

The Connection

Welcome to the Employment Connections (EC) Division's newsletter - The Connection! This newsletter focuses on sharing information to support, connect, engage, and excel.

Read regular updates on projects and programs, and messages from Director Jairus Rice. Please share comments or ideas you have with [Jordyn Johnsen](#) or [Anne Goranson](#), or submit your feedback via [survey](#).

Message from the Director



Greetings, Employment Connections team,

This newsletter is coming your way during a month of remembrances. It falls in between two important holidays. Memorial Day has been celebrated in Washington State since 1891, and Juneteenth is being added to our list of official holidays for Washington State employees just this year. Recognizing the historic nature of this “first,” I am proud to be part of a state that chooses to honor our Black employees and their traditional celebration of the end of slavery. Many of us, including myself, didn't know about this holiday until fairly recently. I'm thankful for EC's Cheri Willoughby, who has agreed to share more about this rich tradition that deserves to be highlighted – please take a moment to read her article below. I also want to mention that I've selected Cheri to serve as our division's Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) representative on an agency-wide team that will support Washington State's statewide PEAR plan. For more information, you can read the Governor's executive order [here](#). I'll be inviting Cheri to share more information with us in future newsletters. She is one of those people who cares deeply about moving forward together through education, crucial conversations, and grace. I agree with her that we can do all those things at once!

The other holiday that I want to highlight is Memorial Day. As you know, I am a military veteran and the executive sponsor of the Veterans Employee Resource Group (VERG). This holiday is deeply personal for me. As a nation that just recently ended 20 years at war, we have so many families in our communities impacted by the nearly 8,500 servicemembers killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan. I personally carry two of those lost individuals with me in my heart every day, men I deployed with but did not return with. I am grateful for this one day to stop, reflect, and make the connection between their sacrifice and the safety, security, and freedom we enjoy every day. As veterans we have a tradition of honoring these heroes with a place at our table. May we pause for just a moment to remember them now. Thank you.

Finally, June is also Pride month in the US – an important observance and opportunity to show support and inclusion of our LGBTQ+ community. There is a common denominator across these groups that are being celebrated – courage. The LGBTQ+

community is made up of some of the most courageous people I know. They have a great deal to teach us about showing up as our authentic selves even when it is really hard to do so. Please join me in honoring them this month!

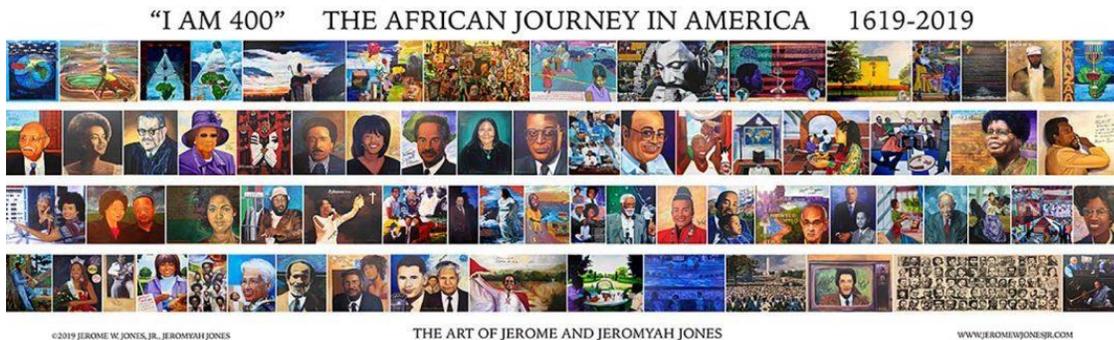
To each of you who belongs to one or more of these groups I've mentioned, we see you, we appreciate you, and we are here to support you.

Thank you all for supporting each other, our customers, and our communities.

Jairus Rice

“I AM 400”

We've reached out to local offices, and many will be displaying this banner in commemoration of Juneteenth.



The next article from our very own Cheri Willoughby will share more background on Juneteenth, why it's important, historical significance, and what you can do to celebrate!

A Time for Celebration, Reflection, and Collective Growth



Juneteenth: A great day of Celebration!

*Written by WorkFirst Job Coach and EC Division Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR)
Representative Cheri Willoughby*

Juneteenth, also referred to as “Freedom Day”, “Black Independence Day”, and “Jubilee Day”; is the newest Federal Holiday celebrated on June 19. The Holiday falls on Sunday, June 19 in 2022 and will be observed federally and locally on Monday, June 20, 2022. Although observed as a day off for State Employees, I encourage everyone to get engaged and involved in many of the Juneteenth events and celebrations around Washington State, to celebrate Black American culture and the contributions our people have made to America.

