

PASTG News Notes - April 2002

Meet JoAnn Giamette - Transportation Assistant ... written by Sandy Groneberg

JoAnn Giamette is a second generation ARS employee, having started working for ARS eleven years ago as a clerk typist in Beltsville, MD. JoAnn's father also worked for ARS in the budget and fiscal area. JoAnn moved from her clerk typist position into an accounting role before taking time off while her children were young. Although JoAnn began her career with ARS in the Beltsville area, she was originally from Peoria, IL. When JoAnn moved back to Peoria, she applied for an accounting position and was hired.

As part of JoAnn's accounting position, she did relocation travel. When Carolyn Goad retired from the transportation assistant position in 1997, JoAnn was detailed to do that work. Eventually she was hired to be the next Midwest Area Transportation Assistant.

JoAnn said she learned her job primarily through doing things. She quickly became aware of the resources available to her and has always enjoyed finding answers on her own. JoAnn likes foreign travel as one of the best parts about her job, and she also enjoys the contact she has with people at field locations. Although JoAnn likes to keep busy, there are times when travel deadlines make her job almost too busy.

I asked JoAnn if she has any tips for those of us who do travel documents. I found her comments interesting. I expected her to say, "Be sure to tell everyone to get their travel documents in to me with plenty of lead time." Instead she told me about the Area Office's efforts to streamline the travel process by closely examining the delegation of authority levels to save us all paperwork. We received a different "delegation of authority" chart this past year, which allows us to do as much as possible at the RL level. One excellent example of streamlining is that once the REE-11 has been approved to bring in a candidate for an interview, secretaries can have the RL sign the AD-202 at the location level now rather than sending it to the Area Office for approval. Another example is that we no longer need to do the AD-750 for foreign travel - simply send a copy of the itinerary. It was very apparent from JoAnn's comments that the Area is working hard to make our lives easier. By the way, JoAnn did agree that receiving the travel documents with sufficient lead time definitely does make her life less stressful!

This past year, JoAnn received the AFM Gold Award for Excellence. I should have asked her if she has ever counted up how many foreign trips she facilitates in a year. This prestigious award is an indication of the quality work JoAnn does for personnel throughout our area.

When she isn't at the Area Office doing travel, JoAnn keeps busy with her four children, ages 13, 12, 10 and 9. As you may guess, spending quality time with them is her main extracurricular activity.

Flashback - submitted by Diane Cronk
From a Professional Secretary Handbook, published in 1968.

Managing your Tasks:

1. Work calmly and steadily to complete tasks .
2. Prioritize your list of duties under these categories (1) To Do at Once, (2) To Do Soon, and (3) To Do When Time Permits.
3. Clean your desks frequently.

Appearance on the Job:

1. Good posture at all times - stand and sit tall, never slump.
2. Avoid sitting with crossed legs, especially if skirts are short and slim styled.
3. When standing, keep the rib cage pulled in and the derriere tucked under.
4. Enter a room with a smooth motion, with head balanced and chin parallel to the floor.

Dressing the Part:

1. Use makeup, but with restraint.
2. Keep to the natural color of your hair unless you can afford the money and the time to keep the coloring constant and inconspicuous.
3. Keep nails manicured and if you paint them, be sure they do not appear chipped or worn.
4. Take daily baths to guard against perspiration odor.

Good grooming and appropriate dress require homework. Appropriate dress requires preplanning what you will wear the next day and selecting suitable, harmonizing coordinates and accessories. Each garment should be pressed, clean, and ready to wear. If you are in need of slimming down, you may have to add to your homework the necessary body-trimming exercises or calorie planning.

Times change but some things stay the same ...

Tips for Writing More Effectively - submitted by Sandy Groneberg

Following are tips that may help you evaluate the quality of your writing.

