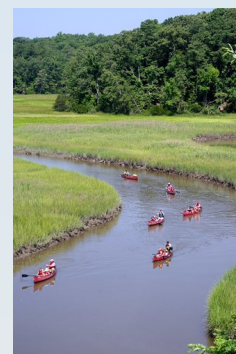
This part of the river is where saltwater meets fresh, so there is a wide range of wildlife to see.

Let's get to the hike. Starting from the main parking lot you will see where the trail begins which conveniently has a kiosk and a map of the trails. The trails range from a wide dirt road (no vehicles) to single track trails that will let you meander quietly through the woods where you can be alone with your footsteps and your thoughts. While most of these trails are multi use (hikers and cyclists) some are only equestrian, but this is labeled on the map and easy to



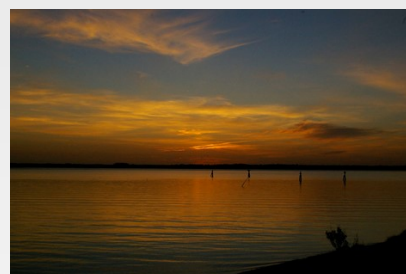
see. Today I'm hiking the Majestic Oak Trail and heading to the East Fork Overlook. In total this should be 3 miles out and back.

The trail bed is all dirt, but has a sandy content to it which really helps drainage and you can hike these trails even after a rain (unless the park closes). Tall oak trees surround you while you make your way around the loop giving you plenty of shade. You will see the occasional paint mark on a tree to let you know you are still on the route you planned. While mostly flat the trail does have some rolling terrain to it, but it really is a more leisurely stroll. Crossing a wooden foot bridge, you will get some views of the river and likely see some kayakers, but don't think this is the best view. There is much more to come. About 10 minutes down the trail you reach an intersection, I turn left which takes me on a short flat trail which leads to an amazing vista overlooking the river. This is the view for which you have been waiting. Stop and enjoy this one and you will surely see some wildlife pass by.



For trail location and information follow this link.: [Trail map and trail descriptions](#) .

Photo credit: Virginia department of conservation and recreation. <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/york-river>



Be a Part of These Pages

We make it easy for

YOU

**TO SHARE WITH OTHER EMPLOYEES
JUST LIKE YOU**

Want to work together? Great! Contact
employeeexperience@dhrm.virginia.gov

Submissions due on the 15th of
March, June, and September.

Employee Experience

Your Connection with Commonwealth Employees

Features:

Employee Activities and Events

Congratulations and Awards

Success Stories

Service Information for Employees

Suggestions/Requests

Agency News

Your Own Ideas!

**A magazine for employees,
by employees--
without YOU, we're missing
something GREAT!**

Wellness that is Working for Patricia Leister

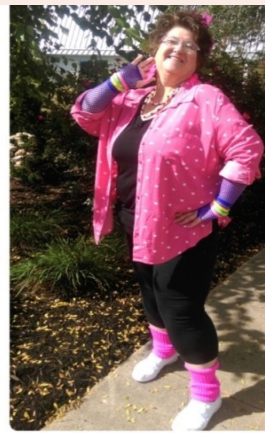
Written by S. Perry, Editor

Patricia has tried WW before, but this time it is different! She has lost more weight and continues to stay on track because this time Patricia knows it is her way of life. She feels the WW app makes it easy to track what she eats everyday. The points system is so easy to follow, and she stays within her points at all times. Patricia has stuck with her lifestyle changes for over a year, WW is working for her!

She does not purchase food until she can scan it to check points, so all the foods in her home are ones she can eat—unless her grandchildren are visiting. In those cases, her willpower overcomes the temptations. Drinking the encouraged amount of water is the hardest thing for Patricia because she went from never drinking water to it being her beverage of choice.

Patricia wants to become a “life timer” because this is her way of life now. While she admits, she is a little scared of what would happen if she stopped, Patricia said, “I’m happier and healthier now and want to stay that way!” She used to have hypothyroidism, but all her bloodwork and test results are excellent now.

