



# VOICES

<https://arsnet.usda.gov/sites/NPA/DiversityBulletinBoard/>

Advancing diversity and its unique contributions in the NPA

## Spring's Arrival Brings Renewal...and Mid-Year Reviews

By Barbara King, Fort Collins, CO

Can it be that spring is truly just around the corner? Warmer temperatures, softer winds, and all the other signs of spring – crocus, tulips, daffodils, and the creeping shades of green across meadows and plains – are all indicators that our long winter is over. Spring often brings with it renewal – spring cleaning, gardening, vows to move more (and move more quickly!) – propel many of us into action. Another sort of action, and maybe one that isn't so breathtakingly exhilarating as shiny windows and blossoming bulbs, involves preparing for the mid-year review.

In late March, Linda Burroughs-Glover (ADR Program Manager with the Forest Service) presented a webinar entitled "Preparing for Performance Evaluation" which was made available to all USDA employees. Despite technical glitches, the information presented was very good. One central premise was that reviews should be conducted as honest and sincere conversations between supervisors and supervisees rather than some sort of adversarial or rushed meeting. Intrinsic to good conversations are good communication skills. The following list is an abbreviated version of barriers to communication and suggestions presented by Burroughs-Glover:

1. Failing to really listen to and consider what the other person is saying both in



words and in body language. Too often, listening is simply waiting for the other person to stop talking so you can say what you want to say, rather than thoughtfully – and non-defensively – respond to what was just said. Pay attention as well to yours and the other person's non-verbal communication, especially facial expressions, tone, volume and posture.

2. Negative feelings toward the other person. Not liking or trusting the other person can lead to faulty assumptions, failing to consider the other person's frame of reference, and generally showing a lack of interest in the other person's accomplishments and ideas.

Good communicators and leaders have the ability to separate the personal from the professional.

3. Using "you" instead of "I" statements. Using "you" often comes across as an accusation of some sort. Instead, say "I think/want/did..." Burroughs-Glover emphasized the tactic of being "...hard on the problem and soft on the person."

4. Failing to be open-minded. Be open to trying something new and to listen to and consider the other person's viewpoint. It's easy to confuse facts and perspectives, and to often see our own perspectives as the true fact while deeming any opposing views as inferior.

5. Stereotyping. With four generations in the workplace, we can all be guilty of assigning generalized stereotyped characterizations based on age. Even worse is when we act based on those stereotypes. The same for race, gender, religion, etc. Pay attention to what you say, what you do, and how people respond to you.

Besides striving for better communication styles, Burroughs-Glover also had the following suggestions:

1. Address issues as they arise. Be honest, but also remember to "...go soft on the person and hard on the problem."

Continued next page

## Mid-Year Reviews... *Continued from page 1*

Don't wait for the mid-year or annual evaluation to criticize something that occurred weeks or even months earlier. Along the same lines, a simple "thank you" or "I appreciate your work on \_\_\_\_\_" is better heard early rather than long after the occurrence.

2. Meet face-to-face. Email can be convenient for the sender, but is also notoriously ripe for problems. Try for face to face or at least spoken conversations whenever possible.

3. Meet together throughout the year, or better yet, be accessible and invite

conversations by having an "open door" policy. For formal reviews, be sure to schedule enough time, in a private setting. A rushed conversation usually leaves no one satisfied. Set aside 30-60 minutes and minimize distractions (mute phones, computers, radios/stereos).

4. Take some time to prepare your thoughts, maybe put in writing some ideas or points you want to make, and perhaps even practice in advance your "take away" message for your supervisor/supervisee.

5. Ask for feedback and use open-ended questions. You might think your message is clear, but if the other person is looking quizzical, doubtful or disinterested, it's time to step back and start over.

We can all benefit by doing a quick self-assessment of our communication styles, and asking for feedback from others.