- Stay away from jargon that a reader may not understand. Be direct and to the point. Busy people don't want to be impressed with extraneous materials or your large vocabulary. They simply want the facts.
- Ensure that all basic information has been included. If you are preparing a document in response to a request, have you included all the components required by the instructions? If you are preparing information about a meeting, have you included the Who, What, Why, When, Where?
- Pay attention to grammar. Check for agreement between subject and verb. If you need a reference for grammar issues, purchase a good style manual.

- Don't rely on "spell check" programs to do your proofreading. Spell check doesn't know that you should have used "their" instead of "there." Print out a hard copy to read, as you may spot things on hard copy that you don't see on your computer screen.
- Read out loud what you have written. You will catch wordiness errors as well as phrases that can be improved by using a thesaurus.
- Check your writing for redundancies, such as "free gift."
- Make a list of the information you want to convey. Start with the most important and end with the least important. The final information should include any action that needs to be taken by the reader.

Helpful Websites

TRAVEL:

Currency Sites

- Currency Exchanger <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic>
- Interactive Currency Table <http://www.xe.net/ict/>

Federal Travel Regulations

<http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/FTR/FTRHP.shtml>

- FMD Travel Site <http://www.ars.usda.gov/afm2/divisions/fmd/travmain.htm>
- Foreign Location Codes <http://dab.nfc.usda.gov/pubs/docs/tflc/tflc-cat/tflc.html>
- Foreign Per Diem Rates <http://www.state.gov:80/www/perdiems/index.html>
- GSA Value Lodging <http://hydra.gsa.gov/regions/r9/travel/balv.htm>
- Hotel/Motel Safety List <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/hotel/index.cfm>
- Map Blast <http://www.mapblast.com/myblast/index.mb>
- Map Quest <http://www.mapquest.com/>

Travel Warnings & Consular Information Sheets: http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html

Vaccinations for foreign travel <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>

Visa Information http://travel.state.gov/visa_services.html

Country's foreign entry requirements <http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html>

Is it my computer? Or is it me?

If we could create a new Murphy's Law, it would be, "Whenever I have a tight deadline to meet, that's when my computer 'acts up,' for sure." If you have the document done by your deadline, that's when the printer won't work! As Program Administrative Support Personnel, troubleshooting is an important part of our job, so here are a few tips to help you maintain your cool in those "hot" situations:

1. **Keep an open mind.** By keeping an open mind, you do not limit the possible causes or solutions to the problem. You should be telling yourself, "I am smarter than the computer and I can fix this problem."
2. **Keep your wits about you.** Slow down! Take a step back and collect your thoughts before you reapproach the problem. Remember that the computer is a piece of machinery and really is not out to make your life miserable. Use your powers of observation to search for clues.
3. **Be Objective.** If you have biases, you will be looking for things that will confirm them rather than finding a solution to the problem. Don't automatically blame the problem on the last person to use the computer!



4. **Use your senses.** If you don't use your senses to gather information, you may miss critical clues indicating the nature of the problem. Use your ears, eyes, nose, and touch. Maybe there is a weird smell or you noticed a noise before the problem appeared. If sounds are out of the ordinary, you may have a problem. Look at the lights on the drives to be sure they light up.
5. **Be Persistent.** The key to accomplishing almost anything is persistence. Persistence means that you will work to solve the problem in the shortest time frame, using all the possible resources available to you. Don't give up when your first idea doesn't work.

These ideas are from *The PC Survival Guide for PC Users*, by David Mertz, National Press Publications, 1995.

It has always seemed to me that the best symbol of common sense was a bridge.

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

NEWS NOTES JULY 2002

News from the Co-Chairs: The PASTG met during the week of July 15, 2002 in Peoria, Illinois. The council reviewed and revised their Charter to make sure it is current with the objectives of the group. In addition, extensive work was done on the PASTG Homepage to assure it is 508 compliant as well as updated with the most current information available. You will see its new look shortly. The SOP Manual has been updated as of April and all information is current. If you keep a hard copy desk reference manual you may wish to print a new copy at this time.

