

# MEDLEY

- a potpourri of diverse talent

Fall 2015

## Vision Statement

**To create a diverse workforce and promote a positive work environment where all employees are respected and valued for their contributions.**

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## Bringing Science and Community Together at Columbia, MO

*Written by, Matthew Sakow*

In 1981, the city of Columbia, MO met to address a particularly stressful summer of youth violence and unrest as well as high youth unemployment and established the C.A.R.E. program (an acronym for Career Awareness Related Experience) in response. This pioneering program was designed to improve conditions in the city by providing marginalized youth opportunities to work, earn money, and learn. This past summer, C.A.R.E. employed over 180 14- to 20-year-olds and placed them at job sites ranging from hair salons to newspapers to facilities with ARS. Importantly, 100% of the trainees' wages are paid by the City of Columbia through the Parks and Recreation Department, resulting in a "win-win-win" situation for the trainee, work site and community.

C.A.R.E.'s goal to prepare for Columbia's youth to be ready to enter the workforce and become productive self-sufficient citizens is fulfilled in several ways. The program provides job mentoring, career exploration, life skills training, and paid, real-world, hands-on work experience to these students. However, students also discover unique opportunities to grow and learn that they might not otherwise encounter in the classroom or at home. A student might assist a veterinarian or discover an affinity for car repair that she or he never had experienced before. Traditional schooling certainly helps students grow and mature in their learning, yet each individual learns best in different environments. The various environments encountered through the C.A.R.E. trainees' out-of-the-classroom experiences can be monumental for both for the individuals and the greater community.

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This side effect of improving the community of Columbia, MO is especially important. Ideally, a group's myriad individuals' personalities and experiences work together to move people forward—to produce the best life for each individual. However, developing such a harmonious sense of community requires the cooperation of each member and when one member benefits, it can positively affect the members around them. Thus, a success for one can be viewed as a success for all. Here in Columbia, MO, organizations such as C.A.R.E and ARS are working in tandem to develop the city, its individuals, and the greater community around them.

The collaboration between C.A.R.E. and ARS is a catalyst for monumental experiences for our youth. ARS seeks to generate interest in the sciences in our youth and bring awareness of what they do to the



greater community. C.A.R.E. has access to a large pool of teens aching to branch out and learn—to discover who they are and who they can be. While ARS desires to encourage the community to engage them, C.A.R.E., formed by the community for the community, acts as a vehicle to foster such engagement. Furthermore, as C.A.R.E. works primarily with marginalized populations of students, it is able to introduce science to traditionally underserved youth with rare access to these kinds of opportunities. Agriculture need no longer be a foreign or unknown idea in the minds of these youth; rather, it is possible for many to gain real experience in a lab or in the field. Here is where the students' true skills and talents are drawn out. Here is where they find their place in the community. Here is where they see the community come together.

C.A.R.E. is ecstatic to partner with ARS to provide opportunities to improve the community of not only Columbia, MO but also the entire Midwest. Currently, we have students working in a variety of research areas such as entomology, fish and wildlife, and other

USDA programs. This partnership allows students to foster their sense of scientific inquiry and participate in an opportunity that many never get to experience. It is our hope that more students interested in the sciences can continue to work, learn, and explore at these wonderful work sites. Together, these organizations can truly touch the minds and hearts of tomorrow.

## ARS Employee Volunteers Time and Expertise to an Iowa Community Garden

As an agricultural research science technician at the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) North Central Regional Plant Introduction Station in Ames, Iowa, Fred Engstrom's responsibilities are wide-ranging. They include tasks from managing the station's nursery and field plots to modifying research equipment and collecting yield data for critical projects such as the [Germplasm Enhancement of Maize](#) program.

But the ARS station isn't the only beneficiary of Engstrom's versatile contributions. His time and technical know-how have also been praised by members of Central Elementary in Nevada, Iowa, where Engstrom helped to build the raised beds and irrigation system for the school's community garden, dubbed "Noah's Garden."

