

# Excellence in Leadership

Public Servant Recognition Month 2023



NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Service.

State Public Servants,

It is my pleasure to recognize each one of you for the service provided to your respective agencies as well as the State of Nebraska. The Excellence in Leadership Award is one of two recognition programs coordinated through the Administrative Services State Personnel Division. It highlights those public servants whose job performance has exceeded the highest standards and who have contributed to the overall effectiveness of their agencies.



To date, 3,358 public servants have received this honor. This year, 99 new recipients are joining that distinguished list. Honorees are chosen based on certain character traits and core values like teamwork, customer service, visionary leadership, ethics, staff development and more. In short, you are the best of the best in Nebraska state government. The fact that you have been chosen reflects the respect you have earned and the value that you bring to your team.

Our public servants answer the call every day to make the lives of our citizens better. It is important to recognize those contributions and the individuals who make it happen. I hope that you take time to celebrate this accomplishment. Thank you again for your exemplary service!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Pillen".

Governor Jim Pillen

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2023

*Excellence in  
Leadership*



## Administrative Services

### April Leach-Sanna

April came to the Department of Administrative Services State Building Division from the Department of Health and Human Services in 2018. April is a lead designer for the design and planning team. Her distinguished efforts and designs include: remodeling the Standing Bear Office Building, coordinating and assisting the Department of Education to move from the Nebraska State Office Building (NSOB) across Lincoln to the old State Farm Building, the entire office design and installation of furniture and furnishings for the department of Motor Vehicles, the NSOB cafeteria floor, cafeteria furnishings and lighting, the remodel of the TSB break room, and the Mother's room. April's efforts and attention to detail surpassed expectations and ensured projects were completed on time, on budget, and to the satisfaction of the customer.



## Administrative Services

### Jareth Kaup

Jareth has been a State teammate for over four years, excelling in agency payroll processing before transitioning to the DAS State Accounting payroll team. Jareth provides exceptional customer service assisting agencies during payroll processing. Fiscal year 2023 required innovative ways to address changes in payrolls due to union negotiations and to process a State Patrol settlement that was the result of 10 years of litigation. Jareth played a significant role on the State Accounting payroll team in finding solutions, testing, and assisting to ensure teammates were properly paid. During a period of historically low unemployment rates, the State found innovative ways to attract talent. This required significant changes to payroll systems, and Jareth played an important roll in making those changes a success.



## Administrative Services

### Brian J. Svik

Brian has led the Training & Development team at State Personnel to increasingly high levels of success. Through marketing and partnering with agencies across the enterprise, Brian brought agencies on board as subscribers with LinkedIn Learning, which in 2022 had over 47,000 courses accessed, more than double the number in 2021. Brian is always providing customers with relevant data and guidance. This includes more efficiently providing a subscriber scorecard, dropping the time to produce the monthly report by over 100 labor hours per year. Brian has also expanded the service offerings of his team via video and audio creation and editing, including the partnership on the Good Life Great Career podcast and producing video content for the Governor's office, COE, State Personnel and others upon request.





## Attorney General

### Michael Maseth

Mike Maseth started with the Attorney General's office as an investigator for the Criminal Prosecution Bureau after a storied career with the FBI. That career was capped off by his participation as the lead investigator in one of the most notorious homicide cases in Nebraska: the disappearance and death of Sydney Loofe. There Mike earned himself a reputation for his competence, fairness, professional demeanor, approachability, command of the subject matter, intelligence, and technical expertise. Those attributes have served this office well and just as he was indispensable to that team, he has instantly become indispensable to this team. Mike's dedication to serve the citizens of Nebraska is evident in the rigor he applies to every task assigned. His numerous talents have made him an integral part of each trial he has participated in, seated at counsel's table as the designated State's representative. An outstanding representative; the citizens of this State are tremendously fortunate to have Mike at their service.



## Attorney General

### Michael Steffes

Michael Steffes began his career with the Nebraska Department of Justice in November 2021, and is a legal assistant in the Legal Services Bureau. In addition to providing legal support to seven attorneys in the bureau, Michael's responsibilities include assisting on open meetings and public records enforcement matters. Michael is hard-working and conscientious. He accepts special projects and challenges willingly, and does not hesitate to lend his assistance and support when needed. Michael has also exhibited effective communication skills when dealing with attorneys, peers, and members of the public. Michael exemplifies several of the State of Nebraska's core values/concepts and character traits including teamwork/collaboration, serving by example, and effective communication. Through his dedicated commitment, Michael has become a valued member of the Attorney General's staff.



## Auditor of Public Accounts

### Jeff Schreier

Jeff is a 2013 Nebraska Wesleyan graduate and started with the Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts that same year. Since starting out as an intern, Jeff has made his mark and was eventually promoted to Audit Manager. He became a Certified Public Account (CPA) in 2017 and is very knowledgeable regarding State statutes and auditing standards. His knowledge of the State's various counties and their elected officials is integral to the efficiency of county audits and being able to provide those working on the county audits with answers to questions that may arise during the audit. With his expertise, he is able to speak regularly at conferences and meetings organized by the Nebraska Association of County Officials and the League of Nebraska Municipalities. Jeff works hard to ensure the budget process is as efficient and accurate as possible. While not only answering questions regarding budgets, he builds a rapport with political subdivisions to make them feel comfortable reaching out to the APA. Jeff has done a great job handling different projects over the year after taking over responsibility for many new tasks. Jeff's numerous contributions to the office and Nebraska counties and municipalities are truly invaluable.

## Auditor of Public Accounts

### Dennis Sugden

Dennis Sugden graduated from Doane University in 2007 with his Bachelor's degree and in 2010 with his Master's. Dennis started with the Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts in 2007. After a brief hiatus from 2015-2021, Dennis returned to the office. He is currently a Senior Auditor-In-Charge. Dennis is a great resource to have on audits and does a good job of documenting complex audit issues. He has a great attitude, is approachable, and willing to take on difficult work. Dennis is very good at communicating with both the auditee and audit team, making sure to keep them informed of the status of his projects. Always willing to lend a hand, Dennis is especially great at helping newer employees with questions and explaining workpapers to help them understand the purpose of our testing. He is always open to answer questions or help other employees, even if those employees are working on audits he is not assigned to. Dennis's outgoing personality, helpfulness, and dependability make him a key component in the auditor's office.



## Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

### Drew Bigham

Drew strives to be a leader in ethics, commitment, and transparency. Over the past year, Drew has helped lead multiple statewide projects including the Nebraska Victims of Crime Alert Portal, the Protection Order Portal, and various enhancement projects for over 200 law enforcement and social service agencies. Drew has also overseen the continued development, maintenance, and improvement of the Nebraska Criminal Justice Information System (NCJIS), and the Nebraska Data Exchange Network (NDEN). Drew views his greatest accomplishment as being able to inspire and motivate those that work around him. Drew has helped create a team environment consisting of enthusiasm, creativity, and hard work with a "no fear of failure" mentality.



## Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

### William Mathis

William Mathis has provided software support for agency level systems. After assisting with evaluating a new learning management system for NLETC he was assigned as primary contact and lead on this project. William worked with the current vendor, the new vendor, and NLETC staff to make this transition successful and keeping project work requirements on track. He has assumed a technical role associated with the Law Enforcement Attraction and Retention (LEAR) program following approval by the Legislature. William also developed a system allowing for electronic application, produced written instructions, as well as video instructions to assist customers with completing the application process. This was done while continuing to support NLETC with the agency's technical challenges and requirements for customer support directed to the agency by email and telephone. William has also been a key player with the project to transition to a new records management system for the agency.





## Department of Agriculture

### **Mahlory Alden**



Mahlory began her career with NDA in 2018 as a food sanitarian. She excelled at that position, asking for additional leadership responsibilities along the way. In 2019, she was promoted to her current position as an Agriculture Food Service Evaluation Officer. In this supervisory role, Mahlory coaches, trains, and teaches team members in a positive, efficient manner. She takes her experiences as a food sanitarian and harnesses them into training tools for her team. Mahlory embodies NDA's mission and vision with a focus on customer service, continuous improvement, and efficiencies and effectiveness. She is open to new ideas to ensure we are providing the best support and services to NDA teammates and our stakeholders. Mahlory is a leader who identifies and works toward finding solutions when problems arise. Her eye is on the future of the foods program, and her focus is ensuring that the team is prepared for upcoming challenges.

## Department of Agriculture

### **Casey Foster**



Casey Foster has been an instrumental part of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's (NDA) promotion and development efforts from the start, 25 years ago. For the past 18 years, Casey has administered Nebraska's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) overseeing the funding of 244 projects and bringing in millions of federal funds to benefit Nebraska's specialty crop industry. His leadership and guidance have been vital in the growth of Nebraska's ag industry. In addition to his work with SCBGP, Casey has partnered with local, state, and federal stakeholders and led various programs and initiatives including the development of Nebraska's Produce Safety Rule and Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. These programs and others continue to provide critical services to Nebraska producers as well as the citizens they serve. Casey represents NDA on commodity boards that support Nebraska's potato, egg, craft brewery, and wine industries, and he also represents Nebraska in leadership positions on the state and national level. Casey embodies NDA's mission of serving farmers, ranchers, and consumers.

## Department of Agriculture

### **Royce Schaneman**



Royce Schaneman is the Executive Director of the Nebraska Wheat Board. He was raised on a diversified farm near Minatare before attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in Diversified Agriculture and Animal Science. Since joining the Nebraska Wheat Board in 2006 Royce has challenged the Board to think long term and for what is best for the entire industry. Royce brings new ideas and fresh perspective to issues facing the industry and creative ways to solve problems and is willing to take on any project for the betterment of the Nebraska wheat industry. No matter the challenge, Royce listens, evaluates, and responds in a positive manner that draws in support and cohesiveness in the effort. His ability to foster relationships builds the foundation for ongoing growth and long-term success of the Nebraska Wheat Board, and Royce remains a valuable proponent and vocal advocate for the Nebraska wheat producers.

## Department of Banking and Finance

### **Steven H. Covert**

Steven Covert has been the Senior Database Analyst for the IT team at Banking and Finance for the last seven years. His role as senior analyst makes his primary point of contact for any IT training requirements and lead developer of new technology deliverables. Steven's efforts in the last year have impacted teams throughout Banking and Finance, above and beyond basic technology implementations. By implementing strong process improvement strategies and through effective communications, Steven was able to help teams find efficiencies and implement new, data-driven processes. His leadership in all phases of multiple projects are worthy of the agency's highest recognition.



## Department of Banking and Finance

### **Claire McHenry**

Claire McHenry is the Deputy Director of the Securities Bureau with the Nebraska Department of Banking and Finance and leads a team of attorneys, supervisors, examiners, analysts, and administrative staff to protect investors and foster capital formation in Nebraska. She has over 15 years of state securities regulation experience, is an active member of the North American Securities Administrators Association (NASAA), and has been elected to serve as NASAA President for the 2023-2024 term. Claire collaborates with other state and federal regulators to protect Nebraska investors and ensure the Nebraska securities market remains trusted while being committed to providing strong public service, specifically in the areas of increasing investor education and financial awareness. Claire is deserving of the 2023 Excellence in Leadership award for her demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement, customer service, collaboration, and visionary leadership.



## Department of Correctional Services

### **Anthony Dreher**

With a natural ability to positively influence both the incarcerated population and his team, Lieutenant (Lt.) Anthony Dreher has made a significant impact at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women (NCCW). In his everyday duties he demonstrates the values of NDCS and stays true to the agency's mission to keep people safe. Lt. Dreher is consistent and efficient and holds his team accountable to perform at a high standard. His leadership has encouraged his team to reach their full potential and become confident in making decisions during challenging circumstances.







Department of Correctional Services  
**Deputy Warden Shawn Freese**

When Shawn Freese joined the Reception and Treatment Center (RTC) as deputy warden in fall of 2022, he was tasked with preparing the high-security units for occupation. His leadership was evident from the start, and it carried through during each step of the project as he methodically planned the mobilization of the units. He rallied the team, communicated thoughtfully, and worked through each potential issue to efficiently open and operate the units. As a teammate said of Shawn, "The success of the units, while not his acts alone, is largely attributed to his leadership."



Department of Correctional Services  
**Pam Hillman**

Throughout her decades of service to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS), Unit Manager Pam Hillman has made an impact on countless individuals. She is a firm, fair, and consistent leader who embodies the NDCS values of integrity, respect, compassion, growth and excellence. As a fellow teammate noted about Pam, "She is someone who can always be counted on to provide guidance and support which she has gained through her experience." During a recent significant population movement between facilities, Pam played a key role in ensuring property was handled with care and made it to its destination in a timely manner.



Department of Correctional Services  
**Jacob Jara**

Following a career in the United State Marine Corps, Corporal (Cpl.) Jacob Jara has brought his sense of calm confidence to his job duties at the Nebraska State Penitentiary (NSP), and he passes it on to those who work alongside him. With his natural ability to lead, he has made an impact upon many at the facility. Cpl. Jara often takes the initiative to mentor staff, drawing out their talents and encouraging their confidence. As a teammate shared about Jacob, "He is an example of what we want our corporals to be and is an asset to all of those who work with him."

## Department of Correctional Services

### **Jason Krause**

Corporal (Cpl.) Jason Krause is an excellent example of a State of Nebraska teammate who uses his skills, training, and commitment to public service to positively impact the community. Last year, while supervising a road detail crew from the Community Corrections Center – Lincoln (CCC-L), Cpl. Krause encountered a vehicle fire. He quickly responded, notifying local law enforcement while assisting with relocating the individual to a safe location, extinguishing the fire and awaiting rescue services. As a result of Cpl. Krause’s training and quick response, no injuries or significant damages were sustained.



## Department of Correctional Services

### **Tyler Ladd**

More than 90 percent of the men and women incarcerated in Nebraska will return to our communities, and the reentry team plays an essential part in preparing these individuals for a successful transition. As a reentry specialist, Tyler ensures that every individual he works with has the best possible reentry plan. He has fostered strong relationships with parole officers, transitional living houses, and community resource providers, which helps him to connect individuals with the best resources available to them. Tyler is also involved with the on-boarding of every new reentry specialist and takes pride in ensuring they are well-prepared for their roles.



## Department of Correctional Services

### **Cristy Schwartz**

Cristy Schwartz consistently performs at a high level and makes meaningful contributions to steer facility operation and staffing needs. As Administrative Program Officer I at the Work Ethic Camp (WEC), she ensures facility practices conform to accreditation standards, NDCS policy, and legal requirements. In her work, Cristy considers the best interest of her teammates, the incarcerated population, and the facility. With compassion and understanding, she guides teammates through employee processes, helping them to navigate situations by providing information that allows them to make informed decisions.





## Department of Correctional Services

### **Brandon Wainwright**

Recreation staff serve an essential role in planning, developing and implementing leisure time programs at Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) facilities. As a Recreation Specialist, Brandon goes above and beyond to ensure individuals at the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility (NCYF) have access to engaging recreational activities. He brings enthusiasm and a strong sense of teamwork to his role. From athletics to music and cultural events, Brandon takes initiative in coordinating events and providing support to his teammates.



## Department of Correctional Services

### **Jessie D. Whitlock**

An energetic and skilled supervisor and therapist, Jessie goes above and beyond for her clients, addressing their needs individually with compassion and care. As a Behavioral Health Practitioner Supervisor II at the Omaha Correctional Center (OCC), she is an effective leader and an excellent example of teamwork, integrity, and a strong work ethic. After taking the lead on a clinical program that moved to OCC, Jessie has consistently developed the program to best meet the needs of the population. She enthusiastically takes on additional duties to enhance the services offered at the facility and steps in to assist other clinicians and facilities.



## Nebraska Department of Correctional Services

### **Jessica Whittington**

Sergeant (Sgt.) Jessica Whittington brings excellence and integrity to her role every day as a third shift supervisor at the Community Corrections Center-Omaha (CCC-O). In 2022, CCC-O completed multiple security and accreditation audits, all of which were passed with flying colors. Sgt. Whittington was instrumental in preparing and overseeing all the key control and evidence sections that were inspected and reviewed by the audit teams. Throughout the year, she has stepped up to ensure adequate staffing and supervisory coverage at the facility and is a key resource many teammates look to for guidance.

