

PASTG NEWSLETTER - August 24, 1999

REMARKS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS:

1999 has been a very eventful year for the PASTG group. The group has been working on several new initiatives as well as furthering the work on several past accomplishments. The SOP Manual with the assistance of Marilyn Paul is now available on the Midwest Area Home Page. All future changes to the directory will be posted on the Internet and will no longer be sent in hard copy form.

Work continues on construction of the PASTG Home Page. We anticipate that the page will be up by the beginning of the new FY. Our page will be linked to the Area Director's home page and will become the official resting spot for the SOP manual.

April 1999 Meeting

The Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) met at the Application Technology Research Unit in Wooster, Ohio.

The PASTG charter will be amended to include the following information:

The GS-303, Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistants series will be included as part of our scope of coverage.

The NADC in Ames will be represented from the Ames campus location.

Lori Wilson-Voss, the new Midwest Area representative, and Marcia Jenkins, the outgoing MWA representative to the National Secretarial Advisory Council, will be attending a Council meeting in Philadelphia in May. Sandy Groneberg was announced as the new Co-Chair of the PASTG.

Sherri Buxton presented extra effort awards and certificates to the members of the PASTG and to Barbara Henry, Plant Introduction Station in Ames, for their assistance during the months E. Lansing was without secretarial support.

A yearly report to the National Secretarial Advisory Council was prepared for Lori and Marcia to take the meeting in Philadelphia, PA in May.

The PASTG discussed our WEB Page and its contents. Sandy Groneberg will chair this committee.

On Wednesday afternoon, the PASTG toured the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center campus and the ARS research units located in Wooster. It was all very interesting, informative, and broadened our knowledge of the variety of research being done in the Midwest Area.

June, 1999 Meeting

The PASTG met during the week of June 28 in Ames, Iowa. The week was spent working on several new initiatives.

The committee helped update several chapters for the National Council Quick Reference Book.

Design of MWA submission of a logo for the National 2000 Meeting

Set up criteria and procedure for new Training Scholarship Program

Worked on the PASTG homepage

Development of an application form to apply for the National 2000 meeting attendance

Our next meeting will be in St. Paul or Morris, MN, possibly in November.

MWA TRAINING SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Secretarial & Scientific Support Personnel

We are very pleased to announce the following new initiative for secretaries, clerks, technicians, support scientists and wage grade employees.. The Midwest Area Training Scholarship Program is intended to assist in professional development of individual(s) through funding for conferences, workshops, short courses, or other appropriate short-term experiences. The Area Director's have agreed to set aside money for this program. The program will begin in FY-2000. Eligibility, Criteria and Application Process are outlined below.

MIDWEST AREA TRAINING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Applicant Name _____

Title _____

Research Unit _____

Location _____

Title of
Training _____

INFORMATION REGARDING THE PROPOSAL

Please provide a brief description/purpose of the course, class, workshop, etc., including the location and dates. If a brochure or similar preprinted information is available from the program provider, please attach.

Location _____ Date(s) _____

Registration deadline _____

Explain how your participation in this training will professionally/personally enhance your career development and benefit others.

Please provide an itemized budget, i.e. cost of course, workshop, airfare, lodging, meals, mileage, parking, materials, etc.

Total amount requested _____

Total amount of MU funds to be contributed _____

Account Code _____

CRIS # _____

In addition to any preprinted materials which may be available, attach any additional information you feel would be useful in describing the training.

Applicant Signature/Date

Supervisor Signature/Date

Research Leader Signature/Date

Center Director Signature/Date

REQUIREMENTS FOR RECEIVING TRAINING SCHOLARSHIP

PURPOSE:

The Midwest Area Training Scholarship Program is intended to assist in professional development of individual(s) through funding for conferences, workshops, short courses, or other appropriate short-term experiences.

ELIGIBILITY:

Applicants for this scholarship must be permanent ARS Midwest Area employees who have successfully completed one year of continuous employment with the Agency.

Applicants must have a current fully successful or above performance rating.

CRITERIA:

A completed application form describing the training, purpose, timetable and budget shall be submitted. An individual/group can receive only one scholarship per year.

Individual scholarships will not exceed \$1000.

Applications will be evaluated using the following criteria: relevance of the training to the applicant's position, ability to enhance the applicant professionally/personally, and the benefit to others.

Scholarship recipients will submit a written report to the Area Director, through appropriate supervisory channels, summarizing the activity within 30 days following completion of the training.

APPLICATION PROCESS:

Application forms will be available at the MWA PASTG Home Page, through a PASTG member, or by contacting the Area Director's Office.

Submit forms to the Area Director's Office, 1815 N. University St., Peoria, IL 61604.