Sedina Lowe, Wooster, OH, Sandy Groneberg, Morris, MN and Lori Wilson-Voss, Ames, IA completed their terms with the Committee. Heather Pace, Columbia, MO was selected to serve as the new Co-Chair and Diane Cronk, Ames, IA was selected to serve as the Recorder/Information Coordinator. Sandy and Lori will assume new roles with the Council and continue as Ex-Officio Members serving respectively as the Web Master and SOP Editor.

We would like to thank Sedina Lowe for the outstanding job she did during her tenure with the committee. Sedina's contributions were numerous. She has mentored new employees; performed secretarial duties for two locations that were without secretaries and was instrumental in developing the MWA's Booth at the Odyssey 2000 Conference to mention a few. We will continue to draw from Sedina's creative talents in the future.

NEW PASTG MEMBERS

Melissa Stiefel, Secretary of the Sugarbeets and Bean Research Unit, East Lansing, Michigan, has been with ARS since 1999. After receiving a B.A. in English from Michigan State University, Missy worked as a Program Manager at the Michigan 4-H Foundation. She represents the clerical staff at the Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana locations. Missy enjoys traveling, reading, gardening, and spending time with her family.

Ginger Walker is the Program Assistant for the Plant Science Research Unit in St. Paul, Minnesota. Ginger has a B.S. degree in Foods in Business from the University of Minnesota. After college, she worked for the USDA Forest Service as a technical editor. She left the Forest Service to raise her family and worked part-time as a teacher's aide at a junior high school for 9 years. She returned to the Forest Service for 1 year before joining ARS. Ginger has two grown children. She enjoys reading, gardening, traveling, cooking, biking, and spending time with family.

Vicki Jones serves as Secretary to the Research leader of the Bacterial Diseases of Livestock Research Unit at the National Animal Disease Center and provides clerical support to 14 scientists. The scientists in the research unit conduct basic and applied research on selected bacterial diseases that are economically important to the U.S. livestock industry. The mission is to develop and evaluate improved diagnostic tests and control measures for Johne's disease, brucellosis, tuberculosis, leptospirosis, swine dysentery, and hairy heel wart.

Vicki began her career with ARS in 1992 as an office automation clerk at the National Soil Tilth Laboratory and accepted her current position in 2000. Her previous federal service included clerical positions with the U.S. Army Child Development Services at Picatinny Arsenal, NJ and the Surgical Clinic at Womack Army Medical Center in Ft. Bragg, NC.

PASTG Representation is as follows:

Sherri Buxton, Co-Chair, represents MWA Office, sbuxton@mwa.ars.usda.gov
Heather Pace, Co-Chair, Columbia, represents Missouri and Urbana, IL, paceh@missouri.edu
Diane Cronk, Ames, represents Iowa, cronk@nstl.gov
Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, represents Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, stiefelm@msu.edu
Vicki S. Jones, Ames, represents NADC, vjones@nadc.ars.usda.gov
Georgetta Stonewall, Peoria, represents Peoria, Illinois, stonewal@ncaur.usda.gov
Ginger Walker, St. Paul, represents Minnesota and Wisconsin, walke019@umn.edu
Sandy Groneberg, Morris, Ex-Officio, Web Master, groneberg@morris.ars.usda.gov
Lori Wilson-Voss, Ames, Ex-Officio, SOP Editor, lwvoss@iastate.edu
Debbie Bitner, Alternate, MWA Office, dbitner@mwa.ars.usda.gov

PASTG CHARTER

Program Administrative Support Task Group Charter

A. Mission and Goal:

The two-fold mission of the MWA Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) is to:

1. Serve the Senior Management Team in an advisory capacity on initiatives which impact employees across the Area;
2. Provide guidance and support to the program administrative support professionals through networking, training, mentoring, and acknowledging their value as a team member.

Our goal is to ensure that ARS has highly skilled professionals working as team members with management to meet the program/administrative goals of the Agency.

B. Vision:

The MWA PASTG's vision is that Program Administrative Support Professionals function as an integral part of the team through shared knowledge, thus providing a valuable resource in support of the Agency mission. It is also our vision that job satisfaction is heightened through improved job performance, positive communication and networking.