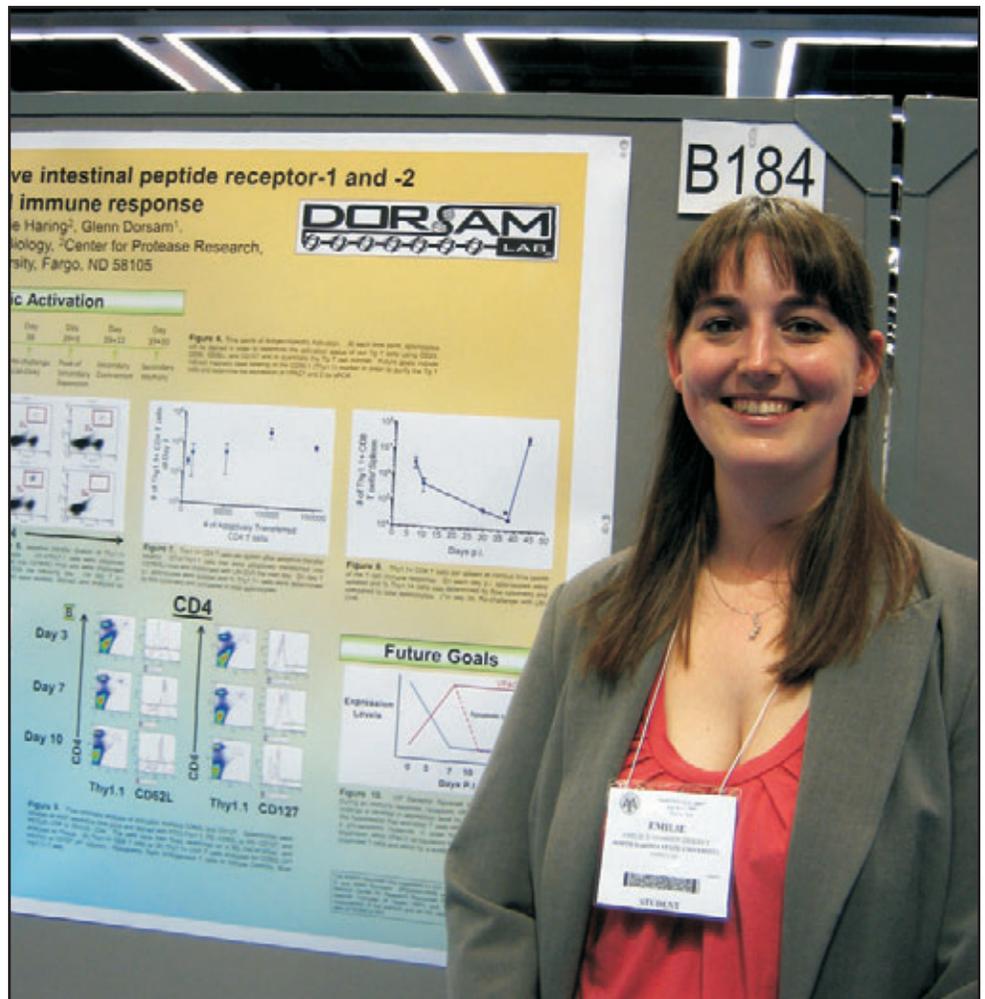
Now, if only my communication was always as crystal clear as those windows of mine will be once I get to cleaning them up! ■

## An NPA Internship Success Story

*By James Buckner, Fargo, ND*

In 2004, Marcia Hagen and I were pleased to receive a NPA Summer Internship. After advertizing the position locally, we hired Emilie Vomhof, a student entering her senior year at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN. After finishing her Internship, Emilie continued to work for us, under the RSA program, until August, 2005. As an Adjunct Professor of the NDSU Chemistry, Molecular Biology and Biochemistry Department, I took the opportunity to introduce her to their Ph.D. graduate school program. She received a research assistantship and, as a member of her Supervisory Committee, I have continued to follow her excellent work for the past 4½ years with Dr. Glenn Dorsam.

Emilie recently sent Marcia and me a "Good News" message about a career opportunity as an ARS post-doc at the Human Nutrition Research Center in Grand Forks. In it she notes: "I'll be graduating in May and then start there near the end of May; I am so excited to go back to the USDA!" So, Emilie is excited to be 'one of us' and I know that she will be an excellent addition to Matthew Picklo's research program. ■



*Former Fargo, ND Summer Intern Emilie Vomhof-DeKrey at a scientific meeting in Seattle in 2009. Emilie is excited about returning to the NPA as a post doc at the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center.*

# Northern Plains Notes

By Northern Plains Area Director Will Blackburn

This time last year Fargo, Grand Forks, and Mandan faced impending flooding, and those same cities once again bravely braced for potential floodwaters. This year, the sandbags held – at least a million in Fargo. With the outpouring of community spirit, the Red and Missouri Rivers were essentially contained and flooding kept to a minimum.

While spring flooding along those rivers seemingly remains unchanged from one spring to another, transformational change is a continuing theme throughout federal agencies and ARS is no exception. Since the last issue of VOICES, one major change was the departure of Dr. Rajiv Shah from Chief Scientist with USDA to Administrator of USAID. A replacement has not yet been announced for Dr. Shah. One very positive change for ARS was the proposal by President Obama to increase the ARS budget by \$20 million, or about 2% over last year, and targeted toward initiatives in animal and crop breeding and protection, sustainable agriculture, food safety, reducing world hunger, human nutrition, bioenergy/biomass, global climate change and other critical areas.

The downside to the increase is that some existing programs and Congressional earmarks will be reduced. The full ramifications of these reductions for NPA are still being worked on. Meanwhile, the transition of Laramie research projects and employees to Manhattan is progressing as scheduled, with the Laramie site expected to be fully closed by the end of August.