Patricia’s motivation to stick with it this time was the death of her niece. She was always big and died with so many issues linked to being overweight. The day of her funeral, Patricia looked at the small box that held her niece’s



I DID it!!!! 100 lbs gone by by and good riddance!!! I want to thank WW, I couldn't have done it without them, I got my life back and so looking forward to do things I couldn't do before. I've already did my first zip lining adventure and I loved it. This picture I have on the same shirt, first one I had to wear it open, now look at it. ❤️ I am looking forward to being a lifetime member with WW.

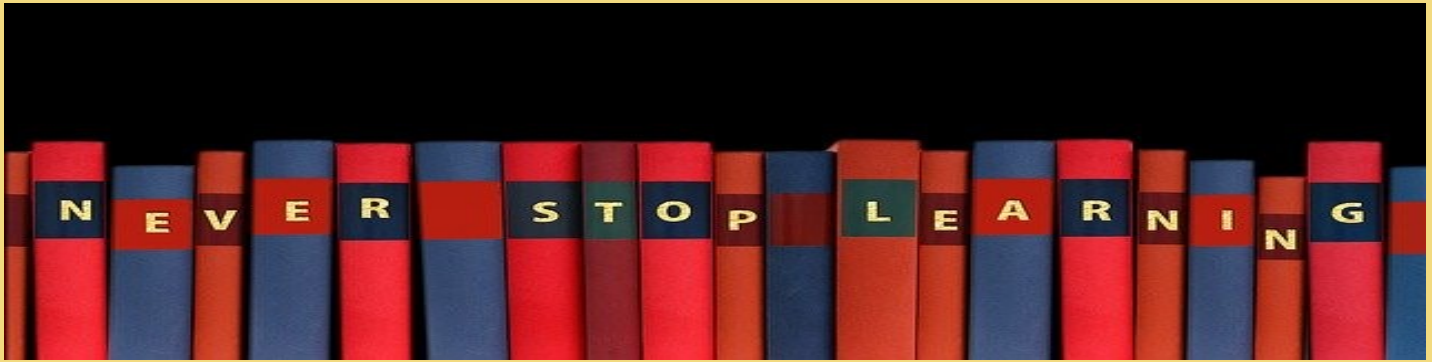
ashes and knew that because of weight they were not able to get all her ashes in that one box. It broke Patricia’s heart. Patricia vowed that day to change her lifestyle for good and became determined not to fail this time.

Going zip lining with her co-workers—and keeping up with them made Patricia very proud of her changes. She now looks forward to many more adventures including parasailing this summer. She did not realize how much more energy she would have and what a positive feeling it would be to go to the gym and enjoy nature walks.

Patricia made a vow to herself and kept it. Certainly daily moments like the one below help her continue:

When my grandson put his arms around my waist one day to hug me and said, “Ninnie I can put my arms together now when I hug you.”

That was her proudest moment ever!



Workforce Development Corner

Deanna Goldstein, DHRM

Learning and development is a fundamental part of our lives, including in the workplace. As Peter Drucker said, “We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.” Workforce learning and development is instrumental in developing individual and organizational capabilities for fulfilling the mission of state government. It is something that is woven into our lives with learning occurring every day in all that we do.

DHRM supports employee learning and development as key components for attracting, engaging, and retaining talent. DHRM also believes that learning and development is not a one-size-fits-all approach and should be tailored to the individual. Learning and development can look different by individual depending on interests, learning styles, and needs.

As we discover learning and development tools and resources that may benefit state

government employees, we think it is important to share them. Here are a few learning and career development tools that may be of interest for you as you navigate your learning and development journey.

Data Analyst Learning Path

Does the idea of working with statistics, data analytics, and data visualizations put a twinkle in your eye? If so, check out this set of data analyst courses offered by LinkedIn Learning at no cost through March 31, 2021: <https://www.linkedin.com/business/learning/blog/career-success-tips/interested-in-a-career-as-a-data-analyst-free-courses-msft>

Career Transition Explorer

Have you ever thought about exploring other jobs or careers where you can transfer skills that you may have already developed? If you are thinking about a change and would like to explore potential job transitions that can leverage the skills you have already developed, take a tour of this career/job transition explorer tool from LinkedIn: <https://linkedin.github.io/career-explorer/>

Life itself is your teacher and you are in a state of constant learning. ~ Bruce Lee



Celebrate Black History Month with WW

Our partnership with WW (Weight Watchers® reimagined) offers a range of ways to celebrate the Black community.



