

### Karen's Corner



As many of you know, West Virginia ranks among the bottom of America's health rankings. As of 2014, overall, we are ranked 44th. In the effort to curb West Virginia's high incidence of preventable chronic diseases, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources is working to improve nutrition for those we serve through programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

SNAP provides monthly benefits to help eligible families buy food, and we are encouraging greater consumption of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables by partnering with farmers markets and farmers. Through this, we are working to increase awareness and promote incentives such as doubling benefits when the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card is used for SNAP purchases.

The project is so important to those families who might think they cannot eat fresh and affordably. The doubling initiative is especially beneficial since some of our SNAP households use all of their monthly benefits well before the end of the benefit month.

In addition, DHHR is encouraging everyone to start growing their own produce. Director of the Office of EBT, Pam Santone, and BPH's Loren Rousseau of the Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health, have been involved in community gardens. Projects like the ones on Chestnut Street and at Thomas Memorial Hospital in South Charleston show residents they can plant and grow seeds of health in their own.

DHHR offices around the state are also participating in similar activities. In May, the BPH Wellness Committee hosted a plant, seed and bulb exchange in Charleston. Employees in Cabell County planted strawberries and have plans to grow herb gardens. In Raleigh County, employees are working on a project to decorate flower pots outside the building. In addition, the Grant, Hardy and Pendleton District is focusing on healthy eating, budgeting and physical activities with a Food Nutrition Program class.

I am so proud of the entire DHHR team for making such a positive impact through initiatives like these. All those involved have made it a priority to develop important partnerships to share the opportunity for a healthy lifestyle.

For a list of farmers markets that accept EBT cards, visit [www.wvdhhr.org/ebt/](http://www.wvdhhr.org/ebt/)

### Adopted Youth Wins State Social Studies Fair

Through recruitment efforts and partnerships, DHHR works to spread the importance of "forever" families. This spring, a young girl named Lexi joined the campaign by sharing her story.

Lexi was placed into state custody at three years old due to an unstable home environment. After seven foster care placements, she met Bill and Misti French. Bill and Misti were planning to adopt an infant, but after spending time with Lexi, they realized Lexi was their perfect match. Bill, Misti and Lexi became a forever family through adoption on February 14, 2014, Valentine's Day.

Lexi is thriving in her new home and has become an advocate for foster care and adoption. Her social studies fair project, "Adoption: What Knits a Family Together?" focused on the need for foster and adoptive parents throughout West Virginia, and won first place at the state social studies fair at the Charleston Civic Center in April 2015.

"Lexi's inspiring story is one that echoes across the state," said DHHR Cabinet



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## Adopted Youth, *continued*

Secretary Karen L. Bowling. “Currently, more than 1,000 children are legally adoptable and are waiting for permanent and loving homes, like that offered by the French family,” said DHHR Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling.

Secretary Bowling encourages anyone interested or who knows someone interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent to learn more at the Bureau for Children and Families website: [www.wvdhhr.org/bcf/](http://www.wvdhhr.org/bcf/)

## Employee Spotlight: Phyllis Penn

“It’s a wonderful job. I realized it when I first came to the door.” That’s what Phyllis Penn, 45 year Lakin Hospital employee, said when asked about her many years as a state worker.

Phyllis, a native of the Oak Hill area in West Virginia, started working at Lakin on November 3, 1969, just a few months after graduating from Mount Hope High School. The opportunity arose when her mother, who also worked for the Hospital, asked her if she would like a summer job. She gladly accepted and worked three weeks in Lakin’s Dietary Department until a position became available on the switchboard.

“I could have worked in either, but I chose the switchboard. I always wanted to talk to people,” remembered Phyllis.

And Phyllis is still passionate about her job. “When I work the phones, I always make sure parents get ahold of their kids and kids get ahold of their parents,” she explained. “Even if it seems small, if it’s important to them, it’s important to me.”

After more than four decades, Phyllis says that the people are still her favorite part of the job. “I love all the residents, employees and visitors. I have met so many different personalities and have worked with many great administrators, too,” she explained.

Her continued dedication to helping residents and their families has led her to receive a number of awards and recognitions. In 1986 and 1996, she was voted “Employee of the Year” by Hospital staff and, in 1989, she was honored for a five year period without sick leave.

“I met Phyllis at the Public Service Recognition celebration and had the great pleasure of hearing about her time at Lakin Hospital,” said DHHR Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling. “For years, Phyllis has served as a great example to her peers and I am honored to have her as part of the DHHR team. Congratulations is due to Phyllis for her many accomplishments and great commitment to not just the Hospital and the Department, but the people of West Virginia.”

Phyllis leads by example and shares the importance of reliability with new employees: “Try and be responsible, come to work and be friendly to everyone.” This was something instilled in her by her mother, Edith Ross, who worked at Lakin Hospital for 35 years after starting as a psychiatric aide in 1951.



Phyllis with Secretary Bowling at the 2015 Public Service Recognition Week celebration.

Phyllis’ husband of 45 years also worked at Lakin Hospital at the start of his career. The two high school sweethearts have one daughter who shares her mother’s compassion for people as a paramedic and medical examiner for Mason County. Phyllis’ granddaughter is also seeking to serve others as a nurse and is currently attending Marshall University. Phyllis said she is proud of her daughter and granddaughter as they listened to her sound advice: “Anytime you can help somebody, you’re already ahead.”

This November, Phyllis will have 46 years as an employee of Lakin Hospital and she isn’t planning on leaving just yet. “I could have retired 10 years ago, but I wasn’t ready to say goodbye to Lakin,” she said. “My goal is to be blessed enough to make it to 50 years.”



Phyllis has been with Lakin Hospital since 1969. She is pictured at her desk here in 1992.