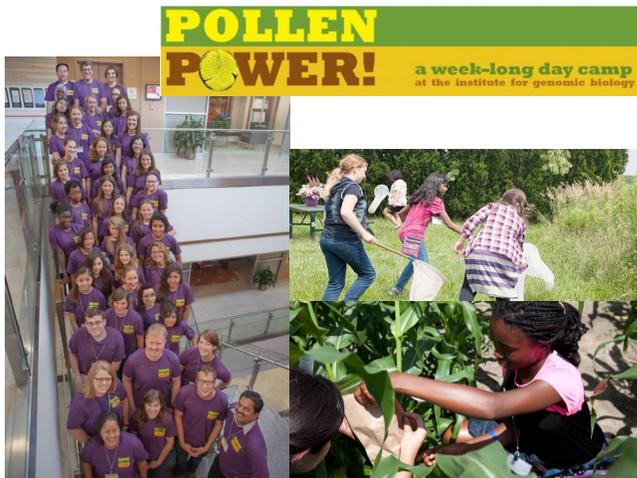
The school began the project in 2012 to provide over 350 students from 16 classrooms with a hands-on opportunity to grow their own food while simultaneously incorporating concepts in math, science, language and other academic fields. The students, together with their teachers and parents or guardians, participate in the Noah's Garden project from seeding to harvest. What the families don't take home—which can include tomatoes, lettuce, beets, broccoli, peppers, sweet corn, carrots, string beans, and other produce—is donated to local food-distribution centers.

"Fred Engstrom has been an active supporter of our garden from the beginning," says Jamie Hughet, a Central Elementary teacher and project organizer. "He was instrumental in preparing the garden and materials of the initial eight 4- by 8-foot beds and the wood-chip paths. He investigated a proper soil mixture for our area and designed the irrigation system." In 2014, he helped add 10 more beds, expanding the garden area to 35- by 45-feet, she added.

The students are assigned one raised bed per class and get to choose what they want to plant. Some have done theme gardens, including pizza and salsa gardens, as well as flower gardens displaying Iowa State University colors. Throughout, says Hughet, the students record and chart seed growth, conduct germination trials and keep weekly plant-observation journals.

Engstrom is modest about his contributions to Noah's Garden, but it's clear he's gotten as much out of the project as he has given working as a parent volunteer with the students and their families.

"I feel it's beneficial for our kids to reconnect to the land in a dirty-hands kind of way," he says. "I also find having parents involved working with other parents and children [creates] a good example for the children to see and hopefully emulate."



## Elizabeth Ainsworth Receives the Agency Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity Award

*Written by Carl Bernacchi*

Elizabeth Ainsworth was recently recognized for her creative leadership in developing an innovative science camp for middle school girls, called “Pollen Power”. This camp, organized for three years thus far, has attracted 85 junior high school girls from around the Champaign County area for a week-long science day camp. The camp is a partnership between scientists with the ARS and faculty and staff from the University of Illinois and is hosted at the Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology (IGB) on the University of Illinois’ Urbana-Champaign campus.

The success of Pollen Power is a direct result of the efforts of the organizers but is certainly facilitated by the unique opportunity for USDA-ARS scientists to partner with an outside agency – in this case, the University of Illinois. The following questions focus on Dr. Ainsworth’s impressions of organizing Pollen Camp and on partnering with an outside agency.

**Q.** Describe the expected experience of students who attend Pollen Camp?

**Dr. Ainsworth:** Pollen Power provides campers with the opportunity to investigate the up-close structure and function of pollen, and to discover connections between the biology of pollen and broader ideas: how plants grow and reproduce, the environmental impacts of climate change, and the importance of pollinating insects and vertebrates.

The camp was designed to impress upon girls what it means to be a plant biologist, and the role that women play in all levels of science. Female graduate students serve as counsellors for the campers, and campers eat lunch with female professors in the IGB. They are exposed to female scientists at all career stages, from students to starting faculty to full professors and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. Girls engage in activities including using the IGB Core Facilities’ high-powered microscopes, designing and printing 3D pollen grains at the University of Illinois Fabrication Laboratory, learning to identify different types of pollen and to pollinate corn, planning and recording a climate newscast with green screen technology, and making fiber optic hair clips.

Campers also explored pollination biology through tours of campus highlights, visiting SoyFACE, a state-of-the-art field research facility and the Pollinarium, a museum devoted to pollinating insects, birds, and other animals.

**Q.** What aspect of the partnership between the ARS and IGB do you feel is the most important?

**Dr. Ainsworth:** The people. Pollen Power started when I was writing a proposal to the NSF to investigate ozone tolerance in maize and Dr. Andrew Leakey, a co-PI on the grant and UIUC faculty, had the idea to create a camp for Jr. High girls. This idea transformed into Pollen Power, and the success of the camp is attributable to the hard work and collaboration of scientists, faculty and staff in the IGB and the USDA ARS. Without the combined efforts of everyone involved, this partnership would not succeed. This includes every aspect of running this camp of this nature from recruiting students to donating time to show how sensors work to making sure every student has an equally educational and enjoyable experience. Everyone involved, whether from the IGB or the ARS, is contributing in different ways but with a unified goal of creating a memorable and educational experience for junior high school girls.

**Q.** From the logistics perspective, what are the advantages of partnering with the IGB?

**Dr. Ainsworth:** The IGB provides many benefits to running a camp of this nature. First and foremost, the IGB has an outreach team that is already plugged into the local community. They host other events, such as Genome Day, and they have connections with science teachers in local elementary and high schools as well as clubs including the Don Moyer Boys & Girls Club. This outreach team is critical component for recruiting students to the camp.

The IGB also has an impressive list of high end research facilities. These include a state-of-the-art microscopy facilities – a critical component of Pollen Camp, and the broader campus has other fun facilities including the Fab Lab where anything and everything can be printed in 3D, a pollenarium where students can see pollinators in action. As an institute of higher learning, the IGB also has the classroom facilities to accommodate a large number of students who participate in the camp.

**Q.** Do you have any specific examples of how the synergy between ARS and IGB added value to this camp?

**Dr. Ainsworth:** I don’t think the camp would be as successful without both partners. For example, seeing pollen through a microscope and understanding how key physical characteristics of pollen add to their function can be learned from presentations alone, but having the opportunity to use the latest generation of microscopes to look at real pollen, and then creating pollen to be printed on a state-of-the-art 3D printer adds a dynamic of learning that would not exist without the IGB. Having the experience of pollenating corn in a USDA research farm is another great example of “learning by doing”. On this last point, campers who attend the University of Illinois “Agronomy Day” were able to pick up their ear of corn that they pollenated during the camp. While certain aspects of the camp would exist without both partners, bringing both partners together the experience is substantially more rewarding.

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**Q.** Do you have other examples of how the you and/or the ARS is working with other agencies to promote science education?

**Dr. Ainsworth:** ARS scientists regularly visit local elementary, middle and high schools, and some of us also are involved in Plants iView, a UIUC Department of Plant Biology after school program for Jr. High students. I personally have been involved with the OSHA Life Long Learning Institute, and have given lectures to retirees on how genomics is used in plant sciences.

**Q.** Aside from the benefits that these synergistic activities between USDA-ARS and other agencies bring to the participants, what is the most exciting aspect of these outreach activities to you?

**Dr. Ainsworth.** I find it fun and rewarding. In all of these outreach activities I am presenting to an audience that is experiencing something novel and unique to them. Whether it is a junior high school girl using scientific equipment that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars or a senior citizen whose entire schooling occurred before the discovery of DNA, everyone who participates in these activities is experiencing something new. I think outreach adds value to our research as well, by forcing us to communicate the importance of what we do every day to a different audience.

## Midwest Area employees donate nearly 15 tons of food

by Marty Williams

The Feds Feed Families campaign (FFF) is about Federal employees helping food banks and pantries stay stocked during the summer months when donations typically decline but need remains high. Food is a major focus of the USDA, and solving problems to ensure a safe, abundant supply of food is a key mission of ARS. Workforce involvement in FFF is quiet, powerful evidence of the genuine employee commitment to the overall mission of USDA-ARS. This article summarizes the FFF contributions of ARS locations in the Midwest Area in 2015.

Of the 13 Midwest Area locations, nine locations reported making donations to the FFF campaign (Table 1). A total of 29,602 lbs of food were donated, equivalent to 24,668 meals. Leading locations were West Lafayette (12,600 lbs), Urbana (7,919 lbs), and Columbia (3,938 lbs). Four locations gathered a portion of their donations from Peoples Gardens, a USDA initiative aimed at inspiring local participation in food production and environmental conservation.

Recipients of the FFF campaign were local non-profit agencies with a major role in feeding the hungry in their community. Such agencies often have a difficult time offering fresh fruits and vegetables to their clientele. Most of the Midwest Area's

locations donated a wide range of nutritious, fresh fruits and vegetables. Urbana donated 1,081 lbs of green beans and 6,603 lbs of sweet corn. In addition to green beans and sweet corn, Wooster also donated green peppers. West Lafayette donated apples, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, cucumber, eggplant, melons, onions, peppers, sweet corn, tomatoes, and zucchini. Columbia donated the most diverse selection of produce, including bok choy, cabbage, peas, green beans, tomatoes, tomatillos, cucumbers, zucchini, scallop squash, yellow squash, crookneck squash, okra, sunflowers, bell peppers, banana peppers, edamame, rainbow colors of carrots, Swiss chard, potatoes, onions, kale, beets, radishes, and watermelon.

Nice work!

Table 1. Summary of FFF donations.

Location	Donation total (lbs)	People's Garden
West Lafayette, IN	12,600	W. Lafayette's Peoples Garden
Urbana, IL	7,919	Three Sisters Garden
Columbia, MO	3,938	Curtis Hall Peoples Garden
Madison, WI	2,854	
Wooster, OH	1,371	gleaning activities
Peoria, IL	500	NCAUR Peoples Garden
Lexington, KY	191	
Columbus, OH	140	
Bowling Green, KY	89	
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,602</b>	



**Brenda Hofmann shows off a few of the tomatoes grown at West Lafayette.**

## EEO Observer Recruitment Evaluation Process & Interview Do's and Don'ts

Written by, Debra Owens-Coleman

### Procedures

#### *Selecting Official Responsibilities:*

1. It is highly recommended that the selecting official contacts the Area PM as soon as a vacancy is approved for recruitment. The **USDA Hiring Timeline Agreement** requires hiring officials to document their initiatives and efforts to advertise/recruit individuals with disabilities, veterans, women and all minorities or under-represented groups in a workforce profile.
2. The Area Program Manager will prepare the workforce profile according to Appendix A, REE Position Management and Workforce/Succession Planning Checklist, Step 2, Item 10. The Area PM or Designee consults with the selecting official in support of outreach efforts after review of the workforce profile.
3. When assembling the panel, the selecting official shall include the Area PM or Designee as a non-voting member of the panel.
4. The Selecting Official will include the Area PM or Designee in all communications (emails, teleconferences, and meeting requests) to the panelists and candidates regarding the recruitment process.
5. The Selecting Official will provide the Area PM or Designee with the certificate of eligibles, ranking templates, standard set of interview questions and all documents developed and utilized prior to the beginning of the interview session(s).
- 6.

#### *Area Program Manager/Designee:*

1. The Area PM or Designee is the responsible team member that serves as the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Observer. The Area PM or designee will serve as a non-voting member of the evaluation panel throughout the recruitment, interview, and hiring process.
2. The EEO Observer does not evaluate, rank, or vote on any applicant nor advocates for any applicant. Note that most EEO Observations are via teleconference.
3. The EEO Observer serves to validate that the selection process of a candidate is fair and equitable; to ensure selection proceedings are based upon merit principles without regard to factors such as race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability

(physical or mental), sex (including gender identity and expression), sexual orientation, genetic information, marital/parental/familial status, religion, and political beliefs.

4. The Area PM or Designee ensures that standard set of interview questions are developed that are job-related and unbiased toward any applicant; all candidates invited to interview follow the same process and/or agenda.
5. The Area PM or Designee reminds the panel chair and panelist of the confidential nature of the evaluation process ensuring the privacy of each applicant.

