



MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Heather Lewandowski & Marci Bushman

As we move forward in this New Year, the MWACOP wants to thank you for the contributions you make in support of the success of ARS-MWA. The administrative tasks you perform are essential to our organization and attention to these details allows the scientists to concentrate on their research.

One of the objectives of the Council is “Improving communication and interactions to enhance teamwork.” In that regard, we seek best practices on daily office operations to share with others. Please contact a Council member listed below to share your thoughts and/or ideas for future editions of News Notes. If it’s an area of interest to one, it’s probably an area of interest to many.

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MWACOP web site:
<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop>

The link has recently changed – bookmark the link listed above to reach the web site and information on the SOP. Please notify a Council member if you see an error or find a link that does not work.

THE ARS RESEARCH POSITION EVALUATION SYSTEM (RPES) An Overview

[Research Position Evaluation System \(RPES\)](#) is the process used by ARS to determine promotional potential for Category 1 scientists. Unlike most other Federal positions, grade levels for Category 1 (Cat 1) scientists do not have a defined maximum promotion potential. Instead, the classification of the Cat 1 position is based on the Research Position Evaluation System (RPES). Details about RPES are provided in [P&P](#) and [Manual 431.3-ARS](#). Briefly, the grade level of a position depends on the incumbent's qualifications and scientific contributions, termed the "person in-the-job" concept. The scientist's record of professional activity will be reviewed periodically by a panel that will decide whether the current grade level is accurate.

It is important to distinguish between RPES evaluations and performance appraisals. As described above, the grade level is decided by an RPES panel and determines the basic salary. However, there can be other salary adjustments depending on the outcome of annual performance appraisals. This appraisal, completed by the immediate supervisor, is required for all federal employees. The criteria used for performance appraisals are determined by line management officials at the beginning of each rating period. It includes an individualized standard that describes the level of activity expected for satisfactory performance of professional duties and for other important requirements of the position (such as efficient utilization of fiscal and human resources, support of EEO objectives, and compliance with safety protocols). If rated as "Less Than Fully Successful" in a Critical Element of the performance standard, RPES grade level review will be denied until the performance issue is resolved.

RPES Review Process

The review cycles are keyed to the position's current grade level: GS-12 and below, 3 years; GS/M-13, 4 years; GS/M-14 and above, 5 years. When circumstances dictate, Area Directors may approve Early or Delayed Review as exceptions to these cyclic intervals. RPES panels use evaluation criteria prescribed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG). This document is the Government-wide classification standard for research positions. The RGEG defines the levels of responsibility, achievement, and activity that are typical for scientists holding positions of certain grades. The RPES panel will apply the RGEG to the position using an information package (case write-up)

prepared by the scientist in conjunction with the supervisor and Area Director.

FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES P&P 402.1

By Janeen Polen & Heather Lewandowski

This article should help you answer some of the common questions we are asked as timekeepers. Contact your Administrative Officer for further guidance. Specific sections are noted in parentheses () for easier reference.

- **Flexible Time (3.1.3):** Depending on flexibility allowed by supervisor, employees may vary their times of arrival to and departure from the work site within the flexible time bands **as long as they account for the number of hours they were scheduled for that day with work or leave.** For example, an employee scheduled for an 8 hour day (7:30 AM to 4:00 PM with ½ hour lunch) could come into work as early as 7 AM and work until 3:30 PM or come in as late as 8:30 AM & work until 5 PM. However, employees cannot work (or account for with leave) for only 6 hours on one 8 hour day, then account for 10 hours on another 8 hour day.
- **Gliding Time (3.1.4)** is a feature in which a supervisor allows an employee to vary a certain amount of time from their regular schedule. For example: an employee may come in no more than 30 minutes before or after their normal starting time. The employee must still account for all hours scheduled for that day through hours worked or some type of paid leave or unpaid leave.
- **Credit Time (3.3):** Credit hours may be earned and used in the same pay period; however, they cannot be used before they are earned. For example, an

employee cannot take credit time on Monday that wasn't earned until Wednesday.

- Maxiflex Schedule (3.2.2): Maxiflex is an FWS that contains core hours on fewer than 10 workdays in the biweekly pay period and in which a full-time employee has a basic work requirement of 80 hours for the bi-weekly pay period. An employee may vary the number of hours worked on a given workday, or the number of hours each week within the limits established by supervisory chain of command determinations.
 - Schedule 1 example – a biweekly period of eight 10 hour days and two off days;
 - Schedule 2 example – a biweekly period of eight 9 hour days, one 8 hour day and a day off.

Part-time employees may also select a maxiflex schedule. However, with supervisory approval and as permitted under a maxiflex schedule, a part-time employee can vary the number of hours worked each scheduled day as long as the total number of hours worked for the pay period equals the tour of duty hours on the SF-52. If the total number of scheduled hours changes, and the change is expected to continue, a new SF-52 must be submitted as mentioned above.

ARS: Employees may propose a variety of maxiflex options, varying the hours, days or weeks, including those examples shown above, as long as they have management approval. Employees select start and end points within their flexible times, subject to any agreements made with the union.

webTA REMINDERS:

- **WARNING** messages – verify everything is correct and continue.
- **ERROR** messages – need to be corrected before timesheet can be validated.

- With the exception of some instances of sick leave, requests for leave should be entered and approved before leave is taken.

HOW TO FILL OUT THE COMMENT TABS FOR PURCHASE CARD & CONVENIENCE CHECK TRANSACTIONS - UPDATED GUIDE (From Carlton Halsey, AAPC, EBSC)

Keep this handy when filling out the comment tabs in AXOL. The Comments tabs provide the ability to enter information specific to USDA that enable the review of additional information about the transaction.

Conv. Checks TIN#:

- For Convenience Checks only.
- Leave blank for normal Purchase Card transactions.
- Enter the Merchant's Tax Identification Number or Social Security Number without dashes or spaces.
- Foreign vendors use TIN 989898989.
- State/Local Governments and Universities – use TIN 787878787.
- Protect Personally Identifiable Information (PII)!

Agency Specific Data:

- Identify green purchases by entering the word "Green"
- Enter specific information for transaction such as your initials or first initial last name, procurement request number from CATS and either P or C for Partial or Complete. (Examples: ABC301-3607-910-5-5P or APerson00189C; Check with your AO or LAPC on location preferences)

Conv. Check Mer Info/Waiver #:

- For Convenience Checks only. Leave blank for Purchase Card transactions.

- Enter merchant name, address (street, city, state, and zip code), and DCIA Waiver Number. Refer to the USDA Cardholder’s Purchase Card Program Guide, Exhibit 3 for waiver list.
- Example:
Grand Canyon Company
1000 Any Street
Any City, Any State 12345
Waiver # 2

Goods Received Date:

- Purchase card transactions enter the date the goods were received.
- Convenience check transactions enter the date the check was written.
- Use date format - MM/DD/YYYY
- No other date format is acceptable

Item Description:

- Enter the item(s) purchased. Also include a description of what makes the purchase “Green” as necessary.
- Enter item description for both purchase card and convenience check transactions. Information should be specific, concise, and clear for reviewers to understand what was purchased. General descriptions (i.e., “miscellaneous,” “general office supplies,” “lab supplies,” etc.) are not acceptable. If necessary, also include a reason and/or cite regulation to justify the purchase of questionable items.
- Reminder: Put CATS number, requestor’s name, and any other information not specifically related to the item description in the **Agency Specific Data** field, not here.

PERSONNEL CHANGES:

Beth Burmeister was selected to replace Sandy Groneberg as the Program Support Assistant in Morris, MN.

Karen Hughes was selected to replace Brittney Jones as Center Director Secretary, NCAUR.

RETIREMENTS:

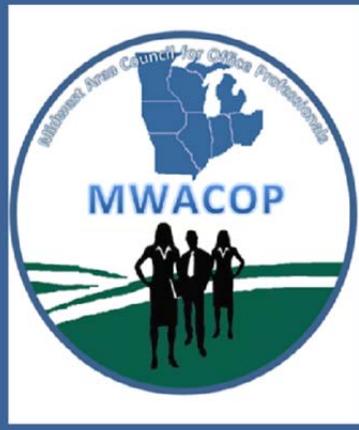
Connie Boss – W. Lafayette, IN

Karen Burianek – Ames, IA

Sandy Johnson – Ames, IA

Pamela Stewart – Ames, IA

Ginger Walker – St. Paul, MN



MWACOP News Notes

Midwest Area Council of Office Professionals

May 2013

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"The reality is that we all perform the same duties; it's how we treat our customers... that makes a positive difference."

Attitude Affects Altitude

By Heather Lewandowski

Customer Service:

Understand that the only way to distinguish you from others is through your customer service. The reality is that we all perform the same duties; it's how we treat our customers (scientists, Administrative Officers, Area, or with whomever you have contact) that makes a positive difference. A good attitude and confidence in your skills will encourage others to value you as a resource.

Network:

Get involved! Make connections! Know your key contacts in ARS. Volunteer for special projects or tasks or find other opportunities to support your scientists, your Administrative Officer, your Area, etc.

Document your Achievements:

Sometimes we are so caught up in doing our daily jobs that we forget we've gone out of our way to help someone such as a visiting foreign national or another Program Support Assistant or Secretary with a problem. If you receive a "thank you" email from someone you've helped, pop it into a folder to remind you when writing up your documentation! Our supervisors are dealing with other daily issues and don't always notice special accomplishments. The more you share your good stories, the more you'll have!

Attitude for Success:

Always be looking ahead. Our duties and responsibilities are constantly changing and to be successful, we must adapt to the changes. "Some people grin and bear it. Others smile and change it."

Do you grin or smile?



The Eastern Business Service Center (EBSC)

By Janeen Polen

ARS established the Business Service Centers with the goal to centralize Headquarters, Area Offices, and the National Agricultural Library. Much of this has been done virtually, and depending upon your dealings, you may not have even noticed the changes.

The EBSC serves the Beltsville, North Atlantic, South Atlantic and Midwest Areas. It includes 102 positions, provides service from six different locations, and is headed by Willis Collie. Mr. Collie is the Director of the AFM Eastern Business Service Center. He holds a Master's degree in International Business from Florida International University, as well as a B.S. in Agricultural Business and a B.A. in Spanish from Clemson University.

Prior to this appointment Mr. Collie served as the Deputy Area Director - Business Management for the Southern Plains Area from 2006-2011. He has worked for USDA for over 25 years. For much of his career, he served in the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) organizing market promotions and trade events throughout Asia, Europe, and Latin America. In 1996, he established the FAS Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office in Miami to promote U.S. food and beverage exports to the Caribbean region, and served as the Director until 2000. Mr. Collie was a three-time recipient of USDA's Export Expansion Award during his tenure with FAS.

Mr. Collie manages two Deputy Directors; however one position is currently vacant. The first position is filled by Carlos Santoyo and he is located in Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania. He leads Field Liaison & Customer Service, which includes Information Technology, Facilities, Property & Safety, and Acquisitions.

Mr. Santoyo has a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. Prior to working with ARS, he worked for the U.S. Forest Service in Arizona, North Carolina, and Puerto Rico and with the Navy Facilities Command and the Navy Medical Command in Camp Pendleton, California.

He came to ARS in 1991 as a General Engineer to Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) in Greenport, New York where he was part of the team that renovated the animal bio-containment facility. Later, he was appointed Assistant Center Director for Management responsible for all support of the research program at PIADC.

**EBSC Continued on page 6*

"The ARS goal has been to centralize Headquarters, Area Offices, and the National Agricultural Library."



Willis Collie, Director, EBSC.

Yes, YOU are a limited resource!

Taken from "Harvard Business Review"

by Peter Bregman

Submitted by Kim Meyers

There is no escaping the nonstop surge of email and voicemail. How can we ever catch up? We can't. The idea that we can get it all done is the biggest myth in time management.

Each day has only 24 hours and we can't sustainably work through all of them. On one hand, that's depressing, but on the other hand, acknowledging it can be tremendously empowering. Once we admit that we aren't going to get it all done, we're in a much better position to make explicit choices about what we are going to do. Instead of letting things haphazardly fall through the cracks, we can intentionally push the unimportant things aside and focus our energy on the things that matter most.

There are two main challenges in doing the right things: identifying "the right things" and "doing" them.

Most of us manage our time reactively, making choices based on the needs that land on our desks. To determine the "right things," we need to make deliberate choices that will move us toward the outcomes we most want. This, of course, also means that we need to make deliberate choices about what not to do. It's never been more important to be strategic about what we choose to do.

In terms of the second challenge, "doing" or following through, we need tools and rituals. We need an environment that makes it more likely that we will do the things that matter most and less likely that we will waste our time with meaningless, unproductive diversions. We need to know how to prioritize properly, delegate deliberately, tabulate to-do lists, and mitigate multi-tasking.

But which tools work best? Which rituals will help us follow through? Here's a process to help you avoid turning time management into another

excuse to procrastinate on your most important priorities.

1. Think for a moment about the time-management problems you face. Do you leave the office with a nagging feeling that you worked all day but didn't get your most important work done? Do you feel like you aren't taking advantage of your talents and passions? Are you distracted by little things? Avoiding big hairy projects? Do you interrupt yourself with email and other distractions? Try taking this three-minute quiz to discover where you are distracting yourself the most.
<http://peterbregman.com/18minutes/quiz>
2. Once you've identified your biggest time-management challenges, choose a single one to tackle. Maybe you're not clear on your "right things." Maybe you use the wrong rituals. Maybe you strive for perfection. Pick the challenge that most often gets in your way. Then choose one time-management tactic to solve that challenge.
3. If that tactic works, repeat the process with another challenge. If it doesn't, try a new tactic. Continue to approach things this way, one at a time, so you can be sure what works for you and what doesn't.



Stress and Stress Management Tips Rarely Help You Deal with Crappy Situations at Work

Taken from "IAM Learning Community" by Karen Tax
Submitted by Kim Meyers

There is a plethora of advice on *ways to relieve stress and ways of dealing with stress* that address health concerns. But what about dealing with stress at work that is often the root cause of these stress symptoms? What about the causes of stress at work?

- The following is a list of work related situations or experiences. Pick all that you have experienced in the past year at work:
- You do not have control of how you can produce your best work
- You spend a significant amount of your time reacting to external demands
- Your confidence in your work has eroded
- Your inability to 'say no' to certain work demands has led to overwhelm
- You have begun to feel apathetic about your work
- You do not have control of your time
- Your manager does not appreciate you
- Your employees or colleagues don't appreciate you
- You have begun to be complacent about your career
- You are not involved in decisions made by management
- Your employees or colleagues are apathetic about decisions you are making
- You experience 'churn' in your work - a lack of clarity about focus, direction or priorities
- You are losing the passion and energy you once had for work
- Your manager does not care about you
- Your employees or colleagues do not care about you
- You long for a sense of family or community at work
- You feel that you don't have a choice about your work because you need to support your family or lifestyle
- You are willing to trade-off happiness now for fun in retirement
- Your manager does not make time for conversations with you
- Your employees or colleagues are difficult to engage or talk with

- You work very hard and have the feeling that you are making very little progress
- You dread Mondays
- Your manager has made you cry
- You are frustrated by your employee's lack of understanding about the big picture
- You are involved in decisions made by management but don't feel heard
- You do not have control of your workload
- You do not feel that you have many choices about your work in general
- You wish that work was more fun
- You use caffeine, medication, sugar or other stimulants to keep your energy up for work
- You use alcohol, medication, or other depressants to unwind from your work day

Each item on the "stress test" above is potentially an indication of a serious stress concern. Each item is also an opportunity to do something about workplace stress and stress management. The more stress you tolerate in your job, the more *stress symptoms* you will experience over time. Ultimately, it's up to you to determine the results of the "stress test." What's most important is to be aware of workplace stress and do something about it.

The following are excellent ways to get started dealing with workplace stress, and experience relief:

- Learn to set boundaries and say no to any work where you can't be your best
- Become more proactive where you can be your best and less reactive
- Focus on your strengths, not weaknesses
- Insist on being involved in decision-making processes; follow your passion
- Listen to others; carve out time for others to listen to you
- Pay attention to how your work fits (or not) with business/society needs
- Love yourself and the people you work with

Ironically, eliminating stress also provides ways to reconnect with being your best - aligning your actions with the 'original you.'

For additional information -

<http://www.iamlearningcommunity.com/stress-and-stress-management-tips-rarely-help-you-deal-with-crappy-situations-at-work/>

Eastern Business Service Center (EBSC) Portal

Submitted by Kim Meyers and Kit Mernick

The Portal is a web-based SharePoint tool that will eventually replace multiple SharePoint sites in ARS, provide easy access to forms and documents, build a library of standardized training and reference material, and track work request entry and status and provide resources that are located in a single location.

Currently, the Portal is not functioning at 100%. All of the information has not yet been migrated, but updates and additions are made weekly. The migration is going to take time because Travel Specialists from four different Areas in the EBSC are working on this to make it consistent throughout the EBSC which covers, the Midwest Area, North Atlantic Area, South Atlantic Area, and the Beltsville Area.

We are encouraged to utilize the Shared Documents folder on the Portal for the most up-to-date and current forms. We anticipate that much of the travel information will eventually be removed from the MWACOP website and the MWA ATA SharePoint site and will be replaced with a link to the EBSC Portal.

MWACOP Representatives 2012-2013

Heather Lewandowski, Sr. Co-Chair
 Marci Bushman, Jr. Co-Chair
 Lori Burma, Recorder
 Deborah Schaefer, Co-SOP Editor
 Kim Meyers, Ex-Officio & Co-SOP Editor
 Janeen Polen, News Notes Editor
 Missy Stiefel, MWA NACOP Rep & Technical Advisor
 Sherri Buxton, Technical Advisor
 Robin Brewster, Representative

*All representatives serve for three years.
 Applications are now being accepted for the council.*

Office Professional Spotlight: Meet Becky Roland



Becky works as a Secretary in the Soil, Water, and Air Research Unit at the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment (NLAE) in Ames, Iowa. Becky began her Federal career with the National Soil Tilth Lab (now NLAE) in November, 2002. In 2006, Becky received the Lab Employee of the Year award for "Outstanding Efforts in Administrative Support to the National Soil Tilth Laboratory Staff and ARS." In the past, Becky has volunteered as a resource for Microsoft Word related questions, updated the NLAE website, and served on the committee to develop a Desk Reference Guide for Office Professionals. Currently, she performs many of the typical secretarial tasks of a secretary, such as travel, 115s, purchasing, agreements, ARMPs prep/entry, annual reports, foreign visitors processing, and T&As. Becky creates fillable forms to gather the various types of information needed to perform those tasks and routinely shares these with others. Becky has a very pleasant attitude at work and is always willing to help when she can. She says her way of getting through the work day is by keeping her sense of humor. "If you can make it better, make it better; if you can't, just do it with a smile."

PERSONNEL CHANGES:

By Kim Meyers

Hail and Welcome!



Paul D. Griner (West Lafayette, Indiana) is a retired United States Navy veteran, completing 20 years of military service in 2007. Upon retirement in Juneau, Alaska, Paul and his family moved back to the Midwest where he was employed as the Program Support Assistant (PSA) with USDA/APHIS in Emerald Ash Borer project from 2007 to 2012. After a short stint with the U.S. Postal Service, Paul returned to USDA as the Program Support Assistant for the Crop Production and Pest Control Research unit in West Lafayette, Indiana. Paul and his wife share their small homestead with two dogs, four cats, and a smattering of other wildlife.

Suggestions, Comments

We want to hear from you! Do you have an idea for our next News Notes? Do you have a question about something you read in this News Notes? Drop one of us a line. This publication is for all of us, and we want to make it better!

*EBSC Continued from Page 2

With the transfer of PIADC to the Department of Homeland Security, Mr. Santoyo was reassigned to the NAA Director Office to serve as the Assistant Area Director for Facilities responsible for coordinating all major construction within NAA.

Many of the Midwest Area office personnel are now part of the Eastern Business Service Center but continue to work out of the same building in Peoria. They include:

- Deb Agee - Human Resources
- Lashay Brown - Office Automation
- Kari Deppe - Branch Chief for Budget Travel and Agreements;
- Lisa Gettinger - Budget and Fiscal Team
- Tim Golden - Engineering Tech/Realty Specialist
- Rebecca Holtzinger - Procurement Analysis,
- Andrea Miller - Information Technology
- Kit Mernick - Travel
- Dona Subatch - Office Automation
- Team lead
- Kristin Turner - Contract Specialist
- JoAnn Volk - Agreements Team
- Mark Volk - Contract Specialist

Diane Strub, the former Deputy Area Director for the Midwest Area, is now assigned to the Western Business Service Center as the Deputy Director for Accountability & Organization Performance. Constance Williams, Contract Specialist, is also assigned to the Western Business Service Center and works out of the Peoria office.





MWACOP NEWS NOTES

Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

December 2013

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MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

In June, Heather Lewandowski rotated to the Ex-Officio position on the MWACOP per the rotation schedule approved in the charter. Marci Bushman is now the Sr. Co-Chair and Lori Burma was elected as the new Jr. Co-Chair. Other members of the council include:

Janeen Polen

Deborah Schaefer

Robin Brewster – Recorder

Vicki Jones – News Notes Editor

Beth Burmeister

Missy Stiefel – Technical Advisor/NACOP representative

Sherri Buxton – Technical Advisor

Please remember to use the following link to the MWACOP website: <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop>. We continue to upload new and/or revised documents to the A-Z listing of the SOP and the look of the website will soon be changing. Also remember to always let a MWACOP member know if you see an error or something that needs to be updated on the MWACOP website so we can get it fixed or added as soon as possible.

As always, please let us know if you have an area of interest you would like us to address in future editions of the News Notes. If it's an area of interest to one, it's probably an area of interest to many.

We want to thank the NACOP for a wonderful training workshop November 13-14, 2013. Their persistence in seeking and receiving approval to host the workshop is very much appreciated. If you have never attended a NACOP workshop and you get the opportunity, we highly recommend you take advantage of it!

Have a happy holiday season!

Marci Bushman & Lori Burma
Co-Chairs

NACOP Training Workshop Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome

Submitted by Heather Lewandowski

The National Advisory Council for Office Professionals (NACOP) held a training workshop November 13-14, 2013, in Leesburg, Virginia. Fifteen office professionals from the Midwest Area participated and shared their thoughts on the workshop for those who were not able to attend.

Many requested to attend the workshop for the benefit of networking with other office professionals that work in similar positions to share ideas and/or learn new tools to use in daily tasks. Other participants mentioned that it was nice to have “in-person” training by the experts about new policies/systems. It is nice to be able to put a face with a name that we see in emails or other correspondence!

The breakout sessions offered were: AgLearn, Bullying, Correspondence, Excel/PowerPoint, Foreign Nationals, Grants/Agreements, Portal, Purchasing, Time and Attendance, Travel, Work/Life Programs.

By far the most favorite breakout session was Travel presented by Janelle McClintock! She presented information on the Concur travel management system which was very informative, enjoyably presented, and provided insight into the improvements that Concur has over the GovTrip system. Janelle indicated there are some negatives with the program but from what we learned the new system is a vast improvement and will make our jobs easier as travel arrangers. She also answered many questions about travel rules and regulations.

Another favorite was Bullying where Jeff Schmitt gave a lot of suggestions on identifying bullies in the workplace and tools/resources on how to deal with them. One participant said “It is hard to pick a favorite, but I was really excited about the programs that are available in the Work/Life Program. I learned so much from all of the breakout sessions and the individuals that conducted the breakouts all did an excellent job.”



Back Row (L to R): Kathy John, Lila Walters, Missy Stiefel, Jacie Klaver, Kim Meyers, Becky Horn, Lori Burma

Middle Row (L to R): Diane Perry, Janeen Polen, Debi Schaefer, Dorene Hensler, Marci Bushman

Seated: Robin Brewster, Chad Henry, Heather Lewandowski

When asked what the MWA participants gained from the experience of attending the workshop, the most recurring themes were networking with peers, gaining knowledge on systems/policies/processes, meeting coworkers for the first time and re-establishing connections with others. Other comments were:

“I came away with a feeling that we (Office Professionals) are really valued for the work we do in support of our units.”

“I have no words to express the night and day difference I feel about my job as a result of attending this training workshop. It did me so much good to step away from the trees so I could gain a more positive perspective about the forest and my place in it.”

“While many of us hold the same title and sign the same performance plan, our jobs are all very different. I also learned that while we are all different people individually – we also all have similarities. It was a pleasant realization.”

“I am in charge of me. I am good at my job and more empowered to do my job. (Sharon Drumm and Jeff Schmitt) I learned that AgLearn has more to offer than I thought. I met four new people that I look forward to keeping in contact.”

“This workshop is a rare opportunity that affords the office professional the opportunity to step outside of their office to meet with others who have a common bond, share work experience and contact information and to encourage and be encouraged.”



HEATHER LEWANDOWSKI AND MISSY STIEFEL



KIM MEYERS AND ROBIN BREWSTER



LILA WALTERS



DIANE PERRY

DECEMBER HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Submitted by Missy Stiefel

Many holidays are celebrated at this time of year. The following paragraphs give a short description of the holiday, its origins, and some of its customs. This information was compiled from many different web sites on the Internet.

Hanukkah Hanukkah is the annual Jewish festival that is celebrated for eight successive days, beginning on the 25th day of Kislev, the third month of the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to the month of December in the Gregorian calendar. Also known as the Festival of Lights, this holiday commemorates the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem by Judas the Maccabee in 165 BC after the Temple had been defiled by Syrian King Antiochus IV. When the sacred Temple Menorah was relit, there was enough oil to burn for only one day. Yet, according to tradition, the Menorah stayed lit for eight days.



The Hanukiyah. The Menorah used to celebrate Hanukkah, called a Hanukiyah, which holds nine candles. The ninth candle, the Shamash, is used to light the other eight candles on each of the eight days of the celebration.

Gift-giving. Traditionally, children would receive gifts of gelt (in remembrance of the coins minted by the new independent Maccabee state). The tradition of giving and receiving gifts other than coins on these eight days is a fairly recent practice. Since Christians exchange gifts for Christmas, those who practice the Jewish faith have come to exchange presents as well.



Christmas For Christians, Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind.



Traditions. Many of the traditions of this holiday were taken from pagan celebrations. At the time of Christ's death, the Romans ruled Judea and the early Christians witnessed many different Roman celebrations. The Romans celebrated Saturnalia, which began in the middle of December and lasted until January 1st. They hung garlands of laurel and had green trees lit with candles as part of the celebration. They also exchanged gifts called *Strenae*, meaning "lucky fruits."

As Christianity spread, some of the converts continued to observe the traditions of this "pagan" Roman holiday. They incorporated lighted trees, hanging garland, and gift-giving into their own celebration of the birth of Christ. Finally, in 350 A.D., the Bishop of Rome, Julius I, chose December 25th as the official observance of Christmas.



Gift-giving. Santa Claus is the gift-giving icon of the holiday season. The American name of "Santa Claus" is a mispronunciation of the Dutch *Sinterklaas*, which is a contracted form of Sint Nicolaas (St. Nicholas). The traditionally held belief about Santa is that he keeps a list of naughty and nice children, and on the night of December 24th he distributes present to the sleeping "nice" adults and children. Santa Claus is a well-known figure in many countries and has many names and traditions associated with him.



Kwanzaa - Kwanzaa is an African American holiday that is celebrated from December 26 through January 1 and is based on the agricultural celebrations of Africa called "the first fruits" celebrations. These celebrations were times of harvest, ingathering, reverence, commemoration, and recommitment. Therefore, this holiday is a time for African Americans to celebrate their heritage and their achievements. Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chair, Department of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach.





Kwanzaa is a *cultural* holiday, not a religious one, so this celebration can be practiced by African Americans (or anyone) of all religious faiths.

The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa.

Kwanzaa was created to introduce and reinforce seven basic values of African culture. These values are called the *Nguzo Saba*, which, in Swahili, means *Seven Principles*. Following are the seven principles, the days they are celebrated, and what they represent:

- Umoja (Unity) - celebrated December 26. To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
- Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) - celebrated December 27. To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.
- Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) - celebrated December 28. To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.
- Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) - celebrated December 29. To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.
- Nia (Purpose) - celebrated December 30. To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
- Kuumba (Creativity) - celebrated December 31. To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
- Imani (Faith) - celebrated January 1. To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

The Kinara. During Kwanzaa candles are placed in a candleholder called a Kinara, which holds seven candles representing the seven principles discussed above. The candle colors are red (3), green (3), and black (1)—the colors of the African flag. When placing the candles in the Kinara, the three red candles are placed on the left side. The three green candles are placed on the right. The single black candle is placed in the center and is the candle which will be lit first.



On each day of Kwanzaa a new candle will be lit as a symbol of that day. The candles will be lit in alternating colors. First the black candle is lit, then the farthest red left candle, then the farthest right green candle, and so forth.



The Seven Symbols of Kwanzaa. Each of the seven symbols below represents values and concepts reflective of African culture:

- Mazao (The Crops) - Symbolic of African harvest celebrations and of the rewards of productive and collective labor.
- Mkeka (The Mat) - Symbolic of our tradition and history and therefore the foundation on which we build.
- Kinara (The Candle Holder) - Symbolic of our roots, our parent people--continental Africans.
- Muhindi (The Corn) - Symbolic of our children and our future which they embody.
- Mishumaa Saba (The Seven Candles) - Symbolic of the Nguzo Saba, the Seven Principles, the matrix and minimum set of values which Black people are urged to live by in order to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and according to their own needs.
- Kikombe cha Umoja (The Unity Cup) - Symbolic of the foundational principle and practice of unity which makes all else possible.
- Zawadi (The Gifts) - Symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by the children.

Gift-giving. Gift-giving is another tradition in celebrating Kwanzaa. Gifts are given mainly to children and should include a book (emphasizing the African value and tradition of learning) and a heritage symbol (reaffirming the African commitment to tradition and history).



If you wish to read more about the holidays celebrated at this time of the year, the Internet is a good source.

Excerpts taken from: www.theholidayspot.com

Office Professional Spotlight—Kim Meyers

Submitted by Robin Brewster and Debi Schaefer

Before Kim started working for the Federal Government she was employed by General Dynamics in Pomona, California, from 1986-1994. Then after moving back to Wisconsin, Kim worked for the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1996-2003.



Kim Meyers began her ARS career in September 2003 as an RL Secretary at the Vegetable Crops Research Unit, Madison, Wisconsin, and quickly became a valuable resource for other MWA Office Professionals. She was promoted to a Program Support Assistant in September 2007. Kim has served the Madison location and MWA in the following capacities: MWA EEO representing Madison (2005-2007); Madison Location EEO committee (2006- 2009); member of the PASTG/MWACOP and serving as junior and senior co-chair (2007-2013) and is a current member of the Madison Secretarial Support Group. As a result of Kim's hard work and dedication, she was awarded the 2009 MWA Office Professional of the Year and recognized for exemplary leadership at the Madison location and contributions to the activities of the PASTG.

On a typical day Kim performs the following tasks: Agreements, Annual Reports, Budget, Personnel and Purchasing. These are to name only a few. Kim has several things that motivate her daily. She likes when a project comes together. She likes to see progress. Kim also enjoys visiting with the nice people in her unit and of course when it finally is 5:00 p.m.

Kim is often sought out as a resource by other location and MWA secretaries and provides excellent information and insight to other office professionals. During her ten years with ARS, Kim has learned a great deal, expanded her horizons and been a great inspiration to her co-workers (locally and area-wide). She gives this advice to other office professionals: reach out to other office professionals if you have questions; treat others as you would like to be treated; step out of your comfort zone; and don't ever turn down the opportunity to learn something new.

WELCOME TO MWA!

Submitted by Beth Burmeister

WELCOME TO MWA!

Submitted by Vicki Jones

Kristine Kust (St. Paul, Minnesota)

Kristine serves as the Program Support Assistant OA for the Plant Science Research Unit following Ginger Walker's retirement. She joined ARS in May 2013. However, Kristine is no stranger to federal service. She provided technical support and served as the "go to" person for the Natural Resource Conservation Service's state office in Madison, Wisconsin, for nineteen years.

Jacqueline Klaver (Ames, Iowa)

Jacie serves as the Secretary for the Ruminant Diseases and Immunology Research Unit at the National Animal Disease Center following Sandy Johnson's retirement. She joined ARS in June 2013. Jacie has many years of federal service both in the United States and abroad. She is married and has 5 children and 3 grandchildren.