## Leadership Training

One change that has impacted the Area Office was the decision to not fill the Assistant Area Director position. To help fill that void, the Area Office has offered details to employees interested in experiencing Area-level administrative duties. Dr. Rosalind James, Research Leader with the Pollinating Insect Research Lab (Logan), served a three month detail (January through March), primarily working with OSQR reviews.

This leadership opportunity for Dr. James also gave Dr. Theresa Pitts-Singer and Dr. Terry Griswold the chance to serve as Acting Research Leaders. Dr. Debby Samac, a Plant Pathologist in St. Paul, MN will be detailed to the Area Office for April and May for ARMPS, then return for the month of September.

Last summer the Area Office implemented a scholarship program for NPA scientists interested in furthering their leadership training. Due to the high interest in this opportunity for funding, the Area Office will again provide scholarships – details will be announced through RLs this summer. Applications are encouraged from scientists at any level who are genuinely interested in developing their leadership potential. In the meantime, scientists who are interested could find out more about the management and leadership courses offered through the Office of Personnel Management: <http://www.leadership.opm.gov/Programs/Management-and-Supervisory-Skills/index.aspx>.

## Taking Stock

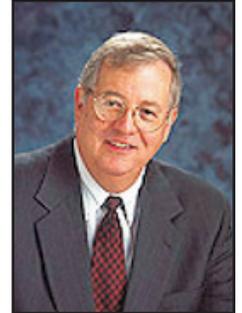
The NASPDP (Newly Appointed Scientist Professional Development Program), started in 2005, is designed to assist new scientists in their transition to ARS (see page 7 of the December 2006 issue of VOICES at: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/npa/voices>).

One recent adjustment to the program calls for the RL and SY to meet and discuss the SYs professional development in relation to factor 4 of the RPES case write-up (development, progress and impact of the research, quality of publications, and management/leadership). This more structured mid-course assessment should help new scientists understand what they need to do to be successful, and take stock of their progress to date, thereby positioning themselves to prepare a successful case write-up.

## Summer Help

The interest in obtaining matching funding for hiring summer interns and

apprentices was once again very high, with requests outnumbering available dollars. Scientists receiving funding were: Dr. Amanda Lindholm for an apprentice; and Drs. Virginia Jin, Zane Davis, Frank Arthur, Kurt Reinhart, Rebecca Phillips, John Hendrickson, Marty Schmer, and Erin Espeland all receiving partial funding to hire interns. Descriptions of these jobs can be found at: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Careers/docs.htm?docid=8536>.



The ARS Office of ODEO is again funding eight-week internships for Native American students, and Sidney, Mandan, Fargo, and Grand Forks hope to host interns this summer.

## ARMPS

The next ARMPS review will be in full swing very soon, and I look forward to visiting each location. ■

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## Employee Appreciation

• Special Feature •

*Who wouldn't like to know they and their efforts are appreciated by their fellow workers! Our special section looks at ways NPA employees spontaneously show their appreciation for their fellow employees and a job well done!*

### Spontaneous Appreciation

Generational Appreciation *This Page*

*Page 5*

## 'Spontaneous Appreciation' Valued By Employees

By Theresa Pitts-Singer, Logan, UT

While there are formal processes for showing employee appreciation, sometimes the more appropriate tokens of appreciation are spontaneous or opportunistic. After an especially hard day's work or at the end of a long process, a supervisor may take the "team" out for lunch or at least buy some treats to share. A lab or office group may be especially grateful for dedication to a difficult or frustrating task by an office assistant, finance manager, IT specialist, or skilled technician who managed to save the day. This group may show their appreciation by all signing a Thank You card or inviting the person for a special treat during a coffee break. Instilling a sense of inclusion, appreciation, or gratitude can be done most any day and any time. Here are some specific examples contributed by NPA Employees:

One early summer day, I needed about 10-15 people to help with a big field task. I sent out a message to anyone listening noting a time and place to gather for executing the task, and also noting a time and place to gather for an ice cream social afterwards. Everyone was invited to the social, even if they did not have the opportunity to help out. The warm, sunny weather was especially alluring to those normally confined to their bench tops. The task was accomplished in record time. Then dirty, sweaty, happy people enjoyed yummy ice cream with a variety of toppings. I covered all the expenses; it was worth it!

After a tornado damaged one Unit's facility, temporary storage for materials and equipment was sorely needed.

*Continued next page* →



More than 50 employees helped select the tastiest recipe in the annual Charles Koesterman Memorial Chili Cook-off held at the Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center in Fargo, ND last February.



There were 14 chili chefs vying for the top honors at the 2010 competition.