C. Objectives:

The objectives of the Task Group include:

- Update the Standard Operating Procedures Manual.
- Strengthen the Mentoring/Training Program.
- Promote awareness of the Scholarship Training Program.
- Increase communication and networking through:
 - Newsletters
 - PASTG conference calls
 - Area program/support meetings
 - Location Site Visits
 - PASTG web site
 - Provide input & suggestions to implement Agency-wide initiatives.
 - Perform special assignments as requested by the Senior Management Team.
 - Participate as a working partner with the National Council.

D. Scope of Coverage:

The Midwest Area Program Administrative Support Task Group will serve as a representative for secretarial and clerical employees throughout the Area. This includes employees in the Secretarial Series, GS-318; Office Automation Series, GS-326; Clerk Typist Series, GS-322; Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303; and other relevant office clerical support occupational series.

E. Task Group Membership:

The Task Group will be made up of the Area Director's Secretary, one representative each from NCAUR, NADC, Ames Campus, and the remainder from locations throughout the Midwest Area. Task Group members will be appointed by the MWA Senior Management Team.

The Area Director's Secretary is a permanent appointment as co-chair and represents clerical employees in the Area Office. Other ex-officio members are: 1) the MWA representative to National Council, 2) PASTG Web Master, and 3) SOP Editor.

Appointments will be a minimum of a three years:

NCAUR

Ames, IA

Columbia, MO; Urbana, IL

East Lansing, MI; W. Lafayette, IN; Columbus/Coshocton/Wooster, OH

Morris/St. Paul, MN; Madison, WI

NADC

The next Midwest Area representative to serve on the National Council shall be selected from the members of the Midwest Area Program Administrative Support Task Group by the Senior Management Team. Upon appointment to the National Council, a new member shall then be selected to serve on the Area task group.

F. Roles and Responsibilities:

Co-Chairpersons will:

- Organize meetings and issue agendas.
- Preside at all meetings and conference calls.
- Advise and work with management on implementing policies and programs affecting the Agency.
- Develop correspondence and obtain appropriate approvals prior to dissemination
- Arrange conference calls as needed.
- Prepare annual report for National Council.
- Process “Issues and Concerns” form.

Recorder/Information Coordinator will:

- Record and distribute highlights and action items of meetings.
- Maintain an accurate roster and E-mail list of membership and current biographical information on Task Group members.
- Format submitted materials for Area newsletters.
- Maintain Task Group records.

National Committee Representative will:

- Ensure all Task Group meetings are conducted in accordance with the established charter and appropriate issues are addressed.
- Ensure that all recommendations from the Task Group are consistent with laws and regulations.

All Members shall:

- Support and actively participate in the activities of the Task Group.
- Collect and report information on significant activities, questions, and concerns.
- Keep MWA secretaries aware of information and activities of the Task Group and related programs.
- Provide current biographical information upon appointment to the Task Group.
- Nominate and select the co-chair and chairpersons of the subcommittees established by the Task Group.
- Serve as a confidential sounding board to program administrative support professionals.

G. Operating Procedures:

- The Task Group will meet semi-annually within the Midwest Area, at a site and place to be

determined. Payment of travel expenses will be the responsibility of the representative's unit.

- Conference calls will be conducted as needed.
- All decisions are made by consensus.
- Recommendations from the Task Group with Agency/Area wide impact will be submitted to the Senior Management Team for approval prior to implementation.
- Accomplishments are summarized at the completion of each meeting.
- A replacement will be named prior to the expiration of a member's term.

In addition, the Task Group will adhere to the following principles:

- All members are expected to attend meetings.
- Confidentiality of all discussions will be maintained.
- Subcommittees will be established as needed.
- Feedback on Task Group issues and activities is encouraged.

