

# dhh Employee UPDATE

*Our Mission: To serve the people of North Carolina by enabling individuals, families and communities to be healthy and secure, and to achieve social and economic well-being.*

A monthly publication for employees of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

## State homeless panel welcomes four members

Four members were sworn recently into the N.C. Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs, an advisory panel on issues affecting people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Neil Miller Belenky of Greensboro, Glenn E. Silver of Whitakers, Lawrence Wilson of Raleigh, and Pamela S. Kilpatrick of Apex took the oath of office administered by Associate Justice Patricia Timmons-Goodson of the N.C. Supreme Court during a meeting of the council in Raleigh on May 1. Council member appointments are for three-year terms. The council has 29 members.

“These new members bring valued skills to the table as we continue our work of identifying and implementing strategies to prevent homelessness in our state,” said Linda Povlich, chairman of the council.

Belenky is president of United Way of Greater Greensboro, a post he has



ICCHP swearing-in ceremony

held since 1990. With United Way’s support, agencies in Greensboro, High Point and Guilford County are partnering to form a task force to develop a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Guilford County. Guilford is among a dozen communities across North Carolina either in the process of adopting, or that have adopted, 10-year plans to end homelessness.

Silver is a housing coordinator for the Best Practice Team of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services. He provides technical assistance and leadership in the planning, development and expansion of affordable supportive housing for people receiving MH/DD/SAS services.

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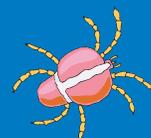
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Wilson is director of the N.C. Office of Economic Opportunity, part of the state Department of Health and Human Services. He is responsible for the Emergency Shelter Grants, the Community Services Block Grant, and Weatherization Assistance programs.

Kilpatrick is an analyst for the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services in the Office of State Budget and Management, where she works with senior leadership to manage budget and program management issues.

The Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs advises the governor and the secretary of DHHS on issues affecting people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The council provides recommen-

dations for joint and cooperative efforts to better meet the needs of the homeless residents of North Carolina.

Research by the council has documented that homelessness is a substantial issue in North Carolina, identifying more than 11,000 homeless people in a one-day count across the state in January 2005. Of those, more than 2,300 were children. ■



***Finding DHHS policy is just a click away!\_***

***Have you ever wondered how to request a cell phone for work?  
Or what situations the department considers conflicts of interest?  
Or what actions are required to safeguard client information?***

These topics, and many more, are addressed in departmental policy. All departmental policies are published on the DHHS website in the DHHS Policy and Procedure Manual. The manual is available on line at <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dhs/>. For answers to the questions above, refer to the following policies: Telephone Acquisition and Use (in the Communications section), Conflict of Interest (in the General Administration section), and the Privacy Manual, Rights of Clients chapter (in the Security and Privacy section).

This one-stop site gives you everything you need to know about department policies covering most questions that arise in the workplace.

# Eliminating Health Disparities: Workshop gives grant recipients training, a chance to showcase community projects

Major health issues such as cancer, diabetes, infant mortality, HIV/AIDS and STDs affect minority populations in North Carolina disproportionately, presenting a major healthcare challenge for all of North Carolina. In response, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Community-Focused Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative (CFEHDI) to focus greater attention on the elimination of minority health disparities and to build the capacity of local public health departments, American Indian tribes, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations.

The N.C. Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, which administers the CFEHDI grants, has awarded 61 competitive grants to local organizations for program planning and capacity building. Representative Thomas E. Wright, chairman of the Minority Health Advisory Council, hosted a workshop and project showcase for the grantees on May 18 in Raleigh.

Participants heard from state leaders including Rep. Wright, DHHS Secretary Carmen Odom, and State Health Director Leah Devlin, as well as community leaders. They learned about reporting requirements, fiscal accountability, and program evaluation, and had the opportunity to both explain their own projects and to learn about other community projects during the day-long event. ■



1. As executive director of the N.C. Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, Barbara Pullen-Smith welcomed participants to the training event, the theme of which was "Healthy Communities. EveryOne Matters."
2. Cheryl Emanuel was one of the many community participants providing input and asking questions during the sessions.
3. Rep. Thomas Wright, chairman of the N.C. Minority Health Advisory Council and a tireless leader in working to eliminate health disparities, praised the attendees for the good work they do and encouraged them to keep on making a difference.
4. Chatham Hospital's Hispanic Health Initiative received one of the community grants.
5. The Cumberland County Detention Center was another grantee highlighting its project at the event.