# Spontaneous Appreciation...

Continued from page 4

To that end, an RL from another Research Unit donated space in his building; however, that space was in need of a good spring-cleaning and some major rearrangement in order to accommodate the additional items. An assortment of volunteers from across Units came together to help out and finished just in time for a grateful RL to spring for lunch.

Think about it; it is the dead of winter in North Dakota. What can you do to liven up the workplace and have some fun? How about a Chili cook-off with a traveling trophy and bragging rights for the whole year that you make the best chili? The Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center (over 125 federal employees) has been doing this for three years now and the response has been terrific. Although usually held the last of January, in 2010, we decided to have the

event coincide with Groundhog Day (February 2nd) and even suggested that type of meat as an option. However, there were no takers.

This year was special because we also had renamed the event. Last fall we lost our IT specialist, Charles Koesterman, who had been a very enthusiastic supporter of the event and had been a co-winner each of the first two years! We decided to name the Cook-off in his memory (The Charles Koesterman Memorial Chili Cook-off) and everyone agreed. Anyone who attends the event also participates in voting for their favorite chili. We had 14 entries in two categories (red and white chili) and over 50 people from the Center enjoyed the great food and camaraderie at this year's event. Folks are now experimenting on new recipes to hopefully take first place in the 2011 Cook-off! ■



Kristin Simmons (white chili) and Anitha Chirumamilla (red chili) winners at the 2010 Charles Koesterman Memorial Chili Cook-off held at the Fargo, ND location in February.

# Discussion Fuels Generational Appreciation

By Tom Herald, Manhattan, KS

In partial fulfillment of my Research Leader training I attended the Gilburg Leadership Institute. One of the sessions included a segment on generational theory. As the presenter progressed through the generational theory material I realized that this may be food for thought to share with my research unit. I was especially interested in sharing this information and listening to the discussion because the unit is composed of a range of ages that span six decades.

Shortly after returning from the RL training I sent out a general email to the unit with a time and date for the non-mandatory discussion on generational theory. A small conference room was reserved for the activity as I was anticipating four or five unit employees to attend. I was pleasantly surprised to have 15 unit employees present (approximately 50%) turn out for the discussion. In fact, I actually had to turn people away at the door because of lack of space in

*“ I was especially interested in sharing this information and listening to the discussion because the unit is composed of a range of ages that span six decades. ”*

the small conference room. I had no idea so many people were fascinated with the topic. Although, the high attendance may also have been due to the free food offered, either way, I was happy.

I was anticipating maybe a 20 minute presentation/discussion in which the last ten minutes would be full of yawning and frequent glancing at their watch. To my surprise we actively were engaged in discussion for at least an hour. Everyone listened intently to the elder colleague discuss his experience of growing up dur-

ing the Depression and how these events affected his life's choices and work ethic. On the other end of the unit's employee spectra was a college hourly worker. She shared experiences growing up that were different from many of the employees in the unit. She was brought up in the era of helicopter parents and a very structured lifestyle, each day being occupied with some activity or event. The attendees who fell someplace in between the six decade age spectra shared moments that impacted their lives as youths. These included deaths of Presidents, civil rights, landing on the moon, wars, etc.

In my opinion, the attendees left the small conference room with a clearer, broader and greater appreciation for the manner in which each colleague participated and survived in their respective decade. I believe these small but powerful insights into each other's earlier lives will be reflected in a more collegial work environment. ■

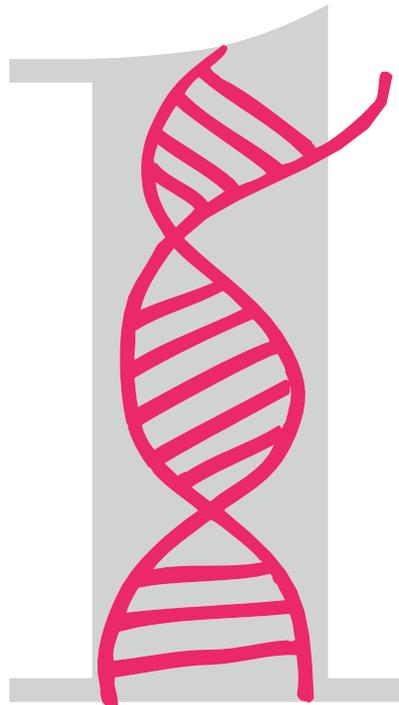
## Each of Us is a Minority of One

*Reprinted with permission from the author, Daniel J. Schneck*

**H**ave you heard the latest? Scientists have recently read the 3.3 billionth chemical letter (base pair) in human DNA. We now know the alphabet – the letters, in sequence, of the language that defines the entire human genome (the human genome actually contains twice that many letters – a duplicate set,  $6.6 \times 10^9$  base pairs – because each human cell is diploid, containing two sets of chromosomes). Although we are still a long way off from using this alphabet to construct any words or sentences, the first major step in that direction has now been completed. I got to thinking about the astronomical numbers involved here and decided to do a little brainstorming with one of my classes.