Get cooking

[WW's Homecoming cookbook](#) highlights the flavors of the American South, West and Central Africa, Caribbean, and beyond.

Make connections

Head to Connect, [WW's member-only social network](#), to find support in the Black Women Connect group.

Discover new faves

Support Black-owned businesses in the [WW Shop](#) and find delicious snacks and sides to add to your meals.

Get inspired

Follow [Tamela Mann](#), Grammy award-winning gospel singer and actor, on her weight-loss and wellness journey.

All benefits-eligible employees, spouses, and adult dependents get an exclusive discount of 50% off the retail price and join now for as low as \$8.48 per month. Sign up or learn more at [WW.com/us/CommonHealth](https://www.commonhealth.com/us/CommonHealth)



Cooking with CommonHealth

Banana Chocolate Chip Mini Muffins *Savor your sweet tooth while staying with a healthy eating plan!*

Total Time

42 min

Prep

20 min

Cook

17 min

Serves

24



These adorable treats are the perfect solution for a chocolate craving. Naturally sweet banana lets us use less sugar and keeps these muffins moist, and it's a great way to use up a ripe banana. Oats add fiber and texture, and chocolate chips make them crowd-pleasers. The recipe also features yogurt, brown sugar, vanilla extract, and both all-purpose and whole-wheat flour for the perfect flavor and texture combination. You can freeze any extra muffins (though we doubt there will be many; feel free to scale up the ingredients and make an extra batch) for a couple of months, then thaw and reheat for 3 to 5 minutes. Check out the full recipe at <https://www.weightwatchers.com/us/recipe/banana-chocolate-chip-mini-muffins/5626a5df4236657004994d50> Recipe Source: WW Weight Watcher Reimagined

Homemade Vegetable Soup

Olive oil - 1 tsp

Minced garlic - 1/8 tsp, or to taste

Uncooked onion - 1/4 cup, chopped

Uncooked celery - 1/4 cup, chopped

Uncooked carrot - 1/4 cup, chopped

1 Cup reduced-sodium chicken broth or reduced-sodium vegetable broth

1/2 Cup canned diced tomatoes

1/4 cup whole wheat pasta, elbow variety



Heat olive oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Add minced garlic and cook, stirring, until lightly browned. Add chopped fresh vegetables and sauté until tender. Add reduced-sodium chicken or vegetable broth, canned diced tomatoes and cooked whole wheat pasta, season to taste and simmer until heated through.

Recipe Source: WW Weight Watcher Reimagined <https://www.weightwatchers.com/us/meal/homemade-vegetable-soup/5626a76f271fc584086cc8b7>

Become an Overcomer – Strategies for Healthy Eating

Written by OWE Staff

Everyone faces barriers to accomplishing their goals. Maybe it is extra responsibilities at work or home, something unexpected coming up, or just feeling a lack of motivation. You are not alone in the struggle to hurdle daily obstacles. Many resources are available to help, including CommonHealth! Listed below are a few strategies to help get you started.



Common Barrier	Overcomer Strategy
Lack of time	Plan ahead and make multiple healthy meals and store in appropriate servings. Pack snacks into individual servings for several days (or purchase proportion snacks) Choose easy, healthy recipes that are not time-consuming.
Lack of willpower	Identify foods that are hard to resist. Only keep in small quantities, or don't keep them around. Plan ahead to handle difficult situations revolving around trigger foods to minimize effects.
Family & friends with different habits	Kindly let family and friends know your healthy eating plans. (Ask for support and encouragement--they may want to join you with some goals!) Suggest social interaction not surrounded by food, such as going for a walk together.
Lack of knowledge	Seek information from credible sources like CommonHealth, WW or your health plans. Ask questions and get help when you need it.