## Jalil Isa

# *iSalud y Saludos!*

## Mercury in Durham

A recent incident involving the distribution and subsequent contamination of mercury has caused a stir in Durham. At last check, the Environmental Protection Agency was still on the scene helping with the clean-up process...in what may end up being a job lasting weeks.

So here's what happened: A gentleman got hold of mercury that police say he stole from his workplace; he later took that mercury to a church service where he gave some to some of the children who attended. Apparently, the man simply thought it was a neat-looking substance that the kids might get a kick out of. One child, in particular, later took it to school and handed some out to several of his classmates—who, in some cases, have since shown signs of mercury poisoning. The church, a school, and several homes were all cordoned off as clean-up crews worked on removing enough of the toxin to safely allow people back inside.

Many of the victims—as well as the man who initially gave the mercury for the kids to play with—were Latino. Durham health workers relied on several bilingual staff—myself included—to help during the crisis. Even in the midst of all this mess, police admit that there was no ill-will or malice involved in the events that transpired. It was simply a lack of awareness on the dangers associated with the shiny metallic liquid. And that brings me to the point of this writing. This was another case where lack of knowledge could have had terrible consequences. This is a lesson not lost on any of those who worked this incident. Many of us at the scene recalled playing with the mercury in broken thermometers, as kids. This is just another example of how what we know about things today has altered how we deal with them. In the case of mercury, I suppose a couple of decades ago, many would have been shocked at seeing the magnitude of the response in Durham. Today, it's enough to turn it into a major incident requiring major clean-up.

In some ways, I'm glad to see the number of individuals who've acknowledged their surprise at seeing what a big deal mercury is today. These people have admitted they probably engaged in some risky play with the substance in their earlier years. So in this regard, this was not ignorance that was confined to just one cultural group. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. As we've seen in previous years, there have been situations that have come up where immigrant Latinos who have not received the same education—and who have different backgrounds and customs—have been involved in accidents that

could have been prevented. Not being accustomed to or familiar with the use of safety equipment at construction sites or failing to recognize the dangers of carbon monoxide have been some notable examples.

In this most recent case of mercury poisoning, there was clearly a need for reaching out and educating this community on the dangers of this substance. But this also gave many of us who grew up here and believe ourselves to be well educated...a chance to realize there are still many things we've failed to learn along the way. Luckily, manufacturing practices have all but made it impossible for us here to get a hold of mercury by way of thermometers (what was the last time you saw a mercury thermometer at the drug store?). But there are still many things which might pose a danger to us, were it not for the fact that they've been made more inaccessible. Let's hope that a combination of proper education—along with getting things out of the hands of those who may not realize the hidden dangers—will help make us all safer in the long run. ■

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jalil". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# New Public Health ad campaign warns parents of children’s skin cancer risk

A new North Carolina Public Health advertising campaign about the dangers of skin cancer from sunburn ran in newspapers across the state in May. Aimed at parents with young children, the print ads warned, “It only takes 5 sunburns to double the risk of skin cancer,” while featuring a photo of a smiling child that appeared to have been burned through to the next page of the publication. Smaller Post-It ads with the same message also were placed on the front page of newspapers.



“As the weather warms back up again, we’re all eager to get outside,” said State Health Director Leah Devlin. “But what parents do today can have a lasting impact on their children’s long-term health risk, in this case in terms of skin cancer. Just take these basic steps—limit sun exposure, cover up, wear a hat and sunglasses, and always wear a sunscreen SPF 15 or higher—to help protect children and grownups from skin cancer in the years to come.”



“We chose this message because it conveys that sunburn risk is not just from the obvious times, like trips to the beach or to the lake,” said Walter Shepherd, director of the Comprehensive Cancer Program, N.C. Division of Public Health. “Sunburn can occur any time children are exposed to the sun for more than a few minutes, whether that’s at the beach, biking with mom, or watching a sister’s soccer game, so good sun protection is

always important.” The Comprehensive Cancer Program works to reduce cancer in North Carolinians by raising awareness of cancer prevention, cancer screenings, and early detection.

The ads were developed under a partnership between the North Carolina Division of Public Health’s Comprehensive Cancer Program and SunSense North Carolina.

For more information about skin cancer, call **1-800-4-CANCER**. ■

## Rabies: Use caution around bats, other wildlife

Spring and summer mean more outdoor time and more open windows—and more chances for people to come in contact with wildlife, including flying bats.