I asked the students the following question: “What do you think the total population of the earth is today?” They seemed to agree that around six billion was a pretty good estimate. Then I asked them, “OK, how many people do you think have inhabited the earth, cumulatively to date, since the first Genus Homo (which was to become the human race as we know it today) was identified some two million years ago? For the purposes of this discussion, let’s assume an evolutionist approach rather than a creationist approach, if nothing else, because it yields higher numbers.” Following some further deliberation, we came up with the following estimate: taking a generation to be the period of time spanning about 20 years, and assuming the human body is about two million years old in its current Homo Sapiens form, some 100,000 generations have preceded ours. Moreover, since some two-thirds of all of the people who have ever reached the age of 65 are still alive today, let’s be generous in assuming that every generation that has preceded ours had an average population of 500 million. That being the case, up to today’s generation, about 50.006 trillion people have inhabited planet earth (a purposely high estimate).

Next, I asked the class to speculate further: “Taking into account the fact that Planet Earth will not be around forever, and that it can only sustain a finite amount of life, how many people do you think have yet to inhabit this



planet until its ultimate demise?” Being again generous (on purpose), we agreed that one million more generations will likely follow ours, averaging 10 billion people in each, so that a total of 10 quadrillion humans have yet to follow us before it’s all over. Putting all of this reasoning together, we concluded that, from beginning to end, some 10.050006 quadrillion (that’s 10,050,006,000,000,000) – give or take a quadrillion – humans will have graced the surface of this planet throughout its lifetime (hopefully, not prematurely annihilated as a result of war). So, what was the point of this exercise?

In order to make my point, I now asked the class to shift gears and consider something else. “Suppose,” I said,

“somebody gave you a set of 400 beads, containing 20 each of 20 different colors. Suppose further that you were told to use each color as often as you liked, and sequence the colors at your discretion in stringing the beads together to form a chain necklace. Finally, you were constrained to use only 20 beads total in creating each chain. Question: How many different combinations could you possibly string together from this pool of beads? That is to say, if you were to make one chain necklace using 20 beads from this pool of 400, how many choices do you have in terms of what this necklace might look like?” Being mostly engineering students, the class was proud to declare that the strict mathematical answer to this question of permutations and combinations is 20 raised to the 20th power, or, written out,  $20^{20}$  = about 104,857,599,992,000,000,000,000 different possibilities for any given necklace chain! OK, we conceded that some of these combinations might be duplicates (for example, mathematically, in the sequence  $ij$ , the possibility  $i = 1, j = 2$  is considered to be different from that when  $i = 2, j = 1$ , even though if you physically turn the latter around, it looks identical to the former when one is considering colors in a necklace chain), but still (see later), we have a number that’s roughly 105 billion quadrillion, compared to the 10-or-so quadrillion we arrived at earlier in estimating the cumulative population of the earth from beginning to end – the former number being ten and a half billion times higher than is the latter! So, again, the students ask, “What’s the point?”

The point is that our body makes proteins-the “stuff” that is “us” the necklace chains that are strung together to form biochemical trademarks that characterize each and everyone of our distinct features – from 20 different “beads” called amino acids.

*Continued next page* →

## A Minority of One... *Continued from page 6*

Each amino acid can be used as often as is necessary, and the beads are strung together in sequences that are defined by our very own, uniquely personalized DNA code. Thus, even a simple protein that might contain a string of as few as 20 amino acids (most proteins contain hundreds, or even thousands of amino acids) can come in 105 billion quadrillion different styles or patterns. "But wait a minute," exclaim the skeptics in every crowd, "we just conceded that many combinations and permutations are actually duplicates of one another! And when you stop to think about it, still others, and the proteins associated with them, may not necessarily be compatible with our particular form of life." Recognizing the value in such reasoning, I yield to the skeptics' concerns, but get the class to agree that I am not being unreasonable when I dismiss a whopping 99.9% of the 105 billion quadrillion possibilities, thus allowing only 0.1% of them to be realistically viable. That still leaves us with better than 100 million quadrillion different combinations of amino acids that can appear as living proteins – still 10 million times more than the projected human population of the earth from its beginning to its demise. And,

mind you, that doesn't even take into account the hundreds of thousands of proteins that comprise the entire human body! We are still looking at only one simple 20-amino-acid protein chain.