Source and article adaptations for this section: National Academy of Sport Medicine, <https://www.nasm.org/> and Athletic and Fitness Association of America, <https://www.afaa.com/>.



Amy Womack, An Anywhere Pumpkin Contest Winner and her prize pack!

An Exercise to Try in the New Year!

One of the best exercises that only takes minutes but offers many benefits is the plank. A plank is simple, but not necessarily easy. Don't let that stop a beginner from trying a plank, there are many modifications to start and build stamina. The plank is a very effective core exercise that will build stability and strength throughout your entire body. The *American Council on Exercise* reported that regular planking can reduce back pain, strengthen back muscles and increase support for your entire back. The benefits of planks extend beyond just core and back strength; planks can also help increase metabolism, improve posture, increase coordination, and improve flexibility.

The only cautions to consider are ensuring correct form to protect your back—so start slowly and build up. Always check with your doctor if you have any health conditions that may prevent you from doing a plank or exercising in general.

Shown here are a couple pictures of a modified plank, which is an excellent starting point; and a full plank—something to work up to.

Beginner, modified plank.

- Start on your hands and knees. Try not to let your hips, head, or shoulders sag. Improper form could lead to injury.
- Hold plank pose for 10 seconds or longer. Work your way up to this! You will get there.
- Remember not to hold your breath. Focus on steady breathing in and out to hold the muscles and continue getting much needed oxygen to brain and muscles.
- Try planks a few times each week. Once this gets too easy, try going down on your elbows, but still stay on your knees. Gradually add more seconds, work up to 30 seconds or more.



Advanced plank.



- Start on your knees and forearms.
- Contract your abdominals and lift on to your toes so that you make a straight line from your feet to your head and neck. Try not to sag.
- Hold pose for 10 to 30 seconds. Take a few seconds break and try another set. You can do this, and you will get stronger the more you practice your plank!
- Remember not to hold your breath. Focus on steady breathing in and out to continue holding your muscles and delivering oxygen to your brain and muscles.
- If you begin to feel back compromise, go down to your knees. Try to push back up to your toes if you can or stay in a modified plank. Remember maintaining good form is important.
- Try to practice your planks most days of the week. When this gets too easy, you can add a challenge by alternating leg lifts for a few seconds.

Below are a few websites with more details, videos and plank pose challenges to try. Feel free to do your own plank search or video demos. Happy Planking!

[Harvard](#)

[LifeHack](#)

[HealthCorps](#)

[HealthierMichigan](#)

Sources, references, and article adaptations for this section: American Council on Exercise-<https://www.acefitness.org/>; National Academy of Sports Medicine- <https://www.nasm.org/>; <https://www.health.harvard.edu>, <https://www.ahealthiermichigan.org/>; <https://www.lifehack.org>; <https://www.healthcorps.org/>

REBOOT

N. Elfino, OWE Staff Writer, Department of Human Resource Management



Keep coming;
it works if you're working.

LaCora Hurte

REBOOT

N. Elfino, OWE Staff

On a cool autumn evening, while walking down a quiet street in Amelia County, we saw several figures nestled unexpectedly on a soft grassy field. “Ready? Go!” their instructor encouraged, as this happy group began to perform stretching exercises. Happy and exercise aren’t always found in the same sentence, but this jovial group was different.

That familiar voice was that of LaCora Hurte. When we visited with Ms. Hurte of the Department of Military Affairs earlier this year, she was leading free fitness classes (REBOOT) and helping her students achieve their goals. We checked in on her – still leading the free

classes - and her students recently at the Amelia County Parks and Recreation Center lawn to see how things were going. While there we talked briefly with the Center’s director, Glen Wilkerson. He told us that Ms. Hurte’s group’s commitment was indicative of the overall increase they’ve seen in attendance since the summer and the community’s desire to connect and socialize. Their programs have nearly doubled with just under 30 youth recreational programs and over five adult programs, with offerings ranging from softball to basketball to soccer to cheerleading to wrestling to football, and even pickleball. Inside the center, they are more than ready for the influx of indoor classes also with plenty of sanitation stations, and new social distancing measures and an increased cleaning

schedule much like you would find at a commercial gym facility.