While many people are aware that raccoons, foxes and unvaccinated dogs and cats may carry rabies, many do not know that bats can also transmit this deadly disease to people. And because bats are small and quiet, and their bites are usually painless, people don't always realize when they have been bitten.

“A woman in Durham was bitten by a rabid bat in May,” said N.C. Public Health veterinarian Lee Hunter. “Luckily, she saw the bat and was able to safely capture it so it could be tested. Tests showed the bat was rabid. She is now undergoing post-exposure rabies treatment and should be fine.”

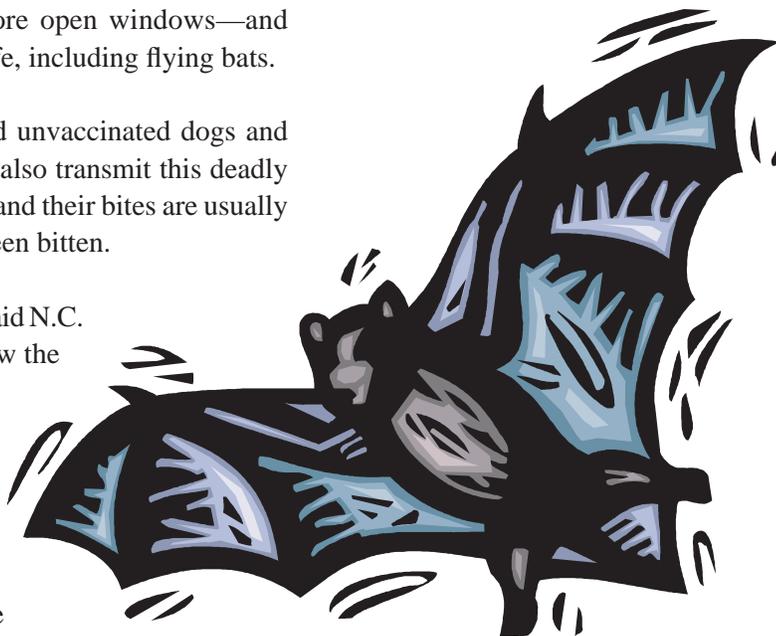
“A boy in Texas was not so lucky. In April, a bat flew into his bedroom and woke him up. He did not realize he had been bitten and so did not seek immediate medical treatment. Three weeks later he became ill and was rushed to the hospital, but it was too late to save his life,” Dr. Hunter said.

“While rabies disease can be prevented if a person is treated very soon after they are exposed, once symptoms develop rabies is nearly always fatal. Since there is no known cure, we want to let people know what they can do to protect themselves and their families,” Hunter said.

In recent years, there have only been a few human cases of rabies in the United States and most of those cases were traced to bats. Bat bites can be difficult to detect and may not cause a person to wake from a sound sleep.

So, Dr. Hunter said, do not sleep in a cabin, tent, shelter or lodging facility if bats are present. If you awaken to find a bat in your room, tent or cabin, it should be captured and tested for rabies as quickly as possible, and you should seek medical advice. If the bat cannot be captured, you have to assume you have been exposed and seek medical treatment.

Use care when capturing a bat. Never handle a bat with your bare hands. If you can confine the bat in a closed room where it cannot escape, do that and call your local animal control for help. If you must capture the bat yourself, wear leather work gloves. You will need a small box or metal can, a piece of cardboard and tape. When the bat lands, approach it slowly and place the box or can over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard securely to the container. Contact your local animal control or health department to get the bat picked up and tested.



If you know you have been bitten, thoroughly wash the wound with lots of soap and water and call a doctor immediately. If you can't capture the bat, then you must still talk with a doctor about what medical care you might need. If there is a chance you may have been exposed to rabies, or if the animal is caught and it tests positive for rabies, you will need to get a series of shots to prevent the disease. You cannot wait to see if you get sick, because there is no known cure once the disease develops.

Bats benefit people because they eat large quantities of insects, including mosquitoes that transmit West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Only about 3 percent of the bats tested in North Carolina are positive for rabies, so most of them pose no risk to humans, but you never

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**Rabies cont. from page 6**

know which ones may be infected. So, physical contact with bats must be regarded as a potential rabies exposure.

Other wildlife, like raccoons, skunks and foxes, may also carry rabies. Never touch, pet or feed wild animals, whether they appear to be sick or not. Open containers of food—including pet food—or garbage may attract these animals to your yard or campsite, so keep garbage and food in tightly sealed containers and feed pets indoors. If you are bitten by a wild animal, contact a physician immediately.