So here's the real point: Given the simplest, most statistically generous scenario of a grand total of 10 quadrillion people, among which are distributed as few as 100 million quadrillion possible combinations of proteins, what is the probability that any two of these people share the same combination, i.e., have exactly the same characteristic anatomical features and physiologic function? Even if one concedes further (as the genome scientists have claimed) that we share in common as much as 99.9% of the total base pair sequence in DNA, I submit to you that the chances of any two individuals winding up with exactly the same genetic code (nature), much less exactly the same expression of this code (nurture), is probably well below one in a million, less than 0.0001%. In other words, not too likely – and that's based on as liberal an estimate as one can imagine. The probability that anybody ever has, or ever will, be exactly like you is essentially zero, because there are so

many more potential possibilities than there are humans that will ever inhabit this planet.

So what is all of this talk about ethnicity, race, religious preference, and so on? The fact of the matter is that each and everyone of us is a minority of one. When they made you, they threw out the mold. In many ways, you are an improvement over older models; newer models yet to come may include still further refinements in design. So isn't it about time we stopped trying to generalize, systematize, and categorize our humanness in favor of appreciating, cultivating, and acclaiming its diversity without being threatened by it? Each one of us has such wonderfully unique anatomical traits and physiologic capabilities. Let's enjoy them! Exploit them! Cherish them! And then maybe, just maybe, we can start learning how to get along with one another without judging on the basis of ill-defined, arbitrary, meaningless criteria. If nothing else, maybe the Genome Project will have accomplished that! ■

*This article originally appeared in the January 2001 edition of American Laboratory.*

## A Taste of the NPA!

*Submitted by Bill Kemp, Fargo, ND*

**F**or consideration – Fast Lamb Curry – Cheap, Fast, and Really Good!  
 (Source [www.prevention.com](http://www.prevention.com))

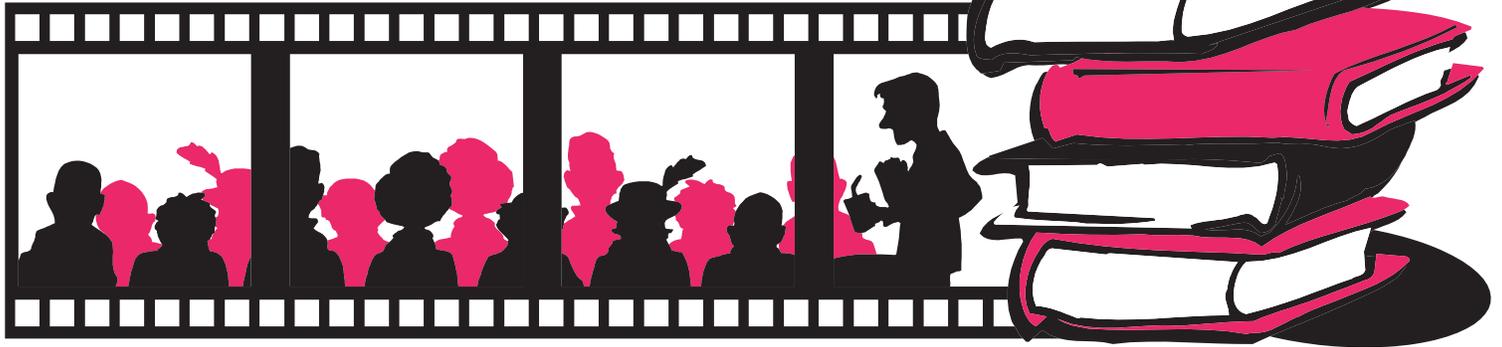
The key ingredient in this Indian-inspired dish is – surprise – Italian marinara sauce! The warm flavors of curry powder add dimension, and ground lamb cooks quickly, saving you lots of time." ■

## Fast Lamb Curry

*1 lb ground lamb  
 5 teaspoons curry powder  
 15 oz fresh marinara sauce  
 6 oz bagged fresh baby spinach  
 Salt and pepper to taste*

Brown a pound of ground lamb (from the meat case in your grocery – ground pork, or game also work as alternatives) with 5 teaspoons of curry (spice aisle or ethnic food section) and ½ teaspoon of salt in a large skillet. Stir in a half a cup of water, a 15-ounce container of fresh marinara sauce (refrigerated pasta case), and 6-ounce package of fresh baby spinach (refrigerated produce section). Simmer uncovered 5 minutes. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve over basmati rice with naan (Indian flat bread). Prep to plate – under 15 minutes.

## On the Shelf and on the Screen: Book, Video Reviews on Diversity



**Editor's note:** "On the Shelf and On the Screen" provides reviews of books and videos that deal with diversity as another means of learning about diversity. We invite you to contribute your recommendations for inclusion in future editions of "Voices" – simply email your recommendations with a short description to: [NPA-DTF@ars.usda.gov](mailto:NPA-DTF@ars.usda.gov)

### **Invictus**

**directed by Clint Eastwood**

Review by Larry Renner, Mandan, ND

The short poem, now titled "Invictus" contains the verse:

*It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.*

It is also the title of the movie directed by Clint Eastwood. The movie stars Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon, and is the story of Nelson Mandela who, during his first term as president of South Africa, campaigned to host and win the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a way to unite his country after the fall of apartheid. The word apartheid describes a legal form of racial segregation. The fears of the country are brought out in the first few minutes of

the movie as President Mandela is beginning his day among the former all white staff who are wondering not if, but how they will be asked to leave. President Mandela sets the stage by assuring that all are valuable and hopes that each will serve his country.