Recipients will complete a Form SF-182.

PARTICIPATION IN CARE REVIEW TEAMS by Sandy Groneberg, Secretary, Morris, MN

During the week of August 10-12, I had the pleasure of participating in training to be a Consolidated Assistance, Review and Evaluation (CARE) team member. I wanted to tell you about this opportunity for two reasons: 1) I was impressed by the quality of the class and I am excited to be a part of this process; 2) I wanted all of you to realize the benefits of participating in "extra" activities of this nature.

The main objective of the CARE Process is to assist those reviewed to understand what can be done to improve their operations and to help make actual changes necessary to improve operations. Our week was focused on team building and we had the opportunity to actually try all of the techniques that were discussed. It is obvious that the program has improved each year due to the input from people in the field much like you and I. The team leaders were enthusiastic and encouraged us continually as we learned our new

roles on the team. Our next step will be to actually visit 1-2 locations. One of the benefits in participating in a review is to find out how other locations function, which causes us to take a critical look at the way we do things. I am looking forward to meeting new people and coming home with new ideas that can be shared. By being a CARE team member, one also has input into future improvements for the program.

From time to time we receive e-mail announcing various opportunities to participate in "extra" activities like CARE reviews. I would highly encourage each of you to consider applying for these opportunities. They are a way to expand our horizons, meet new people, get new ideas, and in general improve our work environment through the things we learn. When you think about it, training of this caliber would normally be quite costly. The personal gain from an experience like this can not be overlooked. Next time you see an opportunity, instead of thinking "oh well," how about thinking, "I'm going to try this!"

REMINDER - YEAR 2000 CONFERENCE

A Year 2000 National Conference for ARS Office Support Staff has been scheduled. Currently, plans are to host the Conference at the Hunt Valley Inn, Hunt Valley, Maryland, May 1-4, 2000. The Conference theme is "Odyssey 2000: Meeting the Challenge."

Attached is a nomination form you may use to submit your name for consideration. Please fill out the form and return it to the Area Office no later than September 17, 1999 if you are interested in attending. Individuals will be selected based on the documentation submitted on the nomination form. Once the participants have been selected the National Council will work directly with the participants to identify their needs and interests and tailor the program accordingly. Registration forms will be sent at a later date.

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ARS OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF
"ODYSSEY 2000: MEETING THE CHALLENGE"
HUNT VALLEY INN - HUNT VALLEY, MARYLAND
MAY 1-4, 2000**

NAME: _____

UNIT: _____

LOCATION: _____

TITLE/SERIES/GRADE: _____ TIME IN
POSITION _____

DUTIES OF POSITION: _____

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I CERTIFY I HAVE A FULLY SUCCESSFUL OR ABOVE PERFORMANCE RATING.

____ YES ____ NO ____ INITIALS

REASONS FOR ATTENDING CONFERENCE: _____

HOW WILL YOU SHARE THE INFORMATION YOU GAIN FROM YOUR ATTENDANCE AT THIS CONFERENCE WITH YOUR LOCATION?

SUPERVISOR COMMENTS:

SUPERVISOR and APPROVAL DATE

RESEARCH LEADER and APPROVAL DATE

CENTER DIRECTOR APPROVAL/DATE

ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS, FUNDING ASSISTANCE MAY BE CONSIDERED BY THE AREA OFFICE.

WELCOME

Madison, Wisconsin

Cynthia (Cindi) Birch comes to United States Dairy Forage Research Center after 21.5 years as a Medical Editor in the Medical Research Office at William S. Middleton Memorial VA Hospital in Madison. She lives in Stoughton, WI (20 miles south of Madison). Her husband, Gary, works for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Her daughter, Erin, 19 is a sophomore at St. Olaf College, and son, Peter, 17, is a junior in high school. Her interests include community theater, singing, and reading.

East Lansing, Michigan

Michael Skowneski has served almost 15 years with the Government, four years in the United States Navy where he was awarded the Certificate in Small Business Administration from Central Michigan University in 1985. In February 1989, Michael helped to establish and open the Military Entrance Processing Station, in Lansing, Michigan. Michael transferred to the Avian Disease and Oncology Laboratory in January 1999. He and his wife Barbara have three children, Michael, Rebecca and Elizabeth and two grandchildren.

Sharon Ventre has been selected as the Office Automation Assistant at the Avian Disease and Oncology Research Unit. Sharon is married (spouse Greg) and has two children (Lindsey 16, Chris 12). Sharon has an Associates Degree in Liberal Arts (math major). Prior to coming to ADOL, she worked at the College of Veterinary Medicine, Michigan State University as student clerical aide in addition to holding the following other positions: bookkeeper, office/operations supervisor, payroll clerk, administrative secretary.