June 19, 1865 marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to announce that General Order No. 3 was issued to ensure that ALL enslaved Black People be freed. Although the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed two and a half years earlier, it freed slaves only in states that had seceded from the Union. Juneteenth (combines the words June and Nineteenth) was first celebrated in 1866, to honor the first anniversary of the end of slavery in the United States.

How Juneteenth became a Federal Holiday!

President Joseph Biden signed Senate Bill 475 (S.475) into law, also known as the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, on June 17, 2021, making Juneteenth a federal holiday. Following President Biden’s lead, Governor Jay Inslee (Washington State) officially declared Juneteenth as a state holiday in Washington and beginning June 19, 2022, Juneteenth will be a paid holiday for state employees (observed Monday, June 20, 2022). Now, 47 American States officially recognize Juneteenth as an official state holiday.

How is Juneteenth Celebrated?

Juneteenth is a time of celebration, community, worship services, cultural reflection and remembrance, family reunions, sharing of history with the younger generations, parades, music, and of course, great food! My family is from Louisiana (Texas’ next-door neighbor), so our Juneteenth celebrations centered around eating traditional creole and soul food items that included red food dishes (symbolizing the blood that was shed by our enslaved ancestors through the Transatlantic Slave Trade from Africa to America). Some of the food items we eat are seafood gumbo, jambalaya, crawfish (also known as crayfish or crawdads), fried catfish, fried chicken, red beans and rice, greens, cabbage, black-eyed peas with okra, yams (sweet potatoes), cornbread, red beverages (soda/pop/punch/Kool-Aid), and red desserts such as red velvet cake, homemade strawberry ice cream, along with pound cake, coconut cake, peach cobbler, and pecan pie. I apologize if I have made you hungry 😊.

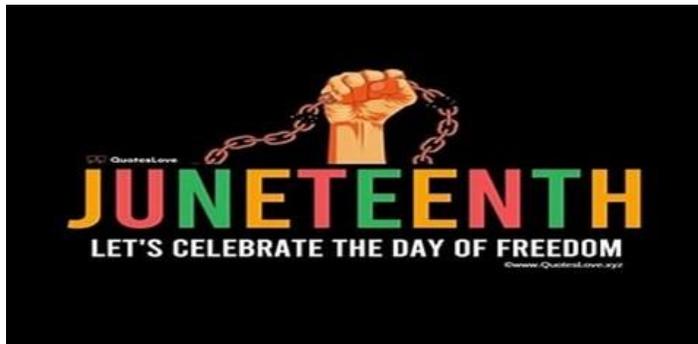
How can you celebrate Juneteenth?

You may be wondering what you can do to celebrate Juneteenth? I encourage you to join in the celebration and as allies, you can participate by attending local or virtual celebrations, learn the factual history, support black-owned businesses, acknowledge, and spread the word about Juneteenth (in truth) within your family and friend circles.

I extend an invitation for you to attend Juneteenth Celebrations that are sponsored by our ESD and statewide Employee Resource Groups, BEING and BUILD, as well as other community events below.

BEING (Black Employee Inclusion Networking Group) is hosting its monthly meeting on Monday, June 13, 2022, at 2PM. You can send an email to esdgpbeing@esd.wa.gov to receive the meeting link.

BUILD (Blacks United in Leadership and Diversity) is hosting a live celebration at Tivoli Fountain on the Capitol Campus in Olympia, WA, Thursday, June 16, 2022 from 11AM-2PM. Register [here](#) today!



Juneteenth Events

Northwest African American Museum (NAAM) in Seattle exhibits the history, art, and culture of people of African descent and the Black experience in America. Every year, NAAM hosts Juneteenth Week featuring a variety of art and culture events. More information is available on NAAM's website, linked [here](#).

Free Juneteenth celebration in Kent on Saturday, June 18, 2022, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm at Morrill Meadows Park: 10600 SE 248th St, Kent, WA 98030. More information is available [here](#).

Free Juneteenth celebration in Rainier Beach on Sunday, June 19, 2022, from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm at Rainier Beach Community Center: 8825 Rainier Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118. More information is available [here](#).