Truly, the world would be a better place for each of us to claim those words, master of my fate and captain of my soul.

The movie is a Warner Brothers production and is rated PG-13.

In Larry's opinion, even though this was an inspirational movie and a tribute to a great man's life, the movie lacked the energy audiences have come to expect from Hollywood. ■

### **Osama**

**2003, Afghan, with English Subtitles**  
(PG-13 – but parents should preview)

Review by Barbara King, Ft. Collins, CO

Imagine a seemingly tranquil, undulating, and silent field of blue. Suddenly the silence is broken by a thundering sound of running feet and high-pitched shrieks. The blue is suddenly transformed into a sea of women dressed in blue burqas fleeing from members of the Taliban.

This is the first indication in this chilling yet provocative film that serenity

and fear can be close companions. This award winning film, produced in 2003, tells the harrowing story of the desperate steps one mother takes to feed herself, her mother, and her 12-year-old daughter during the reign of the Taliban in Afghanistan, after her husband was killed in battle.

Under Taliban rule, women could only be in public accompanied by a male relative – husband, son, brother, father, uncle, etc. For this woman and her family, there were no male relatives, and their situation became a matter of life and death when the mother lost her job when the Taliban closed the hospital where she worked. The family was isolated and starving.

With nowhere else to turn, the young mother decided the only recourse was to have her daughter work. Since girls and women were not allowed to work, she had to transform her lovely daughter into a young boy. She cut her daughter's hair and dressed her in boys clothing, and the child then went to work in a local shop.

This dangerous ploy unraveled when the Taliban swept into town and gathered all the young boys together and took them to what can only be characterized as "Taliban Training School for Boys."

Continued next page →

## On the Shelf...

*Continued from page 8*

Before long, the ruse is up, and the story became even more harrowing.

This film is said to be loosely based on a true story, and the actors are not professionals. The story is contemporary, and starkly portrays the lives of men, women and children – male and female – in a country governed by war, poverty, and religious extremism. This film touches on many themes, and it vividly shows the loss of innocence, the absence of individual identity, injustices – social, gender, and economic – and the acute powerlessness faced by men and women whose circumstances give them few if any choices. ■

### Upcoming USDA National Observances

January

*Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday*

February

*Black History Month*

March

*National Women's History Month*

April

*USDA Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day*

May

*Asian American / Pacific Islander Heritage Month*

June

*National Gay and Lesbian Pride Month*

September 15 - October 15

*National Hispanic Heritage Month*

October

*National Disability Awareness Month*

November

*National American Indian Heritage Month*

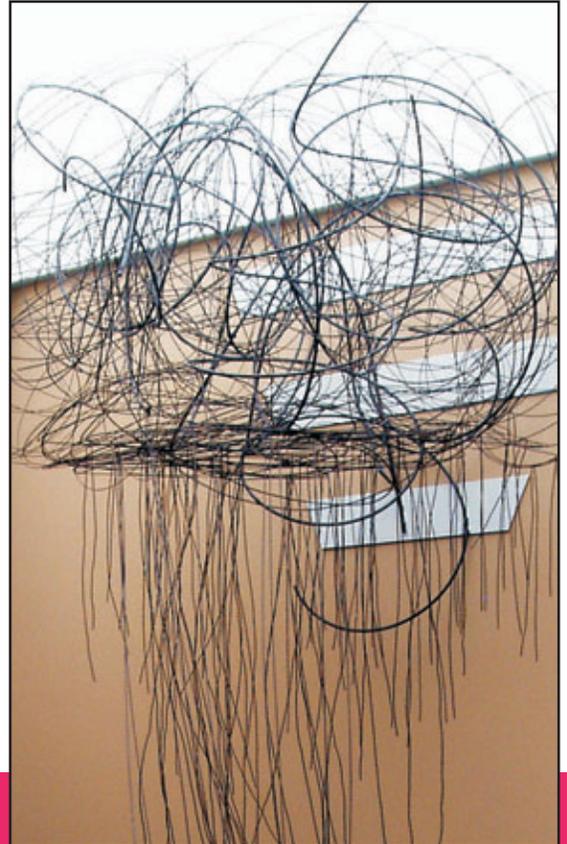
## Where in the NPA?