Melissa Stiefel has been selected as the Secretary for the Sugarbeet & Bean Research Unit. Melissa is a lifetime Michigander and a graduate of Michigan State University with a B.A. in English. Her previous experience was in nonprofits, so "learning the ropes" of government service has been challenging, yet enjoyable. She lives in Williamston with her husband John, seven-year-old son Jacob, and Koko, their chocolate lab. In her spare time, Melissa enjoys playing the piano, traveling, water sports, and reading.

VACANCIES FILLED IN THE MIDWEST AREA OFFICE

Area Budget Technician Position

Mike Horn, Area Administrative Support Manager, MWA was selected to fill the Area Budget Technician Position, effective August 16, 1999, Mike will be responsible for Funds Management for the Area Office and Area Administrative Office. He will also be assisting in the Areas of Cooperative Agreements, Travel, and Program Management.

Mike started with ARS, December of 1988 after a six year tour with the United States Army. Mike was Supply Sergeant for the 724th Transportation Unit, stationed in Peoria, IL. As a result of his outstanding work in inventory management, funds management, and purchasing, Mike received the honor of 1987 Chief of Staff, Army Unit and Organizational Award for Supply Excellence (Outstanding Supply Sergeant for Fourth Army, Midwest Area, Runner up for the Nation). After Leaving the Military, Mike started as the Clerk Typist for the Area Administrative Office. Mike received a promotion to a GS-6 Office Automation Assistant as a result of the diverse nature of his role in assisting with the various sections in Administrative Management. On October 4, 1994, Mike applied and accepted the position of Secretary, for the Area Administrative Officer.

MWA Personnel Assistant Position

Deborah Agee has been selected as the MWA Personnel Assistant. Deb provided these comments regarding her new job: First of all, I would like to say I'm very happy to have been selected as the new APA! The position is very demanding and has been quite a challenge especially considering the individual who previously occupied the position and trying to fill those shoes with the expertise employees have come to expect! Currently, I am still working as Personnel Assistant for NCAUR as well and eventually will be able to concentrate solely on our MWA locations. I want to thank everyone for their patience during this transition. You've been very understanding!

I have currently been employed with the Federal Government eleven plus years. My first employing agency was Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS), a sister agency of ARS. FGIS hired me as a GS-3 Clerk/Typist. I eventually was promoted to Secretary. In 1995, USDA closed several Federal Grain Inspection offices due to Government restructuring, our office was one of several closed. Employees were given the option to relocate to other field offices. A field office in Kansas City, MO was to be my new location. I detailed for a period of time, helping with the workload transferred to the Kansas City Field Office from our location but in the end decided to stay in the Peoria, Illinois area. At that time, FGIS realigned my position into the NCAUR building with the Field Office Manager who was now part of the GIPSA Compliance Division. This move was to hopefully keep me in Federal employment, until a vacancy surfaced looking for the Government related qualifications I had acquired working with FGIS. The MWA Administrative Office hired me in a temp position as a Office Automation Assistant. I never thought for a second I would one day be the Area Personnel Assistant.

On the personal side, I'm married to wonderful man who has a business sub-contracting to area building contractors. I have three children. My oldest son being 23, a daughter age 20, and an eight year old son (surprise)! As you can guess, there have been many challenges in my life!

GOOD LUCK AND BEST WISHES!

Lorna Flansburg, Contracting Specialist for the Midwest Area has decided to leave for a warmer climate in Tucson, Arizona. Lorna accepted a promotion to the Contract Administrator position with the Defense Logistics Agency. In her new position, she will be working as a contract administrator, as a member of a team with engineers and quality assurance specialists, administering contracts from all the military services. Her last day with ARS will be August 27, 1999.

Lorna has been with USDA since 1985, first with ARS in Savannah, Georgia, then with the Forest Service in Aiken, South Carolina until transferring to Peoria. During her tenure with the MWA, Lorna has had quite an impact. She started with the Procurement Office as the Supervisory Purchasing Agent in August, 1993 and in September of 1995, she was promoted to Contracting Specialist.

For approximately three years, Lorna chaired the MWA Total Quality Management Team. In March of 1997, Lorna was asked to serve as the Team Facilitator to the Midwest Area AD/AM Internet Homepage Team. Through her leadership the Midwest Area finally hit the World Wide Web. Lorna's proficiency in creating homepages will be a great loss for all of us in the Agency. Good Luck to you Lorna from all in the Midwest! Your sense of humor, warm personality, southern drawl and above all your EXPERTISE will be missed!