Concurrence with Charter as Amended 7/16/2002 signed by:

Sherri Buxton, Co-Chair, represents MWA Office

Heather Pace, Co-Chair, Columbia, represents Missouri and Urbana, IL

Diane Cronk, Ames, represents Iowa

Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, represents Michigan, Indiana and Ohio

Vicki S. Jones, Ames, represents NADC

Georgetta Stonewall, Peoria, represents Peoria, Illinois

Ginger Walker, St. Paul, represents Minnesota and Wisconsin

Sandy Groneberg, Morris, Ex-Officio, Web Master

Lori Wilson-Voss, Ames, Ex-Officio, SOP Editor

Debbie Bitner, Alternate, MWA Office

NATIONAL COUNCIL UPDATES

The National Council met during the week of May 6th in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Lori Wilson- Voss completed her term as the Midwest Area Representative, as well as her position as Senior Co-Chair of the National Council. Lori did an outstanding job representing the Midwest Area and her leadership will be missed by the Council. Sherri Buxton has been selected to replace Lori as our representative.

The most noteworthy information to share with all of you is that the National Council is tentatively planning a Secretarial Conference for the Spring of 2003. As more details become available, we will let you know.

CHANGING FACES

Retirements:

Mona Keaster, Secretary (OA) for the Animal Physiology Research Unit in Columbia, MO, retired July 12, 2002 following a 15-year career with ARS. Mona began as a part-time Clerk-Typist with the Watershed Research Unit in Columbia in 1987, advanced to full-time Secretary (Typing), and then to a Unit Secretary. In retirement, she is planning on spending more time with her antique acquisition hobby.

Mary Bradshaw, Program Office Manager for the Cereal Products & Food Science Research Unit at NCAUR, retired from ARS on June 28, 2002, after more than 28 years with the ARS. She started her government career in 1974 at the ARS Regional Office in Pioneer Park (Peoria) working in the Budget & Fiscal Office. In 1976, she became Secretary to the Regional Information Officer. When the USDA reorganization took place in 1984 she was assigned to NCAUR as Supervisor of the Typing Pool. NCAUR was realigned in 1985 and she began her duties then as Secretary to one of the Research Leaders. She held that official position until she retired.

Linda Borrer, Program Office Manager for the Food & Industrial Oil Research Unit at NCAUR, retired from ARS on May 31, 2002. She had 34 years with ARS. She held various positions including temporary assignments in almost every Lab Chief/Research Leader office at NCAUR. Most of her career was spent in the Fermentation Office, Steno Pool, Assistant Director's Office, Oil Chemical Research Unit, and finally the Food and Industrial Oil Research Unit.

AD-421 REPORTS

Summary Reports - Following are instructions on how to PRINT the Summary Report which lists all projects requiring the fiscal/annual progress report.

ARIS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

From the Main Screen, choose

Research doc

Status

Annual 421 Reports

Query

In the query screen click on ?

Enter your modecode example 36%XX%xx (XX = your location, xx = your unit)

ENTER

Click on "Action"

"Mark All Records"

Click on "Print"

"Summary"

Then from the Adobe Screen that pops up you can look at the records and/or choose Print.

DID YOU KNOW ...

- You can use “Find and Replace” to replace codes in WordPerfect.

From the tool bar select the following:

Edit

Find & Replace [Ctrl F]

With cursor in “Find”, select “Match”, “Codes”

Highlight code from the pop-up box, then select Insert

Place cursor in “Replace with” box and select another code from the pop-up box,
then select Insert

Select choice from right to continue (i.e., ‘Find Next’, ‘Find Prev.’, etc.)

- You can use “Paste Special” to paste text from one document into a word processing document, without the codes attached. For example, pasting text from a Web page into WordPerfect.

Select and copy the text you want to paste, then go into WordPerfect.

From the tool bar select the following:

Edit

Paste Special

The text should appear in your document without any codes. (Also available for use in Word.)