.....  
*...can you find this lovely April "shower" and its unusual crop of "flowers"?*

*(Answer on page 11.)*

.....  
*Show your own location pride! Share your pictures of scenic landmarks, fun festivities or occupational oddities that make your location uniquely you!*

*Please e-mail your pictures (with captions) to Beth Redlin at: [Beth.Redlin@ars.usda.gov](mailto:Beth.Redlin@ars.usda.gov) or to Barbara King at: [Barbara.King@ars.usda.gov](mailto:Barbara.King@ars.usda.gov)*



## 'Day of Caring' Has Many Rewards

By Richard Sonju, Fargo, ND

The United Way's Day of Caring 2009 matched over 1300 individuals in Fargo and Moorhead from local organizations with 450 seniors who needed a little help with miscellaneous projects around the yard or home in preparation for winter. The Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center put together one team of five people: three from the Sunflower unit, the Area Officer John Johnson, and myself. It was good to go back and help the same senior that was assigned to us in 2008. The five of us helped to cut down overhanging branches, clean gutters on the garage and some really high gutters around the house, secure a tree from squirrel nests, and clean window wells, all in under three hours! Actually this year was special because we got a chance to take time for cookies and coffee with our senior, Virginia. Last year we ran out of time as we had another person's home to help with, but this year it was just Virginia. Our "senior" is very capable (she lives in a beautiful home by

herself); we were just there to help with the stuff that took a few people, but that didn't diminish the satisfaction of the connection made and a job well done.

People seem glad to hear we are with the USDA-ARS. Most people have heard of the USDA, but it's always nice to explain the role of the ARS and give them a face behind the name. We are one of the few public institutions that volunteer our time. Unlike a private institution in which personal contact is made on a regular basis, such as with a banker or grocer, the public rarely has direct contact with an individual from the USDA—it's not every day you run into a scientist or technician working for the government. Of course ultimately it isn't about name recognition or novelty, it's about taking a little time to help someone who needs it.

A large part of the Day of Caring (which was highlighted in the kick-off ceremonies) is not just the duties to be performed, but the personal connection made. Apparently some seniors really

look forward to that day and prepare well in advance; so even though sitting around chatting and eating cookies doesn't sound productive, it really is important.

The Day of Caring is held once a year on the second Thursday in October. Usually we depart from the Biosciences Research Laboratory at noon and walk over to the Bison Sports Arena for sign-in and kick-off ceremonies taking about an hour, then we pile in a van and head over to help the senior or seniors we've been assigned to. All in all it's a good time. Though this year was a bit chilly, the hot coffee, cookies, and conversation made up for it just fine, and though it takes a half-day of your time it is quite satisfying. The more teams we can put together, the more seniors get help, but beware: if you help once, you're probably going to want to do it again. ■

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## 'I'm Not Afraid'

By Leonard Cook, Fargo, ND

It bothers me that so many people demonize anyone who is of the Muslim faith. My experiences with Muslims have helped me realize that they are people just like me. Consider the following.

*I became friends with a young Muslim from Indonesia. He came to America to study but kept his Muslim faith while living in a culture where he was in the minority. We had discussions about his faith and my faith as a Christian, discussions that were sincere, questioning, and open. Each of us knew that the other was not going to change his faith and we respected that reality. I admired his courage for defending his faith when we attended a forum on the Muslim faith.*

*I worked with a Muslim from Egypt and took him ice fishing in order to give him an experience he would never have in*

his home country. There is a lot of free time sitting in an ice fishing shelter waiting in vain for the fish to bite. During that time we talked and I learned that the important things in his life were his family and his children. I learned that teens in Egypt are also interested in loud music, video games, and testing their parents' authority, just like my own children.

*I had a class with a middle-aged Muslim from northern Sudan. Most news reports tell us that many of the problems in Sudan are the fault of the Muslims in the northern part of the country. I learned from him that not all of the Muslims in northern Sudan are extremists or terrorists. He was angry and frustrated with what the extremists were doing in his country. He also treated me with more respect than I probably deserve.*

So...I'm not afraid of Muslims. Each of my Muslim acquaintances rejected the extremist views and actions of terrorists in their home countries and around the world.

*I am afraid...* of people who blindly follow any political agenda and refuse to accept the reality of an opposing view.

*I am afraid...* of people who use violence as a means to get their way.

*I am afraid...* of people of any faith who use religion as a justification for violence.

*Don't be afraid* of people just because they are of a different faith or ethnic origin. Get to know them and discover that they are just like you and me. ■

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**Where in the NPA? - Answer Key**

*This beautiful sculpture, fittingly depicting rain, crops and soil, hangs on the wall in the entryway of the NPA Area Office in Fort Collins, CO, welcoming all comers.*

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**Share Your Favorite Pictures!**  
E-mail your photos and captions to Barbara King or Beth Redlin (addresses on this page).

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