Avoid any physical contact with unfamiliar dogs and cats. Pet only animals that you know have been vaccinated against rabies. Make sure your own pets have up-to-date rabies vaccinations, and do not leave your pets outdoors unattended. Do not try to separate animals that are fighting. If your pet comes in contact with an animal that might be rabid, contact your veterinarian. If you are bitten by someone's pet, get the owners name, address, and telephone number; wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water; and contact your doctor.

“Rabies is a fatal disease,” said Dr. Hunter, “but people can protect themselves and their families by following these common-sense guidelines. And if they do come into contact with a bat—even briefly—or other potentially rabid animal, it is important that they know to see a doctor right away.”

For more information on rabies, see the N.C. Division of Public Health's rabies website at

[www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/rabies.html](http://www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/rabies.html).



## Avoid illnesses from mosquitoes and ticks

May 21 through 27 was “Tick and Mosquito Borne Illness Awareness Week” in North Carolina. The state leads the country in the number of cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever, carried by ticks, and Lacrosse virus, which is carried by mosquitoes.

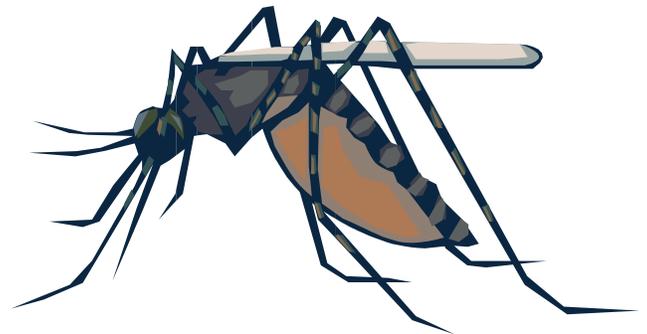
Infections from tick and mosquito bites can be serious and result in lengthy illnesses, hospitalization, disability and even death. However, these illnesses can be prevented by protecting yourself against bites and making your surroundings less friendly to those insects.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is the most common tick-borne illness in North Carolina. By the end of April, North Carolina accounted for 225 of the nation's 292 recorded cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever. In 2005, there were 625 reported cases in

North Carolina. The state also has other tick-borne illnesses, including Lyme disease, with 49 cases reported last year, and ehrlichiosis, with 37 cases.

Lacrosse virus is the most common mosquito-borne illness, and it is found mostly in the western part of the state. North Carolina accounted for more than 46 percent of the country's Lacrosse Virus cases, according to the CDC.

Two other mosquito-borne diseases, Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile virus, are also found in North Carolina. While EEE is found largely in the eastern part of the state, West Nile is found across the state.



Although rare, ticks and mosquitoes can kill. Since 2003, two people have died as a result of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and two have died from West Nile Virus.

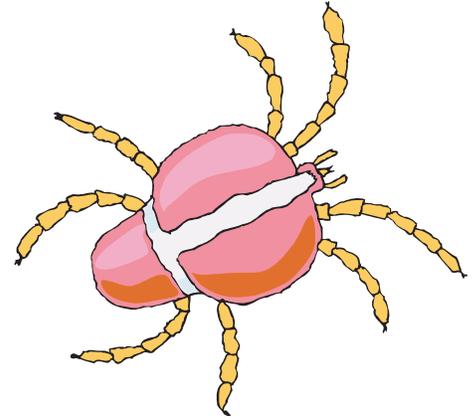
According to the North Carolina divisions of Public Health and Environmental Health, you can do the following to protect yourself and your family from ticks and mosquitoes:

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**Mosquitoes and ticks cont. from page 7**

- Apply insect repellent according to the label instructions.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants to cover your skin.
- To make your environment less tick-friendly, keep grass short and remove plants that attract wild animals like deer and rodents that carry ticks.
- To make your environment less mosquito-friendly, remove any containers that hold water and make sure that screens and doors fit tightly.

For more information about tick and mosquito borne illnesses visit the Division of Public Health's website at [www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/arbovirus/eee.html](http://www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/arbovirus/eee.html) and the Division of Environmental Health's website at [www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/phpm/html/pest\\_species.html](http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/phpm/html/pest_species.html).