- Don’t forget! If your unit needs financial assistance to send you to a job-related training session, the Area Office may be able to assist you with your financial needs. The training scholarship form is located on the PASTG website. You can find it at: www.mwa.ars.usda.gov/pastg

MAKE TIME PRODUCTIVE

We are all very busy! Is there ever a “spare” moment? And yet, we have times when there are a “few minutes” at the end of the day when we really don’t want to start a new big project. So what do we do with that time? Here are a few suggestions to make that 15-minute interval productive:

- Reassess your list of goals for yourself - Are you on track with your goals? Do you need to re-prioritize your goals? Do you need to add or delete goals?
- Clean up your email. Check your archived email - are there things that are no longer needed and can be deleted?
- Teach yourself something new:
 - Increase your ability to use the written and spoken word appropriately: Look up something in *The Gregg Reference Manual* that seems to give you problems (punctuation, proofreaders’ marks, capitalization problems, troublesome words, etc.)
 - Take time to explore a software program that you don’t know well. Glance through the help topics and pick a topic that has given you problems or investigate features of the program that you haven’t used before.

- Keep a file of “Things to read,” that you can handle in spare minutes. It may be a new directive, or material on a new skill you want to develop, etc.
- Clean out file drawers a couple of folders at a time. You could keep a “marker folder” in a file to show how far you have gotten for the next time you have 15 spare minutes.
- Brainstorm ways to streamline your work. Think about the tasks that take most of your time every day. Write down as many things as you can that would help make that job easier, faster, more enjoyable, etc.
- Review your manuals for out-of-date materials. I look at my stack of manuals and I know there is outdated information that can be thrown away. Try going through one book at a time, so that it doesn’t seem like an overwhelming task.
- House-clean your address files. Do you have addresses, phone numbers and email addresses in your files that are obsolete?
- Organize project files. The ARIS on-line manual, Chapter 15F, tells what to keep in a research project file folder and the alignment of documents within the project folder (see “Helpful Hints” below).
- Create your own “Standard Operating Procedures Manual.” If someone else needed to help you because you were out of the office sick for an extended time, would it be easy for them to know how to do things from the way your desk/office is organized and the notes you could provide for them regarding your job?
- Reorganize your computer files. Delete unnecessary files. Re-evaluate the folders. Do you ever have problems finding electronic files when you need them? Maybe you need to “re-file” your computer files.
- Journal your thoughts and ideas. Are you the person you want to be? What do you value? What do you need to do to become the person you want to be?
- Plan ahead. Jot down important projects coming up. Are there parts of those jobs that can be done ahead of schedule to make the job easier? Set time-lines for accomplishing the tasks on your calendar.

These are only a few ideas. You may like some of the ideas - you may dislike all the ideas. If you dislike all the ideas - guess what: You can use your first 15 spare minutes to come up with your own “list of things I want to do with 15 spare minutes.” Good luck!

HELPFUL HINTS

When you have a new CRIS Project, Grant, Specific Cooperative Agreement, or CRADA, set up a separate folder for the new project. On the inside cover of the file folder, use an Avery Adhesive Full Sheet Block-Out Label (#5455). There are 20 labels to a package. On this label, you can keep a running log of the different actions on this project as it goes through its cycle. While the project is in a “pending ” status, put a large colored paperclip on the folder to alert you that you need to keep checking on the status of the project as it goes through the different levels of the approval process. When the project has expired and you need to do a final report at annual report time, put a small binder clip on the folder to remind you which projects need to be terminated. For those of you who have numerous projects, these suggestions might be helpful when looking at the folders as to which projects still need attention.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The following is our issue sheet. If you have an issue that you feel needs to be addressed, submit your

form to Heather Pace, PASTG Co-Chair via e-mail: paceh@missouri.edu or desk address: USDA, ARS-PGRU, 204 Curtis Hall, UMC, Columbia, MO 65211

This information will be forwarded, anonymously if requested, to the Midwest Area Senior Management Team. The response will come back to the sender confidentially through Heather Pace.

Issues and Concerns

(State briefly what issue is)

Concern or question generated from location

Problem/Explanation:

Impact:

Why is this a problem; How does this affect your routine?

Suggested Solutions:

PASTG Recommendation:

Senior Management Team Remarks:

Senior Management Team Recommendation: