SAMHSA Staff Say “I Do” to LGBT Benefits

Recently, a few SAMHSA employees, colleagues and family members gathered in a second floor conference room for a celebration—of a piece of paper, the Declaration of Domestic Partnership. The one-page form represents an important first step toward extending benefits to same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees. Details are still being worked out, and it’s not yet clear the form is even required. But for SAMHSA’s Sylvia Fisher, Ph.D., Nancy Kennedy, Dr.P.H., David Thompson and David Wilson, submitting the form matters. Says David Thompson, “It’s symbolic. The right to apply for long-term health care insurance, for hospital visitation rights, the Family Leave Act, are codified now—We no longer have to go to a Supervisor under ‘special circumstances.’” Based on current law, not all benefits, for instance, health and life insurance, are available yet. Passage of the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act would extend the full range of benefits to staff with same-sex partners. And The President’s Memorandum of June 2, 2010, imposes an on-going obligation for agencies to extend any new benefits. Sylvia and her life partner were legally married in Massachusetts, although their marriage is not recognized by the Federal government.

Surrounded by her friends, daughter and spouse, she says, “For me personally, this is acknowledgment from the government of my 27-year relationship—that I’m in the service of my country, a tax payer and a Federal employee. It’s important, to have this finally recognized by my employer.” Others in the room, who include Dave Wilson, marking a 20-year relationship; David Thompson, 17 years; and Nancy Kennedy, looking forward to her 28th anniversary in October—quietly nod in agreement.

For more information:
- Contact Pam Kelley, SAMHSA’s Division of Management Systems, 240.276.1192.
- To submit the form, contact Keeya Flournoy, Human Resource Specialist, 301-827-2304.
- To obtain the form, go to: http://www.ltcfeds.com/
- To read the President’s June 2, 2010, Memorandum, go to http://www.whitehouse.gov.

Coming Soon: “A Place for Us” — New SAMHSA Musical Production

Last year’s first-ever SAMHSA theatrical production, “Pathways to Recovery: A Musical Journey,” was an overwhelming success—and the SAMHSA PeopleFirst Theatre Players are already hard at work on a new production for 2010. Scripted by SAMHSA employees, the new musical is called “A Place For Us.”

This year’s project represents an exciting collaboration among SAMHSA’s PeopleFirst One Community Workgroup and SAMHSA’s HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Workgroups. “A Place for Us” begins in a Woodstock-like setting evoking the youth culture of the ‘60s. As the story develops, the characters experience consequences of their behavior, including addiction and HIV/AIDS. They face community attitudes and alienation, and finally learn to overcome their own attitudes before they recognize the need to seek help. The message of “A Place for Us” mirrors SAMHSA’s message: Prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover. This year, three performances will be held during World AIDS Day week, December 1-3, 2010. Watch for audition notices—soon!
Employee Spotlight:
Josefine Haynes-Battle, CSAP

Relaxing in the half-light of the plane, CDR Josefine Haynes Battle, R.N., B.S.N., M.S., had spent some time thinking back on her trip with Julian, 22, her son, and Brianna, 5, to Morocco, where daughter Marissa, 26, serves in the Peace Corps. She’d mentally assessed the logistics that faced her once back home, when family members would fly in from around the world for her son Julian’s upcoming graduation (with honors) and an oncologist, they were only too happy to drop back and serve as translators and well, “gophers,” she grins.

Now, sitting with her hands wrapped between seats as she was yelling, ‘Turn around, around!’” she remembers, meanwhile wedged in, holding the baby. (“Thank God I’d lost all that weight!”)

Soon after touch-down in New York City, Josefine walked the baby, who was doing fine, over to paramedics waiting by an ambulance. After a long walk through the airport and a trip to the Ladies’ to change clothing, she found herself greeted like a rock star when she and the kids made it to the warmest spot in the plane, next to the flight attendant’s seat, and squeezed in, holding the baby. (“Thank God I’d lost all that weight!”)

Cold herself, Josefine quickly located the warmest spot in the plane, next to the flight attendant’s seat, and squeezed in, holding the baby. (“Thank God I’d lost all that weight!”)

In our continuing salute to the many who helped make SAMHSA’s first employee newsletter a reality, here are (most of) the people we missed in our first photo session:

From left to right: Curtis Austin, Dr. Eric Broderick, Juli Harkins and Joanne Atay. Unable to make it at the last minute was Ruby Neville.

COMING TO YOU SOON!
September 18, 2010: SAMHSA reveals its new ‘look and feel’ with a brand-new homepage. One new feature? An easy-to-use, comprehensive online ordering system for all SAMHSA publications. Get what you need, when you need it!