

NEWS NOTES JANUARY 2003

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS:

Our appreciation is extended to **Georgetta Stonewall** for her three years of service to the Program Administrative Support Task Group for representing the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research. Georgetta was instrumental in maintaining the SOP manual, the mentoring program and was invaluable in coordinating the 2001 Area Secretarial meeting. Please join us in thanking her for her service and wishing her well in her new position as Contracting Specialist for the Midwest Area.

NEW PASTG MEMBER:

Brittney Mernick, will be representing the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Peoria, IL. Her bio is located under "Changing Faces".

REMEMBER:

--Go through files, disposing of materials that may be discarded, and do a general "house-cleaning" of computer files and general files.

--Mid-January: Submit documentation of Cat. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 accomplishments, appraisal and award forms to Center or Area Director.

--Be sure all Cat. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 employees have performance standards and IDPs in place for the coming year.

CHANGING FACES:

Mindy Barber, Secretary of the Air Quality of Agricultural Systems Research Unit, National Soil Tilth Laboratory, in Ames, IA. Mindy joined ARS in January 1998 as an Office Automation Clerk. Before ARS, she worked at a local hospital in a variety of departments, such as Pre-Admissions, Emergency Room, and First Admitting. She is looking forward to the challenges of her new position.

Thomas Evans, Office Automation Assistant, Center Directors Office, National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Peoria, IL. Retired from the U.S. Army with job experience in both personnel and logistics areas, Tom is the father of three children and the grandfather of four. After traveling around the

country for the past 20 years he enjoys spending as much time as possible with his family.

Dianna Halcumb, Secretary of the Microbial Genomics and Bioprocessing Research Unit, National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Peoria, IL. Diana spent several years working with the Navy (including duty in the Caribbean and Great Britain). She moved to Peoria about four years ago with her three daughters, Leah, Danielle, and Rachel, and their three cats and hamster. She enjoys gardening, photography, crocheting, reading, enjoying the outdoors whenever possible, spending time with her friends, and is very active in her church.

Karen Hughes, Office Automation Assistant, National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Peoria, IL. Prior to coming to ARS Karen was employed by ROHN Manufacturing in Peoria for 18 years holding the position of Project Manager for the Construction Group. Karen is married with one son. She enjoys the lazy days of summer boating and jet skiing with family and friends.

Brittney Mernick, Secretary of the Food and Industrial Oils Unit, National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Peoria, IL. Brittney worked as a Physical Science Aid since 1998 at the Center while pursuing her Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism, Bradley University. Brittney enjoys reading, sewing, scrap booking, singing and playing the cello.

Wyvonne (Kit) Mernick, Secretary of the Cereal Products and Food Sciences Research Unit, National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Peoria, IL. She has her bachelor's degree in Business Management from the University of Illinois, Springfield. Prior to coming to ARS she was employed at a non-profit organization as Business Manager. Kit is married and the mother of two children. She enjoys working in the yard and maintaining her Koi pond.

Cris Nass, Office Automation Clerk, North Central Regional Plant Introduction Station, Ames, IA. After living in Naperville, Illinois almost her whole life she decided to move to Ames, Iowa to be closer to family and to enjoy small town living. Before coming to NCRPIS she worked in a variety of different office settings including interior design, workers compensation, and real estate.

Becky Roland, Secretary of the Soil and Water Quality Research Unit, National Soil Tilth Laboratory, Ames, IA. She previously worked with a large health insurer in Colorado for many years and her last position included controlling a large inventory of forms on a central website, as well as trouble-shooting orders placed on that website and handling training duties. Returning to Iowa in 2001, she worked as a documentation writer in a manufacturing firm before joining the NSTL staff.

Pamela Stewart, Secretary of the Agricultural Land & Watershed Management Unit, National Soil Tilth Laboratory in Ames, IA. Previously, Pam was a member of the Administrative Support Team as an Office Automation Clerk and Office Automation Assistant. She has also worked as the Office Manager of a local church and a cosmetologist.

DID YOU KNOW?

- \$ Ctrl + W will close the annoying pop-up advertising screens on the Internet.
- \$ **www.google.com/unclesam** is a U.S. government search engine. You can find just about anything concerning the government via this engine.
- \$ There is now a website to access for information about which countries we should not send correspondence without special permission.
 - Access **www.treas.gov/ofac**
 - Select “Sanctions Program and Country Summaries” located in the Content directory.
 - Locate the country on the list.
 - Note that some countries have both “Overview of Sanctions” and “Guidelines and Information.”
 - Select the information you want and it will open in Adobe Acrobat Reader

UPDATE:

As you are aware, standardized performance elements for the secretarial series are being developed for implementation in the Midwest Area. We are awaiting final approval from the Area Directors' office and expect that these will be applied during the next performance rating cycle. Please make sure that you have current standards in place so that you may be rated at the appropriate time. All standards must be in place for 90 days with a rating and reviewing official's signature in order to be rated for this performance year. As additional information is received from the Area, we will keep you posted.

Happy New Year!



November 2003 Issue

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS:

Our appreciation is extended to Diane Cronk for her service to the Program Administrative Support Task Group. Diane has been very active in all of the Council's activities and for the past 3 years she has served as the Secretary of the Council. Please join us in thanking her for her service to the PASTG.

NEW PASTG MEMBER:

Jaci Weese replaced Diane Cronk in representing the Ames, IA, campus location. Jaci is the Secretary of the Swine Odor and Manure Management Research Unit and has been with ARS since 2000. Prior to coming to ARS, she was employed with the Ames School District as an Administrative Assistant. She serves on the MWA EO Advisory Committee for the Ames location. In her spare time, Jaci is a Director with Mary Kay Cosmetics. She also enjoys reading, stamping, traveling, and spending time with her family.

NEW PASTG WEBSITE:

Have you stopped at the PASTG web site recently? The site has been updated and contains many valuable links to numerous resources which we use in day-to-day

activities. Check it out at:

<http://www.mwa.ars.usda.gov/mwa/pastg/index1.htm>

Navigation for the new website contains links on the left side bar that keep you within the PASTG web site. The right side bar has related links that take you away from the PASTG site, but are relevant to the topic of the page. You will notice that near the top left portion of the web site, you have convenient links to ARS, the Midwest Area and to the opening page of the PASTG site. These links are on every page.

The SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) is an excellent resource. Note that the new site contains numerous additional links to information helpful to each topic. Take a look at the expanded list of links on the right side bar.

Information has been grouped according to topics that will be used in web sites agency wide in the near future. "Research" contains all sorts of information relevant to tasks we do in support of the ARS mission. You can find information about AD-416/417s, annual reports, patents, and extramural agreements within this section. There are also links to OSQR, NAL, the ARIS Manual, CRIS information as well as electronic references and agricultural World Wide Web sites. Tell your scientists about this section, as they will find it useful.

The "Products and Services" section contains our products, most importantly the SOP. Look for us to provide additional helpful information to you in this section.

Another area your scientists may like is the "People and Places." The right side bar contains numerous helpful links to other offices,

international calling codes, postal information, the REE directory etc. If you have a site that you find useful, let us know, and we will add it!

This section also provides information about your representatives on the PASTG committee, as well as the nomination materials for Secretary of the Year.

“News and Events” will have the most current newsletters. We will also feature upcoming events in this section.

“Partnering” is the section of the web site that provides information on collaboration and technology transfer. If your scientists have questions about patents, inventions, CRADAs or where to find funding opportunities - this is the page for them!

Our charter and accomplishments are displayed under “About Us,” and the final section on top is “careers.” Information about training, ethics and human resources may be found under “careers.”

Because this site is newly updated, we realize you may have suggestions for improvement or things you would like to see added. Please send your input regarding the site to Sandy Groneberg at groneberg@morris.ars.usda.gov.

TRAVEL TRAINING:

The Midwest Area was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend travel training conducted by Linda Mahoney, financial specialist, Beltsville, MD. She is better known as the “travel guru.” For those who were unable to attend here are few things that were covered:

FTR and ATR chapters:

301 Applicability and general rules

302 Relocation allowances
303 Payment of expenses
 connected with the death of
 certain employees
304 Payment from a non-federal
 source for travel expenses

Rules of Thumb:

- If it doesn’t say you can, you can’t!
- Just because it saves money doesn’t mean it is permissible by regulation.

General Rules and Responsibilities:

- No one can approve their own travel authorization or travel voucher.
- Regulations apply to ALL individuals traveling for the Federal Government.
- Individuals shall conduct themselves in a prudent manner when incurring expenses.
- Only travel that is advantageous to the U.S. Government will be authorized.
- When possible, approving officials shall schedule travel to prevent employees from having to travel during non-duty hours (Fair Labor Standards Act).
- Redelegations must be in writing.

Travel Requiring Special Approval:

- Any annual leave being used in conjunction with official travel.
- Deviations for personal convenience from normal mode of transportation or itinerary.
- Travel that combines personal travel with official travel.
- Offsite meetings which costs the USDA \$25,000 or more.

Reminders While in Travel Status :

- Use of the travel card in place of the fleet card for the purchase of gasoline is

prohibited. You must use the fleet card for any vehicle related expense. If the fleet card does not work or is not available, use cash or your personal credit card.

- No travel advances will be approved unless for foreign travel.
- Preferred method for paying meeting registration is the purchase card.
- You must use the travel card for travel expenses (air fare, lodging, food, etc.) when on official business.
- You must pay the balance on your travel card every month, regardless whether the traveler has been reimbursed.