## State Health Plan offers PPO options; open enrollment - May 22 to June 30

The North Carolina State Health Plan is offering three new preferred provider organization (PPO) health plan options during this year's open enrollment. The new NC SmartChoice PPO plans will be offered along with the current Comprehensive Major Medical plan as a significantly more affordable choice for teachers, state employees and other eligible members effective Oct. 1.

- 1) You may choose to remain on your current plan, Comprehensive Major Medical (CMM), or
- 2) You may select one of three new PPO plan designs being offered.

The State Health Plan has contracted with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina to use its Blue Options Network of preferred providers. The NC SmartChoice products offer:

- An employee/spouse option – You no longer pay the family rate if you want only to cover your spouse.
- Reduced premium options if you cover more than just yourself.
- Lower out-of-pocket costs (office visit co-pays instead of deductibles and co-insurance).
- No annual dollar cap for wellness benefits.
- An extensive network of providers – 90 percent of the primary care physicians in the state participate and 97 percent of the hospitals participate.
- No referrals are required to see specialists, and you will still be able to see physicians out of the network—just at a higher cost.
- Any credit toward the Comprehensive Major Medical (CMM) plan deductible will be applied to the PPO plan deductible effective 10/1/06.

Open enrollment for the State Health Plan runs from May 22 to June 30.

- If you are a member in the State Health Plan, a packet with all the information you need to help you make the best choice for your family should have arrived at your home address in May.
- If you are not a member in the State Health Plan and would like more information on the NC SmartChoice PPO plans, contact your Human Resources office to obtain a packet.
- As you make your decision about whether to join the State Health Plan's new NC SmartChoice, please remember that some in-network providers work in practices that are hospital-owned or operated. If you see an in-network provider whose practice is hospital-owned or operated, the services you receive may be subject to your

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**PPO cont. from page 8**

in-network deductible and co-insurance. Call your physician or refer to the Provider Directory if you are not sure whether your physician works in a hospital-owned or operated practice.

Be sure to check the State Health Plan Web site at [www.statehealthplan.state.nc.us](http://www.statehealthplan.state.nc.us) for information on your health plan options and the Provider Directory. You may also talk with your Human Resources representative

or you can call the new NC Smart-Choice PPO Customer Service line at **1-888-234-2416**.

## Soapworks offers opportunities

*By Charles Spiron, O'Berry Center Marketing Director*

Chris is a soap maker, working each day at *By Nature Soap* producing handmade soaps and other personal care products. Chris is an exceptional young man. What makes Chris unique is that because he has physical and mental challenges he requires a bit of assistance in his daily life. Chris is one of some 300 men and women who have developmental disabilities and live at O'Berry Center in Goldsboro. O'Berry offers to those who live there an opportunity to have meaningful jobs.

"Work is a vital and important part of every person's life," explained Carolyn Davis, director of Vocational and Educational Services. "We know that personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment derived from completing a task are important to all of us. That is our challenge, to provide meaningful work opportunities to all the individuals who choose to work."

Operating under the business name Berry Towne Crafts, all the activities have one common purpose:

to offer meaningful, life-enriching work opportunities grounded in fun and expressive programs. All the individuals in the various studios are compensated for their work.

*By Nature Soap* is one of the main enterprises providing jobs for those at O'Berry Center. The soapworks produces very high quality handmade organic soaps, lotions, butters, and balms.

"We are very proud of the soap and personal care products we are making," Davis noted. "But, the Soapworks is only one of more than a dozen artisan programs we have that provide important jobs for the individuals living here."

Other artisan areas include pottery, woodworking, custom printing, specialty foods, decorative arts, and floral studios in both dried and silk flowers. Jocelyn Jackson guides the pottery studio, along with two other experienced potters.

"North Carolina has a long tradition in pottery as exemplified by the world-wide

reputation of the Seagrove area, known as the pottery capital of America. We use only native North Carolina clay and our work is hand thrown on the potter's wheel, made on our slab rollers, or extruded," Jackson said. "We use all the traditional methods of throwing, coil pottery, and slab building."

Most of the items produced in the pottery studio are utilitarian in nature like strong sturdy mugs, plates, bowls, or vases, and other items are more just for fun such as their character jugs and pots.

Berry Towne Crafts has been selling their products through their retail store on the O'Berry Campus for many years. Recently they have expanded and now have an online store [www.berrytownecrafts.com](http://www.berrytownecrafts.com). Plans are underway to expand Berry Towne Crafts with a new facility, which when completed this fall will provide more than 1,500 additional square feet of display space. ■