Two of Ms. Hurte’s students discovered the class much like we did, walking down the street by the Center, seeing the group exercising on the lawn. These close friends bonded over a similar loss in their lives and had started taking occasional walks with each other. Ms. Hurte, thinking they were approaching the area to join the class, greeted them with excitement only to find out they didn’t know about the program and were just out for a leisurely walk. Upon finding out how easy and convenient joining the classes would be, they began attending and have become regulars. With the abrupt closing of a local gym nearby, Lucy* says she’s enjoyed the convenience of being able to have an activity to do

together with others. “Just somebody to exercise with or going walking with... and [Ms. Hurte] doesn’t make you feel guilty if you can’t do [the movements] she helps you do it... She’s really good, motivating.” The widows went on to say how they are disappointed that the current series, in its fifth week, will be ending soon and how important it has been for socializing and to a degree lifting their emotional well-being. Ethyl* added that since she works remotely from home and lives alone, she really enjoys having a way to socialize outside of the house for a change in atmosphere. Ms. Hurte reflected on that day, “Imagine if they had been walking at any other time, they wouldn’t have seen us and joined.”

In another testament to presence being able to positively influence others and the kismet of timing, Ms. Hurte shared a story of one individual who was motivated to walk laps by her Burkeville class. Having to use a cane for many years, after six months, one Monday, she started walking her laps without her cane. Pleasantly surprised, Ms. Hurte exclaimed, “Where’s your cane?” and she replied, “Oh, it’s in the car. I don’t need it anymore.” Proof positive that what we do can positively influence other lives even if they aren’t directly engaging with us. Every little bit does count. This makes Ms. Hurte’s class closing mantra so true: “Keep coming; it works if you're working.”

**Names changed to protect the privacy of interviewees.*



EMPLOYEE FINANCIAL WELLNESS



State Employee Financial Wellness Program



Written by J. Singleton, OWE Staff

In 2020, over 7,000 state employees participated in this program and learned how to manage their finances better, become financially independent and eliminate their debt. Your financial wellness will remain one of our top priorities in 2021.

New for 2021!

Introduction of **VACU's Creative Ways to Save (CWTS)**. A new savings initiative to encourage establishing emergency savings. Newer/younger employees and new families are encouraged to participate. [Click Here To Start Saving!](#) Employees can now join Virginia Credit Union online with no funding needed. In just a few easy steps: Visit www.vacu.org/partnerjoinus. Then enter the referral code: 3910.

Finances Got You Stressed?

CommonHealth has partnered with the Employee Financial Wellness Program offering quarterly stress-related health & wellness webinars to employees. CommonHealth Consultants will offer various stress-reducing techniques, wellness ideas and micro-learning videos to add to the physical and mental well-being of the state's workforce. Please check out the [CommonHealth VA YouTube channel](#).

Introducing **VRS's** newest interactive mini-course, **Saving for a Child's Education**. At only 20 minutes, this course covers college funding plans and the multiple ways you can save, and the potential timeline of your savings plan. Simply log in at myVRS.varetire.org and select Financial Wellness to access an entire online curriculum of financial wellness courses, videos, articles and budgeting tools.

Do you have money waiting for you? Try Virginia Department of Treasury's Unclaimed Property Program. [VA Money Search](#).

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): Your health plan may offer services from debt counseling to estate planning that are available to you. [Employee Assistance Program](#).

Please check out the monthly emails and virtual financial wellness fairs coming soon!

Know Your Benefits: VRS Group Life Insurance Program Has You Covered

Life insurance isn't always top of mind, but as a state employee and member of the [Virginia Retirement System](#), you are covered under the [VRS Basic Group Life Insurance Program](#) from your first day of employment. Plus, if you want even more coverage, you can purchase it through the [Optional Group Life Insurance Program](#).

The VRS Basic Group Life Insurance Program provides your beneficiaries a natural death benefit, which is equal to double your creditable compensation. If your death is accidental, your beneficiaries are eligible to receive double your natural death benefit. Here are some of the additional benefits that you may qualify for under certain circumstances.