CHANGING FACES:

Jackie Brown is the new secretary at the Cereal Disease Laboratory (CDL) in St. Paul, Minnesota. Jackie will provide administrative support for program development, fiscal management, and research documentation, as well as managing the front office at the CDL. Jackie has been a Federal employee since 1988 and was previously employed by the Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons, Correctional Programs Division. She has four children and enjoys spending time with her children, biking, boating and fishing, camping and traveling.

Kim Meyers is serving as the Secretary in the Vegetable Crops Research Unit in Madison, Wisconsin. She is married and the mother of three boys. Prior to ARS, she worked at the University of Wisconsin in the Housing Division and also with the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences in the Short Course Program. Kim enjoys outside activity and especially camping with her family.

Janet Herrick has worked for the Government in various capacities for 26 years. She actually started work for the National Animal Disease Center in 1961 and worked there for about 8 years when she left for a time period to raise her family. She returned to NADC in 1984 and worked there until 1988 when she took a job with the Office of Technology Transfer. Upon her supervisor's retirement in May of 2003, she began her career once again at the NADC. Janet is since with two grown children. She remarked that, "it feels good to be back in the same office I worked in many years ago."

Gera Ashton began work at the National Animal Disease Center as the Program Assistant to the Ames Modernization Program in June. Gera is a graduate of Iowa State University where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications. She previously worked for Master Builders of Iowa in Cedar Rapids and has many skills pursuant to working with architectural, engineering, and construction firms. Gera is a veteran of the United States Air Force where she spent six years as a Personnel Specialist in Minot, North Dakota before moving with her family to Iowa. She is married and has a 10 year old son.

Stephanie Mitchell was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and since that time she has lived in many different states. She came to Purdue in 1994 to pursue a bachelors degree in Animal Agribusiness. It was at Purdue that she met her husband, Derek. They reside on their small hobby farm in Delphi, IN. She and her husband are also very active in the church, where they publish the monthly church newsletter and Stephanie serves as president of the Women's Fellowship. Professionally, Stephanie started with the USDA in 2000

under the Farm Service Agency. In 2003, she made the move to the Agricultural Research

Increase Your Word Power:

Following are some words that are mispronounced by many people, along with their recommended pronunciations.

1. **often:** The correct pronunciation is “OFF-en” NOT “OFT-en.” The “t” is silent, just as it is in the word “soften,” which we pronounce as “SOF-en not “SOFT-en.”
2. **poignant:** The “g” is silent and the second syllable is pronounced quickly - POYN-yuhnt.
3. **recognize:** Don’t let the second syllable degenerate into “uh.” It is correctly pronounced as “REHK-uhg-nyz.”
4. **forbade:** Bade rhymes with “mad,” not with “made.” Say fur-BAD.
5. **indicative:** Don’t say IHN-duh-kay-tihv. Ihn-DIHK-uh-tihv is the correct pronunciation.

Your Telephone “Personality”:

When we meet people face to face, we give them a smile or a friendly hand shake. On the telephone, we must rely completely on our speech to establish a good relationship. The following questions will help you analyze the way others perceive you on the phone.

- How does your voice sound? (Harsh, sharp, whiney, shrill, nasal, joyous, clear, etc.) Think about the voice qualities that you like in others - is that how you sound?

Service

- What manner and attitude do you project? (Abrupt, impatient, cold, hurried, accommodating, courteous, confident, respectful, etc.)
- How well do you enunciate your words? Do you run words together and speak so rapidly that the caller cannot understand what you are saying? If you are giving phone numbers or e-mail addresses - slow down! The person is trying to write down the number or address.
- Do you think about your grammar and vocabulary? Do you tend to use “slang?”
- Do you interrupt the caller or wait for them to finish what they are saying?
- Do you end conversations without saying “good-bye?”
- Do you listen attentively, or is it necessary for the caller to repeat their request due to your distraction?
- Do you talk while chewing gum, candy or other food?
- Do you bang the receiver after completing a call?

What picture of yourself are you giving to the person on the other end of the line? The impression you make depends entirely on what you say AND the way you say it.

UPDATE:

- Retain travel documents for **6 years and 3 months** as prescribed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) under General

Records Schedule 6, paragraph 1
(<http://ardor.nara.gov/grs/grs06.html>)

HELPFUL TIP:

If your Unit does not have monthly meetings, you may find it difficult to remind the staff about upcoming events or new regulations. Following are the steps to sending out reminder emails that will be easier for the research staff to process than an entire P&P:

1. Pick a date, such as the first of each month, the first Monday of each month, etc.
2. Keep notes for a couple weeks beforehand on items you would like to share with your research unit—you may want to remind them of travel regulations, e-buy training or your vacation schedule.
3. Send out an email titled “Unit Monthly Notes December” (or something similar so it will be easily recognizable).
4. Keep the email on the shorter side—4-6 different topics, 4 or less sentences each.
5. Continue to keep new notes for the next email. Your unit will soon recognize the value of these emails!