## Department of Education

### **Sydney Kobza**

Sydney is the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the Nebraska Department of Education. Sydney has been an employee of the agency for six years and began her career as the Business, Marketing, and Management Career Field Specialist and was promoted to her leadership position in March of 2020.

Sydney consistently demonstrates her customer-focused approach by establishing meaningful connections with colleagues, educators, administrators, and businesses across the state. Through her dedication and genuine care for others, she has built a reputation as a trusted and reliable resource for career and technical education statewide. As a supervisor and leader, she recognizes that the agency's success depends on the well-being and growth of each individual team member, both within the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, and within the agency.



## Department of Education

### **Morgan Krull**

Morgan Krull is the Step up to Quality Program Associate for the Office of Early Childhood Education at the Nebraska Department of Education. Morgan has been employed by the agency for six years. Her ability to identify and anticipate future issues, coupled with her strong sense of initiative has made her an indispensable team member. She shares valuable insights and helpful information gained by her communication with early childhood professionals. Morgan is the personification of stellar customer service and is incredibly humble in her contribution to the clients she serves. Her impact is noticed by everyone with whom she works. Morgan's commitment to excellence to lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living is undeniable.



## Department of Education

### **Kirk Russell**

Kirk Russell served as the Assistant Administrator & Title I Director for the Office of ESEA Federal Programs at the Nebraska Department of Education. Kirk has been employed by the agency for over five years and began his career as a Federal Programs Specialist and was promoted to his leadership position in May of 2020. He led by example every day with his professionalism, positive attitude, and his 10,000-foot view on problem-solving. Kirk has been a great leader, taking on anything that lands on his plate. His extensive experience as an ex-administrator, teacher, and superintendent has made him a valuable member of the agency. Before retiring earlier this year, Kirk set the bar high with his strong work ethic and dedication to do what is best for the team, the NDE and Nebraska education. Kirk deserves to be recognized for all he has done for students, district staff, the Office of ESEA Programs, the NDE, and Nebraska education.





## Department of Health and Human Services

### **Hollie Andrews**



Hollie has always done a great job in communication, not only with her team, her coworkers, and the leadership team but also with the individuals she interacts with daily. Her communication is approachable, honest, and genuine paired with an ability to be transparent and articulate. While there might be difficult transitions and changes, these traits help her be empathetic while moving the entire team forward. Hollie has always shown great leadership qualities and is dedicated to her team and the Agency. She has served as mentor in each stage of her career thus far; being a mentor for new workers and now being a mentor for supervisors. Most recently, she has been chosen to attend a yearlong Leadership program. Hollie continually shows that she is dedicated to helping others and fully embraces the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services mission, Helping People Live Better Lives.

## Department of Health and Human Services

### **Amy Bilka**



As a new leader of Total Rewards, a high level of integrity is a must and Amy demonstrates this daily. She regularly handles highly sensitive information and maintains strict confidentiality. She has handled many new challenges and difficult situations with a high degree of professionalism and integrity. Amy is extremely aware of timeliness concerns and does a great job of following up to keep on time even when things are outside of her control. Perhaps one of her greatest strengths however, is her high commitment to providing excellent customer service. She is responsive and helpful especially in explaining difficult options related to Total Rewards. Amy takes the time to help teammates better understand processes and procedures while displaying much patience and grace with teammates who are frustrated. She continually works with the Total Rewards team and all of HR to solve problems and to streamline processes. Her extensive knowledge is a huge asset to the HR team and her Agency.

## Department of Health and Human Services

### **April Coakley**



April is one of a kind! Beyond being a skilled and highly proficient professional, April defines what it means to be a team player. She is responsible for numerous Federal and State reports monthly and completes them timely and accurately. Last year she started her Master's program and completed her practicum with the Adult Protective Services Unit. April applies her knowledge and expertise in her daily tasks of reviewing case management work to ensure federal and state practice standards are met and to ensure safety for youth in care through ongoing communication and feedback to CFS field staff. Additionally, April is committed to exploring ways to improve current policies and practice to improve outcomes for youth and families. The CQI Administrator seeks out April for special tasks and commends her on her expertise and willingness to do what is needed to support the team to reach better outcomes for children and families.



## Department of Health and Human Services

### **Beckie Cromer**

Beckie is a Federal Aid Administrator III on the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) team. She has been in this role for 2.5 years. Beckie has been instrumental in administering over \$300 million of CCDF pandemic funds. For many of the activities utilizing these funds, Beckie led the planning, development, trainings, and implementation as well as executing subawards and contracts for these activities. Part of the planning included convening 12 statewide listening sessions with child care providers to hear concerns and barriers which helped develop many of the activities. She also coordinated planning meetings with outside partners. Besides managing the pandemic funds, Beckie oversees an annual \$20 million-dollar CCDF budget. She ensures these funds are used to support statewide innovative quality initiatives that provide families quality child care for their employment and education. Beckie is well respected and appreciated by her peers, community partners, and leaderships.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Christopher Gallegos**

Christopher strives to be a dependable, reliable, and steady fixture of the team. He is not only dedicated to the success of the facility, but he has a true passion for the population DHHS serves. Christopher recognizes the value in developing all team members and is relied upon for his outstanding leadership abilities and leads by example. He is the type of employee who puts others first and recognizes when going the extra mile is truly what it will take for his team to be successful. The level of professionalism Christopher brings to his team and stakeholders is unmatched.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Angie Gonzales-Dorn**

Starting her career in with DHHS in 1993, Angie Gozales-Dorn, has worked tirelessly to support individuals to live better lives for the last 30 years. After beginning her work at BSDC as a Human Services Treatment Specialist and then a Qualified Developmental Disability Professional, Angie gained an appreciation for individuals' unique strengths in light of their challenges and grew a steadfast dedication to the notion that all individuals are capable of greatness within their own lives. Now as a Program Specialist with the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Angie has developed a robust expertise in the areas of person-centered planning and particularly supported employment. Helping to craft policies and draft waivers, Angie serves a rich resource for her co-workers wishing to develop best practices in supporting individuals to live out the lives they wish for themselves. Presenting routinely at local schools, parent and community organizations, and community events, Angie also serves as a resource and advocate for individuals and families wishing to learn more about DDD services and set the groundwork for success as they transition into adulthood.





## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Danielle Harders**

Danielle has been with DHHS Developmental Disabilities for nearly six years. She has been an amazing asset to her division; she has shown great passion for advocating for participants and families and ensuring everyone in services are receiving quality care in all aspects of their life. Danielle is always looking 'outside of the box' to find solutions when the team hits a roadblock and is an integral part of her team, developing and sharing tracking sheets and resources for her teammates to use to support independent providers. Danielle builds everyone up and always acknowledges the great work other do. Her positivity and energy is contagious which inspires everyone around her.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Brenda Kastens**

Brenda is a Health Services Administrator I within Medicaid and Long-Term Care. Brenda brings a wealth of knowledge to her position and is passionate about supporting everyone on her team, ensuring that Medicaid provides the best possible services with the highest integrity. No matter how much chaos is going on around her, she always makes time for her teammates. When a team member needed support recently, Brenda did not hesitate to step up to take on responsibilities above and beyond her regular duties on top of the extra work she was doing for an already understaffed area. She goes above and beyond to always make her team feel appreciated and recognized and finds ways for every team member to grow and work in areas that best showcase their skills. Brenda is a leader in every sense of the word and serves as a great advocate for the Medicaid community.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Nikki K. Krause**

Nikki embodies excellent public service as demonstrated by 25 years with the State of Nebraska. In May 2018, Nikki began working at the Division of Public Health, splitting her administrative assistant support time with the Health Services and Systems Unit and with the Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCDD). Nikki's previous service includes four years at the Game and Parks Commission, almost 10 years with the Department of Roads, and six years with the Department of Correctional Services. Within her role at the DHHS DPH and NCDD, Nikki is dependable and accountable, and balances multiple job duties. Nikki excels in customer service and also holds high standards for following policies and procedures to help the Unit and NCDD reflect the core values of DHHS.

## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Paula Markuson**

Paula Markuson is an MLTC Eligibility Operations Worker that has supported clients for more than 40 years in determining eligibility for nursing home and long-term care placements. She is the gold standard in addressing each person with grace, patience, and kindness throughout the complex process of determining eligibility for Medicaid. Paula daily works with elderly individuals, their families, and representatives to explain the program rules and assist them in gathering the required information. She is also a valuable resource statewide in mentoring other workers and participating in process improvement teams. Paula has dedicated her career to helping Nebraskans needing long-term care placement live better lives.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Lea Meece**

Lea began her DHHS career in 2013 as a Social Services Worker in the Medicaid & Long-Term Care Division and was promoted to Social Services Lead Worker in July 2020. She has a passion and skill for training, mentoring, and coaching staff to become the best they can be. During her career, Lea has played a vital role in training, mentoring, and coaching numerous staff both within and outside of her administrative area. In August 2022, she was promoted to supervisor and is currently involved with the State Review Team. Lea displays excellent teamwork, often being the first to volunteer to provide coverage for fellow supervisors and assist with employment interviewing. Lea deeply values her team and possesses a positive attitude which greatly influences teammates' morale.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Charissa N. Sieron**

Charissa has been in the service coordination role for nearly five years. She has shown that she cares about her teammates and their success. Charissa has shared tools that she uses for work tasks, such as trackers and an ISP checklist with her fellow teammates, and plays a role in training and mentoring new and current Service Coordinators. Charissa attended the Charting the Life Course/Person Centered Planning conference this year and is working on follow up from that conference with a peer group. She has shown that she truly cares about the participants she works with, helps them to reach their desired goals, and celebrates their achievements.





## Department of Health & Human Services **Erin Sheffield**

Erin Sheffield is the Procurement Manager for 24/7 Facilities and has been with DHHS for nearly five years. She has aligned resources across the 24/7 facilities by streamlining products and procedures to save tax payer money and staff time. She is passionate about continuously improving and modernizing procurement processes and racking in cost avoidance. Erin has reclassified her direct reports and encourages cross-training for maximum utilization of her reports' talents. In addition, Erin allocates items across the 24/7 facilities and proposes creative solutions to meet needs.



## Department of Health & Human Services **Susan Strohn**

Susan joined DHHS in 2012 with 25 years trial experience in State and Federal courts and working in senior management at a Fortune 500 company managing claims and litigation. At DHHS, Susan served in the role of Public Health Hearing Officer for licensure and discipline cases for six years, before being appointed as Deputy Director in Public Health in 2018. She returned in 2019 to the DHHS Hearing Office where she now leads a team of seven hearing officers and three staff, with the office being responsible for 2000 appeals annually in public health and public assistance cases.



## Department of Health & Human Services **Sara Thomas**

Sara assists at both Kearney and Hastings facilities as the Clinical Program Director. She interacts at both facilities, conducting therapy due to the shortage of therapists at both facilities. Sara keeps communication open and communicates the information needed to both facilities and teams. Sara's dedication has led her to spend time traveling back and forth to the Hastings facility to meet the needs of female youth while also meeting the needs of male youth on campus in Kearney. Sara operates with professionalism, giving her best to all youth that we serve.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Ashlie Thomas**

Ashlie has worked for the State of Nebraska in her current role as a DD Service Coordinator for almost 10 years. She is very thorough in her work and has the desire to be accurate and to provide accurate information to the participants she works with and their teams. Ashlie goes above and beyond with Person Centered Planning/Charting the Life Course, helping participants reach their hopes and dreams through that process. She embodies the Department's Values and Core Competencies. She plays a large role in helping new service coordinators learn their job tasks and is a mentor for current teammates. Ashlie is also a Union Steward and a member of the NSOB's 4th floor social committee.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **BettyJean Usher-Tate, Phd**

Dr. Usher-Tate has a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska in qualitative, quantitative and Psychometric Methods and Educational Administration. Currently, she holds a pivotal role as a Data and QI administrator within the Division of Behavioral Health, where she combines her expertise in statistics with her deep understanding of behavioral health operations. In her role at DHHS, Dr. Usher-Tate plays a vital role in analyzing complex datasets related to mental health, substance abuse, and behavioral trends. She works closely with a multidisciplinary team of administrators, providers, and policymakers, providing them with invaluable insights derived from her rigorous statistical analysis. Her findings help shape the Division's directions and policies that have a direct impact on improving mental health services and overall well-being in the community. Dr. Usher-Tate's relentless pursuit of knowledge, her analytical acumen, and her unwavering dedication to public health make her an exemplary figure in the field of statistical analysis and a driving force behind the Division of Behavioral Health's impactful work.



## Department of Health & Human Services

### **Amy Volbrecht**

Amy is the HIM Manager at the Norfolk Regional Center (NRC). She has been with NRC since December 1990, which shows her dedication to serving the public. Amy may carry the title of HIM Manager; however, her duties are much more than her title represents. Amy not only leads the HIM department, she is also the Security Administrator which coordinates all issues and requests related to NRC phones and computers. In addition, each month Amy is on-call for NRC as an Administrator On-Call. Amy always open to assessing how things are done at NRC. Her greatest attribute is her humbleness and willingness to give gratitude to others. Amy goes above and beyond with communication her appreciation to her peers.







## Department of Health & Human Services **Claire Wollenburg**

Claire has been with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for 11 years. She serves as a CFSS Supervisor in the Beatrice Office. She has been in this position for over five years. Prior to that, Claire was a teammate in the Beatrice Office and Nebraska City Office. Claire has had a positive impact across the rural 10 counties and beyond, serving families and representing Children and Family Services with the highest integrity and excellence. While recognition is not a motivating factor for Claire; it means a lot to all those that have had the opportunity to work with her at DHHS.



## Department of Insurance **Julie Neal**

Julie Neal has been employed with the Department of Insurance since 1984. In her capacity as Accountant I, she has proven to be an invaluable member of the team. Her knowledge of accounting practices, agency history, and just plain common sense has made her input essential on many projects. Her attention to detail is astounding. She has helped streamline practices within the agency's Administrative Services Division with an eye toward efficiency and transparency. Always willing to pitch in and solve a problem, the agency is indeed fortunate to have Julie as a valued teammate.



## Department of Labor **Isaac L. Hill**

Isaac Hill joined the Nebraska Department of Labor in 2018 as a paralegal. In 2022, he was promoted to Paralegal II and began supervising the legal administrative team. In his time with the agency, Isaac has stepped in to any role necessary to assist the agency. In addition to his regularly assigned duties, he has served as a hearing officer, helped lead Nebraska's short-time compensation program, assisted with the scheduling and docketing of appeals, and helped develop technology changes. Since being promoted, Isaac has developed into a strong leader for the agency.

## Department of Labor

### Leah Zangeneh

As Labor Standards Program Manager for the Nebraska Department of Labor, Leah Zangeneh has excelled in leadership during the 2022-2023 year. Leah is continually assessing and improving systems and processes used for the enforcement of labor law and services provided to the public. She also regularly collaborates with the agency's IT team to improve upon and adapt systems to be more efficient and effective. Leah frequently coordinates with other divisions within the agency and outside agencies toward the common goal of effective customer focused service as well as an increase in successful enforcement of labor law. Leah is an approachable manager and effective communicator who encourages and supports her team in their development to provide excellent delivery of our programs to external customers. Leah has been with the Nebraska Department of Labor for over seven years.



## Department of Motor Vehicles

### Jerry Borrell

Jerry's expertise in all areas of Information Technology has cemented him as a valuable resource for the Information Systems division as well as all DMV Staff. His ability to handle the needs of every user in the agency has greatly improved the overall support experience. Jerry has been instrumental in utilizing his vast knowledge and experience to implement solutions that have improved the roll out of the new Road Test system. He also completed a computer refresh of all DMV computers, and the motor carriers modernization. Jerry can be relied upon by all DMV staff and project members to be innovative and look at all options available to come up with viable solutions in the always changing world of IT.



## Department of Motor Vehicles

### Jessica Estes

Jessica Estes has been an employee with the State of Nebraska for over 18 years. In her role with the Department of Motor Vehicles, she took on the newly created position of Data Privacy Inspector. She has proven to be an integral part of developing not only the position, but the methodology and process of making Nebraskan's personal data as secure and safe as possible. Her dedication to the development of the position and tireless work ethic are bright examples of the best qualities looked for in leaders within the DMV and throughout State government. Her attention to detail, collaborative efforts, and customer focused service make her a very deserving candidate for Excellence in Leadership recognition.





## Department of Natural Resources

### **Casey Schleicher**

Casey is an exemplary teammate who likes to get things done. He consistently volunteers for new tasks big and small and continually leads by example. Just one of many examples of his work ethic happened recently during a dam inspection trip. After a long drive to reach the dam, Casey and a colleague turned off the county road onto an off-road trail leading down to the dam. Soon after turning onto the trail, they found the only path leading to the dam was blocked by fallen tree branches. The colleague immediately thought they would have to leave and come back another day. But Casey worked to clear a path so work could proceed. Time and time again, Casey has demonstrated hard work and determination.



## Department of Natural Resources

### **Michele York**

Michele coordinates with communities to schedule meetings and find meeting space for the NFIP and mapping groups, she informs communities of changes and upcoming trainings, and is always professional and friendly in her outreach to teammates and the public. She is quick to volunteer for tasks, but often is thinking forward and preparing in advance for upcoming tasks. She sets a high standard with her attention to detail and is able to complete tasks other teammates find challenging or tedious all while maintaining a positive attitude. She has been instrumental in assisting the team leader stay organized and keep up with training and travel approvals and other administrative tasks required for FEMA grants. The Floodplain Management Section strives to be a national example for their work under the CAP grant, and through our mapping program, Michele is vital in helping the team achieve this goal.



## Department of Revenue

### **Jessica Nawrocki**

Jessica started at Revenue in 2017 as a Process Improvement Coordinator, then was promoted to a Revenue Division Manager in February of 2019. During that time she has taught her staff firm leadership and human relations skills. She encourages her staff to become better at their jobs every day, and as a result of that, the entire Department benefits. Her leadership style is one that brings each regional office within the Department together and on the same page. Jessica is an understanding and empathetic manager working to improve processes and work in the future.

## Department of Revenue

### Jackie Woodruff

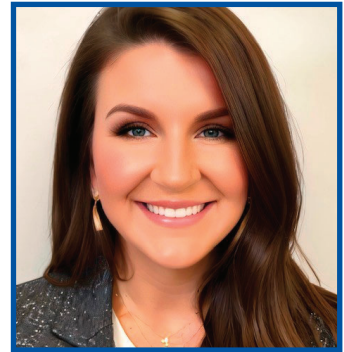
Jackie has been with the Department since May 2011. She filled the key role in creating an extremely effective process for issuing Partnership refunds, most the result of Property Tax Credit (PTC) claims. In the first year, just short of 14,000 refunds worth over \$61 million dollars, were paid to taxpayers. Jackie resolved complex accounts and provided valuable input, helping to arrive at well reasoned approaches/ solutions where there was no precedent to draw from. She organized the workload to minimize the amount of interest the Department issued on delayed refunds. For processing year 2022, credit interest totaling under \$17,000 was issued on only 290 accounts. Jackie deserves credit for the commendable degree of success realized in the first year of a new process. What Jackie accomplished represents a perfect balance between providing both service to the claimants, in timely issuance of PTC refunds, and value to the public we serve.



## Department of Transportation

### Cierra Arnett

Cierra goes above and beyond her job as a Highway District Right of Way Permits Officer. She is truly dedicated to her position. In being assigned tasks such as checking/updating encroachments, her effort in completing these tasks makes people feel valued as a customer. Cierra assumed her position with only minimal training and strives to learn as much as she can to be the best at her job. She is kind to her customers and is always looking for a better way to do things that make her job and other people's tasks easier. Cierra is a Department of Transportation standout and a rare employee. She is a dedicated teammate who consistently displays her strong work ethic serving the people of Nebraska.



## Department of Transportation

### Monica Greve

Monica serves as a great example of a hard worker with an experienced mindset and a calm demeanor. She is happy to step in with a helping hand and an encouraging word for teammates who are struggling and exhibits patience, a positive attitude, and a quick wit throughout the day. Monica is a team player and instills this value in her co-workers. She can take a mundane task and make it a fun and interesting job. Monica had a role on the Snowplow Rodeo Committee helping to revive and renew the Rodeo. She did a great job helping to establish sponsorship and encourage participation. She is the kind of employee that every yard in the state wishes they had. Her experience, compassion, personality, and work ethic have proven to be a great asset to the agency.







## Department of Transportation

### **John Gorecki**

John is an excellent leader who is always looking for innovative ways to perform maintenance and keep his assigned highways in good condition. Several sections of highway in his area of responsibility were showing signs of premature failure due to subgrade issues. Rather than “doing what we always do,” John came up with a way to repair the failing pavement and also add subgrade drains to help mitigate further deterioration. John has transformed the Ravenna Maintenance Crew into a well-oiled team since assuming the supervisor role there three and a half years ago. He has mentored his employees and provided excellent training for them while doing the right thing at the appropriate time in maintaining the highways and bridges he manages in his area. His maintenance work will help the highways and bridges stay in good condition for a long time. This will save the state money in the long run and also provide safe usage for the traveling public driving the roads in his area. John is an extremely valuable member of the Department of Transportation team who makes a difference for our state on a daily basis.



## Department of Transportation

### **Anna Lannin**

As the supervisor and leader of the Engineering Division, Anna has taken on a majority of the workload due to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act’s increased emphasis in the Airport Improvement Program. She has worked to train staff to manage grants in a way that increases capacity. Throughout her time with the Aeronautics division, Anna has developed an encyclopedic knowledge of the public-use airports within the state, allowing her to effectively guide her team in the appropriate allocation of limited resources. Airports across the state have provided unsolicited positive feedback on Anna’s support. She prioritizes relationship development and has established an excellent rapport with airport officials and FAA staff alike. Anna values the development of those with whom she works, holding weekly team huddles that focus on individual development and the completion of team goals. The Division of Aeronautics and the Nebraska Department of Transportation are better organizations because of her outstanding leadership.



## Department of Transportation

### **Darrell Lurz**

Darrell is organized, detail oriented, communicates effectively, and has high expectations for everyone who works around him. He cares deeply about providing quality highway projects to the citizens of Nebraska. His latest project was the In Valentine project which reconstructed Highway US-83 through downtown Valentine. The project exemplified Darrell’s Excellence in Leadership and was very successful. Not only is the final product of high quality, but Darrell minimized the impact to the business owners and community through effective communication and coordination between all parties. Darrell has mentored many people throughout his career. Many of these mentees have advanced quickly in their careers. Darrell often volunteers to test new software processes, vetting them prior to implementation and was one of the first project managers to test and commit to e-Construction - paperless records creation and storage.



## Department of Transportation

### **Andrew C. Reinhard**

Andrew has provided excellent leadership to his team. Andrew is a great example of a proactive manager as he is always on top of everything contractors need to complete, often before they are physically on the job site. He ensures that everything entered and documented is accurate and submitted on time. Andrew has been instrumental in making sure all jobs in his area are properly managed and maintained effectively while also serving in a training role. His focus and drive and attention to detail serve as a great example to new teammates at the Department of Transportation.



## Department of Transportation

### **Margaret Repass**

Maggie's interactions with customers is always pleasant and leaves a great impression, and she demonstrates an ability to enthusiastically take on the biggest challenges. She serves and collaborates on numerous process improvement teams including the Purchase Card for Contract Items team, the On-line Hay Permitting Process, and an updated Adopt-a-Highway program. Maggie plays a key role on the Digital Invoice Workflow Team that is working on more efficiently processing invoices to improve promptness and accuracy for accounting. She volunteered to travel the state, providing training to the districts and the Operations division. When Maggie started her position her technical skills became readily apparent, and she took the lead to assist in IT issues. She has become a trusted resource for the team and regularly screen shares with staff to resolve issues.



## Department of Transportation

### **Megan Rodgers**

Megan is all about serving the needs of her teammates and collaborating with people to get the best possible results. When teammates have questions regarding accessing the computer system for information, Megan quickly responds to her team's concerns. She values the people with whom she works, and her effective communication and problem solving with her team is always appreciated. Megan has also proven to be excellent at aligning resources. She is very conscientious in her interactions, making her a great asset to the Department of Transportation team.



## Department of Transportation

### Jarrold Walker



Jarrold Walker is part of the Strategic Planning Division and serves as NDOT's freight and economic development liaison. In his position, Jarrold has no direct reports, nor is he a part of a team. Instead, he is a "one-man-show" who works tirelessly with stakeholders and peers to deliver a multitude of products and programs. This includes administering the Economic Opportunities Grant Program, organizing grant applications for the NDOT, and developing the State's Freight Plan. As part of these responsibilities, Jarrold routinely speaks at conferences or in front of other groups, representing NDOT on topics such as discretionary grants, supply chain optimization, and various other NDOT programs. Jarrold is trusted, respected, and well-liked by his customers and peers.

## Nebraska Department of Transportation

### Terry Wilson



Terry is always thinking of better and more efficient ways to accomplish the tasks assigned to his team. Terry is very involved with all the steps of a project from start to finish, providing leadership and the tools needed to accomplish the team's goals. Terry is not a boss, but a leader. He is fair to his employees and appreciates everyone for the work that they do. Terry's a perfect example on how to interact with the public and is a great representative of the Department of Transportation. Terry is always thinking ahead and preparing for the next task on projects. He has a talent for being able to anticipate a potential problem before it is encountered. Terry has always been patient in teaching and training everyone on his team. He is excellent at communicating his expectations and making sure that his team understands the task ahead of them. The amount of respect that Terry has not only from the people who work with him but from outside of work is a true testament of what kind of man he really is.

## Economic Development

### Rose Baker



Rose Baker started with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development in April of 2014. She made a quick impression on management staff and became entrusted to take on side roles in assisting with several different administrative programs, such as InternNE, Customized Job Training, and the Site & Building Development Fund. Eventually she was promoted to manage those programs under the Business Recruitment team and received a firsthand look at how businesses and people are positively impacted by the agency's programs. She then joined the Talent Team where she helped manage the InternNE program, Developing Youth Talent Initiative, and helped implement new targeted marketing strategies and legislative priorities, such as the Career Scholarship Fund. Rose became the manager of the Talent Team in September of 2021 and has continued to elevate talent initiatives across the state.

## Economic Development

### **Kylee Bischoff**

Kylee Bischoff is the Application Coordinator for the Division of Housing within the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED). Kylee joined the Department's team in the Fall of 2017. Kylee leads the Division of Housing in the intake and processing of eight federally and state funded housing programs and ensures every project awarded is issued a contract in a timely manner, along with having access to their award in the Department's electronic grants management system. Since 2020, Kylee has been an instrumental team member in assisting the agency transition all housing awards from a paper application to an all-electronic application and grants management system.



## Equal Opportunity Commission

### **Sophie G. Belter**

Sophie Belter has almost six years of experience working for the State of Nebraska, having previously served as a Mental Health Security Specialist at DHHS before coming to the Equal Opportunity Commission. At the NEOC, Sophie has been an Investigator with both the employment and housing units and is seen as a leader by their teammates and supervisors. Due to their wealth of knowledge, Sophie was asked to speak on a panel of experts at the 2023 Lincoln Commission on Human Rights conference in Lincoln. Sophie also serves on Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert's LGBTQ+ Advisory Board, where they work to ensure a safe and affirming city for all citizens. Sophie holds a bachelor degree from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and is a long-time resident of the Omaha area.



## Equal Opportunity Commission

### **Ben Noodell**

Ben holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in psychology, with minors in sociology and criminal justice. He has an extensive background in customer service, and has been employed with the State for seven years. Ben is held in high regard by his colleagues who consistently recognize him for the mentoring he provides to his teammates. With a recent influx of new investigators in the Omaha office, Ben has been an invaluable resource to the agency and its new investigators. He makes himself available for questions, and offers assistance and resources to the new employees. Ben's interactions with his colleagues and the the public are always positive and professional, and he provides efficient and knowledgeable customer service to all parties that contact the agency.





## Fire Marshal

### **Robert Folck**

Robert has deep fire service and public service roots. Prior to joining the State Fire Marshal Agency, he was the fire chief for a volunteer department. He has served as a training instructor and volunteered on the state Hazardous Materials Response Team. Robert is the consummate teammate within the agency. He is the first to volunteer whenever help is needed. Customers find Robert helpful and always friendly. His extensive experience and knowledge allows him to work a large area of Northeastern Nebraska, and he always gets the job done. Whenever help is needed he is first in line. As an example, assistance was needed to conduct an inspection in Kimball. Robert was the first to volunteer even though the drive from his home office would be over five hours one way. He works hard, treats customers with respect, and his team members know he will be there for them when called on.



## Fire Marshal

### **Rosemary Hatton**

Rosemary began her career with the State, and the Fire Marshal's office, in 2007. She serves the agency as an Administrative Technician. In those 15 years, Rosemary has proven to be a dedicated and valued employee and is held in high regard by the administrative team. She chooses to see the workplace in a positive light and sets an example for others to emulate in her work ethic and manner in which she treats both customers and co-workers. Rosemary takes pride in her work, and her positivity has spread throughout the agency. All these traits combined make her worthy of recognition.



## History Nebraska

### **Araceli Hernandez**

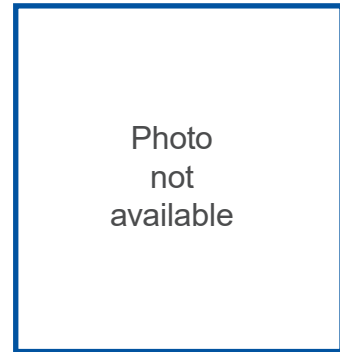
Araceli is the embodiment of excellent leadership. She works to bring Nebraska history to people across the state through virtual field trips. She also collaborates with teachers across the state to see what their classroom and curriculum needs are. Araceli is forward thinking and intentional about the programming she creates and ensures that there are diverse histories being shared. Her passion for creating programming that shares these stories shines through. Araceli is also a leader when it comes to teamwork and collaboration. She is a selfless and inclusive teammate who is always willing to help.



## History Nebraska

### **Sondra Rierson**

Sondra shows amazing leadership skills with a focus on forward thinking, continuous improvement, collaboration, and excellence in customer service. She has a positive attitude at all times and is very humble. She promotes positivity, camaraderie, curiosity and inclusion, both within the department and throughout the agency. Sondra manages a diverse group of individuals from multiple teams and ensures that everyone feels heard and seen. She goes above and beyond to support History Nebraska, making both small and large changes to ensure staff success. Sondra is an exceptional problem solver and shows a great deal of care and respect towards her teams. As a part of the Leadership Team, she asks meaningful questions and helps to move the agency forward. Sondra is a model of excellent leadership within the State of Nebraska.



## Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

### **Eric Buckwalter**

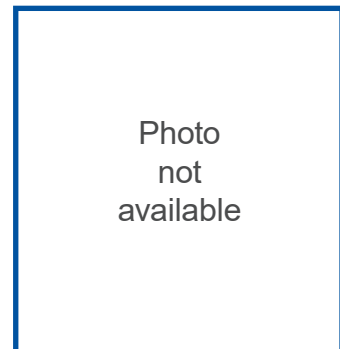
In the past year, Eric has taken on additional responsibilities to help lead the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) program. When a supervisory position became open, Eric jumped into this new challenge with high level of professionalism. NCBVI has seen improvements to the NBE program since Eric became the supervisor. He has managed the program well when the staff he supervises changed, and always maintains a positive attitude. When Eric is confronted with difficult situations, he maintains his professionalism and keeps situations moving in a productive direction. He started to work for the Commission for the Blind as a vocational rehabilitation counselor; where he assisted blind people in understanding that with proper training and opportunity, anyone can be successful. Eric is admired and respected by the people he serves as well as his colleagues.



## Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

### **Angie Hoff**

Angie created an innovative program to reach nearly 200 individuals and was featured in the PSA for this event. In undertaking this project, she collaborated together with staff to ensure they had the communication they needed, while maintaining her caseload at the highest level. Angie believes in the customers she serves and advocates for them to receive high level training. Angie leads by example and serves as a resource for her coworkers to learn from.





## Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy

### Lynn Chamberlin

Lynn's dedication is shown in how she supports her team and the NeWAP network. Due to staff shortages, she has filled in many gaps to keep the Weatherization Assistance Program operating to meet our goals and objectives. Lynn has also been instrumental in developing a nationally recognized consumption analysis on the NeWAP completed units on energy efficiency savings the program has provided. This provides each subgrantee information on where their program can improve to provide greater energy efficiency and reduce the energy burden of low-income families. This allows families to spend their money on other household essentials like healthcare, food, or housing. Lynn's dedication to her job, her teammates, and Nebraska's Weatherization Assistance Program (NeWAP) for over 34 years is the definition of the Excellence in Leadership.



## Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy

### Matthew Standley

Matthew has been asked to assist with several tasks this past year, all outside the normal realm of his duties. He has completed them all well and above expectations. A few examples include assisting in NDEE's Strategic Plan, Pay Increases, Engineering Microfilm Imaging & Conversion, Position Safety Forms, Calendar Contest, Training Outreach, and Legislative Session. All of these Matthew not only did what was asked, but anticipated the subsequent steps of the projects and completed them quickly than before deadlines. Matthew has the ability to take a multitude of detailed information and complete it in a way that is understandable. Matthew does an outstanding job of communicating with the public and is the definition of teamwork, forward thinking, serving by example, and customer focus.



## Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

### Dawn M. Bice

Dawn is with the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home (ENVH). In her role as the Senior HR Specialist, Dawn is often the very first voice and face that applicants hear and see. Dawn plays an essential role in the recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts for all teammate positions at ENVH. Dawn's work is not easy but has proven to be very effective. Prior to, during and after COVID-19 seeking out and hiring quality teammates to hire has been Dawn's passion. For applicants, new hires, and existing teammates Dawn is the "go to resource" for all things related to Human Resources. During the height of the COVID pandemic ENVH employed near just 50 percent of all available positions. Dawn, in conjunction with NDVA Central Office, worked her magic with creative employee incentive and retention programs to attract and retain teammates. As a result ENVH has now filled over 98 percent of all available positions.

## Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

### **Kristine Hughbanks**

Kris is a registered nurse with 38 years of nursing experience including 13 years of management and leadership in health care. Her experience in leadership includes the leadership of large departments like the CNVH's Nursing Department, Director of the CHI Health Good Samaritan's Maternity Center and Emergency Services or Director of the Patient Care Services for the same hospital. During these years of service, Kris persevered in her personal growth, attaining a Master of Science in Nursing in 2010 followed by a Doctorate of Nursing Practice in 2017. She leads over 100 teammates and excels in clear and effective communication, and is very easy to understand by her reports which enables real teamwork building. She has excellent customer service skills and she values all people whether members, families, teammates, volunteers, or visitors.



## Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

### **Kali Peter**

Kali has been with the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home (ENVH) for nearly two years. Currently, Kali serves as the Assistant Director of Nursing (ADON). She is a very proactive teammate in the nursing leadership team at ENVH, playing a very active role in directing staff in clinical care, coordinating the admission process of new resident Members, providing direction in the staff scheduling process and generally helping to assist the Director of Nursing in the provision of clinical nursing services at ENVH. Kali actively displayed her leadership skills and willingness to "go the extra mile" in the spring of 2023. With an unforeseen temporary reduction in several key nursing leadership positions, for a period of approximately three months, Kali volunteered to serve in three separate role simultaneously, in order to ensure resident Members continued to receive the appropriate level of nursing care. Once all key nursing leadership position were again fully operational, Kali returned to her primary role as the ADON; however, the additional duties and her leadership during a nursing leadership staffing emergency was invaluable.



## Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

### **Emily Rogers**

Emily came on board in 2020 as someone new to the world of supervision. She quickly embraced her new role as Certified Master Social Worker Supervisor with two social workers to supervise. It was evident from day one that Emily possessed the vision, proactive management style, and leading by example required to be successful. Valuing people and customer service focused excellence are cornerstones of a good supervisor and an excellent social worker; and Emily definitely has these qualities. Emily is a valued member of her leadership team and collaborates well with her fellow leaders and teammates. Emily is assigned a caseload of members and serves their needs with respect and empathy.





## Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

### **Elizabeth Stricker**

Elizabeth values the members and teammates at Western Nebraska Veterans' Home and serves by example every day. She performs her job duties at the highest level and is extremely reliable and dependable. She enhances the quality of life, particularly with our Veteran members, in her efforts at work. Her confidence and integrity, as well as her wealth of knowledge through her years of service, make her a respected teammate. Through the years she has worked at the VA, her contributions have been immeasurable and she is considered always dependable. Elizabeth performs her Business Manager job duties at the highest level is a reliable team member with a wealth of knowledge.



## Nebraska Library Commission

### **Jerry Breazile**

Jerry's professional knowledge and experience are essential to the Library Commission's operations. Jerry's position includes a range of functions with primary responsibility for managing the Commission's budget, finances, personnel, and other business operations. He performs these duties with exceptional knowledge and skill. Jerry approaches his work with good judgment and creativity, consistently going beyond expectations to contribute to the Commission's mission.



## Nebraska Library Commission

### **Tessa Terry**

As the Library Commission's Communications Coordinator, Tessa excels in applying design technologies to communicate the Commission's programs, services, and activities. Tessa's design skills and creativity are applied effectively for the Commission's statewide promotion, development, and coordination of library services mission. Tessa takes initiative, works efficiently, independently, and productively in carrying out position responsibilities. Successful teamwork and collaboration are demonstrated in Tessa's work.



## Nebraska Military Department

### Robert Jones

Robert (Bob) Jones has been with the Nebraska Military Department for eight years. During his time with the 155th Security Forces Squadron, Bob has excelled in various roles. He began as the first line of defense to the Nebraska Air National Guard (NEANG), an installation entry controller. As he progressed through the ranks, he was certified as a Base Defense Operations Controller, responsible for the overall communication and control of all security events during his shift. Throughout this time, Bob continually showed a passion for knowledge and strove for perfection in the performance of his duties. Because of his initiative, he was chosen to be the primary Gate Annex operator for the NEANG. His continuous pursuit of innovation was essential in the updating of base access forms used to process over 2,500 personnel annually. Bob's customer-focused mindset is what allows the seamless processing of visitors and contractors onto the installation ensuring an unbroken stream of communication with every agency and office on the NEANG.



## Nebraska Military Department

### Sue Spence

Sue has worked as the Human Resources Specialist for the Nebraska Military Department for four years and for the State of Nebraska a over eight years. During this time, she has exhibited the highest level of professionalism, customer support, and competency possible. She has assumed additional responsibilities in the absence of the Human Resource Manager and aided in the transition of a new manager to ensure seamless continuity of operations. As a retired Chief Master Sergeant in the Nebraska Air National Guard, Sue's understanding of the structure and operations of the Nebraska Military Department enable her to better deal with complex human resource issues and provide recommendations and guidance to supervisors on manpower and personnel issues. Sue's collaborative teamwork and customer service are valued contributions to the Nebraska Military Department.



## Nebraska Parole Board

### Sue Olson

Sue worked for the Board of Parole for seven years. She diligently worked to ensure that projects met the highest standard and never missed a detail when it came to operations and the design of spaces and projects. She brought her passion and love of design to every project and would shine when she saw the pieces come together. Sue's no nonsense approach was appreciated when deadlines arrived and everything was completed as planned. Sue was a loyal colleague who stepped in at a moments notice and was available when a teammate needed her. She had a strong personal code of ethics and always did the right thing. It was an honor to nominate her and we were thankful everyday for her gifts, talents and accomplishments. Regrettably, Sue passed away earlier this year. She will be greatly missed by her team members.





## Nebraska Parole Board

### **Deanna R. Schmidt**

Deanna has been with the State of Nebraska for 19 years working at the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) and currently, with the Nebraska Board of Parole (NBOP) as the Administrative Release Specialized Parole Officer. She is well known for serving as an example to others for her dedication to her work and to the State of Nebraska. Deanna is conscientious in her work product and communications with her Teammates. She routinely will take the time needed to complete projects until she's 100% satisfied with the results. As the Administrative Release Officer, she coordinates the release of incarcerated individuals onto parole from correctional institutions, manages a large docket of cases for the Board of Parole, and keeps the parole hearings running smoothly with focus towards a positive interaction for the customer. Deanna is warm, genuine, personable, and makes her environment an enjoyable place to work.



## Nebraska State Patrol

### **Eric J. Aho, Jr.**

Sergeant Eric Aho is a 24 year veteran of the Nebraska State Patrol. Eric spent nearly 20 years in the traffic division specializing in motor vehicle accident reconstruction and enforcing misdemeanor and felony violations of law. In 2019, Eric transferred to the computer crimes lab as a digital forensics examiner. In 2022, Eric was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and now oversees the operation of the computer lab. Sergeant Aho assumed his role as a Sergeant last August and in less than a year's time has made accomplishments that few leaders make in several years, let alone in less than one. During his time as an examiner, Eric was always willing to assist his co-workers in the lab, external partners, and investigators with examinations, search warrants, and other tasks without hesitation or complaints. His attitude is stellar but of all his qualities, his work ethic is the best. He often is the first to arrive at the office and typically is the last to leave. Eric readily takes on challenges as they come to him and the people he leads follow suit.



## Nebraska State Patrol

### **Sean David Case**

Sean Case is the full-time Aviation Support Mechanic responsible for five aircraft and hanger maintenance. Sean has been an invaluable asset to the Aviation Support Unit and Nebraska State Patrol by continuing his aircraft maintenance education and learning other law enforcement components. Sean has taken it upon himself to familiarize himself with video downlink systems, camera systems, and SRS radio systems to be able to troubleshoot and maintain those items and the aircraft themselves. The pilots within ASU rely on his expertise to keep the aircraft airworthy and safe to fly. Sean has also participated in several missions as a crew member when ASU didn't have a TFO or another pilot available. Sean never turns away from work or an opportunity to learn something new.

## Nebraska State Patrol

### Steven W. Hearn

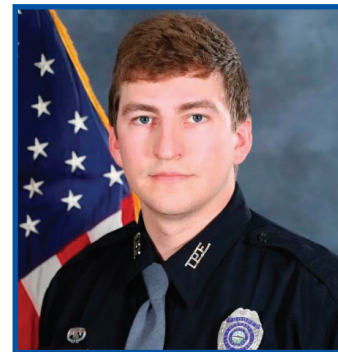
Steve Hearn has worked for the State of Nebraska for over 40 years. Steve began State Service as a corrections officer for NDCS, then joined Capitol Security as a security guard and communications specialist, eventually becoming the second shift Sergeant. Steve Worked in Capitol Security as it was originally under DAS Building Security, and continued service after the transfer to NSP Capitol Security Division. Steve is the perfect example of a leader, not only mastering the job he has, but working with true passion. Steve has excelled in his position, striving to help others achieve their goals; his drive for supporting others has been key to the Capitol Security's success. Steve proficiently communicates, allocates resources, and lifts others to accomplish tasks and duties.



## Nebraska State Patrol

### Brandon Smith

Trooper Brandon Smith exemplifies the mission of the Nebraska State Patrol "Pro Bono Publico." He is intrinsically motivated to constantly provide the highest level of service to the public. His efforts are not only about the volume of serious arrests that he makes but in how he makes them with respect and even at times kindness to individuals. Brandon recognizes that how he treats people matters in how they perceive police officers, especially fellow state troopers. His positive attitude makes him an easy choice for recruitment efforts and assignments that involve engagement with the public. His "can do" attitude results in him getting selected for extra assignments and duties. He performs these extra duties with professionalism and always wants to do his part to make sure his team is successful. Brandon's kindness, ethics, decision making and performance are the gold standard for his peers and other members of the Nebraska State Patrol.



## Office of the Chief Information Officer

### Bud Gilfillen

Having worked for the State of Nebraska for almost six years, Budd has worked his way up from an SOS Temporary position to his current Lead role. While gathering knowledge and insight along the way he continues to acquire more. Why this makes Budd exemplary is because of how eager he is to pass what he has learned along to others and help them. This is made evident by the sign in his work area (given to him by his peers & co-workers) that simply states "Ask Budd". It is Budd's willingness to help, collaborate, improve, and serve that has led to this nomination for the Excellence in Leadership Award. Budd is a Lead on the IT Applications Developer team at OCIO primarily working on the ECM (OnBase) and Sharepoint systems. As a vital member of the OCIO team he assists in writing scripts to maintain and automate features within current OCIO systems, leads the development of performance monitoring tools to allow OCIO to react before negative impact, develops automated alerts to internal and external users to make them aware of critical issues, and often helps outside his area of expertise because he enjoys the challenge as well as helping others.





## Public Employees Retirement System

### **Coral Bryant**

Coral has been with the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System (NPERS) for almost four years and is currently the team lead for data services. Coral exhibits many of the great qualities and traits that a good leader should display. She is highly accurate and thorough in carrying out her duties, is proactive in assessing and completing projects even before being asked to do them, and shows care, respect, and an amazing attitude in dealing with both internal and external peers. Coral's willingness to innovate and help others was on full display when she took on the manual tax processing project, which meant that she reviewed calculations and tax forms prior to the implementation of a more automated solution. All these things make Coral a perfect example of Excellence in Leadership at NPERS.



## Public Employees Retirement System

### **Vanessa Hohlen**

Vanessa has been with NPERS for nearly three years and is currently the Internal Auditor. Vanessa has worked tirelessly to establish a team and lead by example completing audits, fostering open communications with our major agency stakeholders like Employer Reporting Agents and the PERB, providing customer service to individuals during the audit process that is both helpful, friendly, and relevant. According to her manager, she is to be commended for adding a focus on Internal Controls. Her trusted work is consistently accurate and efficient.

Vanessa's proactive attitude has meant that she headed up projects like coordinating the move of DCP participants from Empower to Ameritas and participated in Employer Reporting training workshops. She has also represented NPERS in speaking engagements for The Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO). It is said that being an auditor is a difficult job; however, Vanessa never ceases to accomplish positive interactions with everyone around her, while innovating the auditing process here at NPERS, and making it all look effortless.



## Public Service Commission

### **Matt Efken**

Matt Efken serves as an agency attorney with the Public Service Commission. Although he has helped to support several departments at the PSC, he has been the primary attorney for the State 911 Department. He has been instrumental in helping the State 911 Department and the 911 Centers across the state transition from legacy 911 to Next Generation 911. From the initial planning to the identification of vendors through multiple RFP processes, to negotiating contracts, he demonstrates his customer service focused excellence and that he values people with his strong desire to help improve public safety for the citizens of Nebraska. His innovative, forward thinking helps resolve potential problems. He is an outstanding communicator, often relied upon to draft Commission orders and write comments to be filed with federal agencies on behalf of the Commission. He is also an excellent teammate and strong supporter of his coworkers and is extremely deserving of this recognition.



## Public Service Commission

### Laurie Casados

Laurie was essential to the successful implementation of two large and complex federal grants. Her willingness and ability to research the grant requirements and regulations along with her in-depth knowledge of broadband was essential to receiving these federal awards. She continues to keep the entire team on task as we continue to implement these programs. This past evaluation period, Laurie proved she can adapt and respond to extreme challenges. She was able to tackle and assume all of this additional work while still completing her daily tasks and assisting with the biennial budget submission. Her desire to learn and grow in all things was essential to a great many difficult projects this past year.



## State Treasurer

### Jennifer Card

Jen has exhibited all of the character traits listed for Excellence in Leadership in every role in which she has served over the past 18 years. She strives to continually improve herself in her role at the State Treasurer, and she continually improves herself across the spaces of the character traits listed for Excellence in Leadership. Jen is a valuable staff member of the NSTO's NCSPC/SDU and continually goes above and beyond with her dedication to her role, responsibilities, co-workers and colleagues, and the people for whom the NSTO's NCSPC/SDU provides services.



## State Treasurer

### Stacy Pfeifer

Stacy Pfeifer serves as the Assistant State Treasurer/Director of the Enable Savings Plan. Stacy has fully embraced her position and is always looking for ways to improve the Plan. Stacy is responsible for the administration of the Enable Savings Plan, and she shines with her ability to encourage Nebraskans to open an Enable account for persons with a disability. She makes everyone feel welcomed and shares a kind smile to all those that seek her assistance. Stacy has excelled in growing the Enable Savings Plan, and she is constantly working to develop innovative initiatives that will better serve the disability community. She can multi-task effectively and is able to handle a high-volume workload with accuracy. Stacy is also willing to lend a helping hand within the office to ensure success with the day-to-day operations. She handles her job with ease and through her professionalism provides excellent customer service to all Nebraskans.



# NEBRASKA



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