Project updates

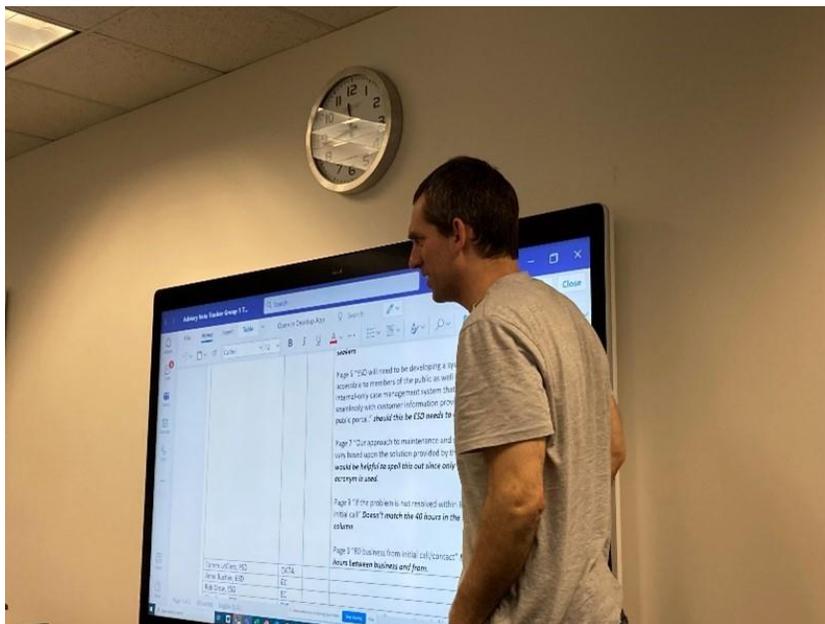


A little bit about WIT

Submitted by Nona H. Mallicoat, Deputy Director, Employment Connections

Exciting news - the final draft of the request for proposal (RFP) is out for review and should be posted a little later this month! I would like to thank everyone who participated as an RFP team member, SME, or participated in the sessions with Michael, Matt, and the team that traveled around the state!! We truly appreciate all of your insights and feedback, as it has immensely assisted us in creating the business requirements for the RFP, as well as ways to evaluate the bidders.

As I write this column, I am in a meeting with the core planning team while we go through the steps of the RFP – preparing for the bidder's conference, product demonstrations, testing and technical review, workshops, and ultimately selecting the vendor who will create our next Case Management system. The RFP and project are using an approach called agile, which is a new way for us to manage contracts...it's exciting! If you'd like to learn more about agile, here's a [link](#) to more information.



Picture above is IT Solution Architect, Chad Stoker

Over the next month, we will be posting the RFP, selecting and training the staff that will be evaluating the bidder's responses, and finalizing the QA Vendor contract.

If you haven't had the opportunity yet to watch [Michael's video](#) about his insights learned during site visits and the product vision for the future, I would highly encourage it. In addition, our next town hall is coming up on Friday, June 24 – feel free to attend either the morning or afternoon presentation to learn all the latest updates.

As always, we encourage you to interact in the replacement process! I would recommend checking out the [Workforce Professional Center](#), where you can always find the most recent recordings from the town hall, a Q&A document, project status updates, and a link to submit ideas and questions. Until next month...that's a little bit about WIT!

2022 Blueprint for Success

Monthly pillar wrap up

Throughout this last month, we've begun rotating the updates on our four pillars in the Weekly Update Rollup. Here's the summary of this last month's pillar movement.

The four pillar teams:

- Have requested volunteers
- Utilized virtual collaboration
- Distributed telework kits across the State
- Created a survey to gather the top 10 skills you feel are needed to be a successful WorkSource Specialist
- Worked to develop a survey to be added on WorkSourceWA.com
- Explored various outreach methods to reach underserved populations in our communities
- Are looking for new opportunities to serve customers in new ways – virtual services, on-demand, etc.
- Are dissecting Employee Engagement Survey responses in search of opportunities to lead meaningful change
- Are using data to inform decisions

Reminder, you can find information on each pillar on [InsideESD!](#)

Please join us for one of the Quarterly Town Halls, to learn more about the pillars and have coffee with Jairus! The next two townhalls are:

- Today, Wednesday, June 8, 2022 from 1PM-2PM
- Thursday, June 16, 2022 from 10AM-11AM.

These sessions will be recorded and shared out shortly after.