- ◆ **Repatriation benefit:** Covers the costs of returning your remains home if you die in an accident 75 miles or more from your home.
- ◆ **Accidental dismemberment benefit:** Covers the loss of limbs or eyesight.
- ◆ **Seatbelt benefit:** Pays an additional benefit if you suffer dismemberment or die while wearing a seatbelt in a private passenger vehicle.
- ◆ **Accelerated death benefit:** If you are diagnosed with a terminal condition and have fewer than 12 months to live, you can withdraw some or all of your life insurance coverage to use for any purpose.

In addition, some basic group life insurance benefits will continue into retirement at no cost to you.

If you elect optional group life insurance for yourself, you can also purchase coverage for your spouse and dependent children. Evidence of insurability (proof of good health) is not required if you enroll within your first 31 days of employment, and not required for dependents if they are added within 31 days of a qualifying event, such as marriage or the birth or adoption of a child.

If you are enrolled in the optional life insurance and meet the qualifications for retirement, you may continue a portion of your coverage upon leaving employment.

Name or Update Your Beneficiary

To name or change your beneficiaries for basic group life and optional group life benefits, as well as for your VRS defined benefit member account contributions, be sure to submit the [Designation of Beneficiary \(VRS-2\)](#).

VRS has contracted with Securian Financial as the insurer for the Group Life Insurance Program. For more information about your coverage, visit [VRS' Life Insurance Benefits webpage](#). Your [myVRS account](#) also provides a summary of your life insurance benefits as well as other helpful resources including myVRS Financial Wellness.

To stay up to date on the latest VRS news and information, follow [Virginia Retirement System on Facebook](#) and subscribe to Member News at varetire.org/newsletter.

Welcomes and Congratulations: Employee Announcements



Chrystal Briggs joined the Office of Health Benefits (OHB) on January 4, 2021. Chrystal will serve as a Health Benefits Specialist on the Employee/Retiree Services Team. The Employee/Retiree Services unit supports agency Benefits Administrators in the administration of the programs, handles employee concerns & complaints and coordinates the process for both claims and administrative appeals. The unit also reviews benefits communications, policies, and procedures in compliance with law, regulations, policy, and contracts. One of her favorite quotes is, "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything." In her spare time, Chrystal likes spending time with family.



William Brazier has had a 29-year career in public education in Virginia, and before that served as an analyst for a public interest think tank in Washington, D.C., and in state government in Boston, Massachusetts. Being someone who loves the field of Philosophy, his passion in public service is to strive for the "Justice" that Plato urged us all to pursue in that philosopher's famous work, *The Republic*. He will serve as a Diversity Program Specialist for OWE.



Navodita Varma will serve as one of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Consultants within the OWE. Ms. Varma is a senior human resources professional with more than 18 years of experience. She began her career in human resources in India. After relocating to the United States in 2001, Navodita got certified as a Senior Professional in Human Resources, learned United States employment laws and HR practices while continuing to work for technology and consulting organizations based out of Washington DC. Her areas of specialization include Diversity and Inclusion and Affirmative Action/EEO compliance. She is passionate about HR Analytics.

Congratulations to the recipients of the *new* DHRM Excellence Award

In December, the DHRM Leadership team announced the *DHRM Excellence Awards* to embed recognition, appreciation and thanks into their own workplace culture. Join us in congratulating the first recipients recognized for their significant accomplishments and exemplifying the DHRM values of excellence, teamwork, honor, innovation, customer focus and stewardship. Congratulations to LaDonna Judkins, Anne Waring, Patrick King, Melanie Kuftic, Alex Morgan, AnneTewell, Bill Breed, Deanna Goldstein, Debbie Rigdon, Diane Anderson, Jo AnnStamper, Natalie Brannan, Sumi Lanneau, Cynthia Duncan, Nancy, Elfino, JonathanSingleton, Kristina Fischbach, Mary Louise Gerdes, Michael King, Ryan Bridgett, and Susan Perry.

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