### Recommended Topics

#### *Guidance and Topics of Discussion Held with the Selecting Official*

The EEO Observer:

1. Provides guidance to the evaluation panel chair and/or selecting official on the value of a diverse panel, recognizing that Area policies specify guidelines on the panel composition.
2. Aids the panel chair/selecting official in advising panelists of their role through the deliberation, and reference checks of each candidate they interview.
3. Advises the panel chair/selecting official and panelists of the perils of any actions which would suggest pre-selection.
4. Discusses the confidential nature of the evaluation process with the selecting official, panel chair and panel members.
5. Reviews the standard set of interview questions that will be asked of all candidates with the evaluation panel, ensures that the standard set of questions are job related and are not designed nor have a likelihood of eliciting personal information or biases.
6. Reviews the rating process the panel will use to screen qualified applicants in order to identify finalists/semi-finalists.
7. Informs the evaluation panel that the selecting official should collect all material(s) associated with the evaluation panel, including panelist's written notes. The documents should be retained for three (3) years.
8. Advise the selecting official or panel chair to consult with the Human Resources Division for all HRD-related issues, questions, or extensions.
9. Each observation session should be documented on the "EEO Observer Log" and submitted to the Office of Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity on a quarterly basis. The Designee should submit their report to the Area Program Manager.

10. If, at any time during the recruitment process an incident occurs that might have EEO/Civil Rights implications, the Area PM or Designee (EEO Observer) prepares an "Incident Report" and stops the process. A thorough description of the incident and what corrective steps are recommended must be detailed in the report. The EEO Observer shall contact the EEO Manager, ODEO Director, or designee for guidance if such an incident occurs.
11. At the conclusion of the observation process, the Area PM or Designee should provide a closing email message with feedback to the panel chair, panel members and selecting official briefly detailing the overall observation process.

## Interview Do's and Don'ts for Recruitment Evaluation Panels

*All questions must be job related. As you develop your questions, think about what you expect to learn from that question, and how it relates to the job. Questions that either directly or indirectly elicit information about a candidate's age, race, family status, religion, etc. are not to be asked. If a candidate volunteers personal information do not ask follow-up questions and do not allow those comments to influence your appraisal of that candidate. If a candidate asks about the community, schools, neighborhoods, places of worship, local employment situation, etc., provide what answers you can, but again, do not let that information influence your final decision.*

### DO...

- ⇒ Be friendly to establish rapport, help the candidate feel at ease.
- ⇒ State questions in a positive manner.
- ⇒ Observe the candidate, and pay attention to how the candidate interacts with both men and women, and people of different ages, races/ethnicities, occupations, etc.
- ⇒ Consider potential as well as current ability.
- ⇒ Note the kinds of questions the candidates ask. Do they concern opportunities for self-improvement and increased responsibilities, or only pay and fringe benefits?
- ⇒ Use professional terminology to evaluate the candidate's knowledge.
- ⇒ Be objective. No yourself and your stereotypes.

- ⇒ Be honest even if it means saying something negative (e.g., the facility is old and there is not much space). Just don't overemphasize it.
- ⇒ Maintain confidentiality for all proceedings; the privacy rights of all applicants is important. Confidentiality does not end once the selection has been made. It is important to maintain confidentiality even after the person comes onboard. The selecting official and candidate should be supported during and after the interview process. Maintaining confidentiality after the selection is made helps not only the person selected, but the entire organization as a whole.
- ⇒ Relax and enjoy the interview.

### DON'T...

- ⇒ Talk too much.
- ⇒ Try to impress the candidate with your knowledge.
- ⇒ Put up a "front" – just be yourself, because the candidate is also "interviewing" the panelists and other employees to assess if this is a place they want to work and town they want to live in.
- ⇒ Hide demands of the job. A good candidate reacts favorably to these.
- ⇒ Be satisfied with surface facts. Look for reasons and probe.
- ⇒ Make commitments you may regret or are not authorized to make.
- ⇒ Be aggressive or evasive.
- ⇒ Ask convoluted or over-defined questions.
- ⇒ Ask questions in a way that indicates the answers you want.
- ⇒ Ask the following types of questions as they do not elicit job related answers and, in some cases, they are obviously inappropriate:
  - Sex/Marital Status: Any question that might be construed as trying to identify a candidate's marital status and/or family status, or sexual orientation**
    - Are you married, have a partner, engaged, single, divorced?
    - What will your spouse/partner do if you are offered this job?

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- How many children do you have? What are their ages?
- Who will watch your children while you're at work?
- What does your spouse/partner do?
- Will your spouse/partner mind it you have to travel on business?

**Race/National Origin: Don't assume anyone's race/ethnicity, or national origin**

- How do you feel about working for a supervisor of another race?
- That's an unusual name, what nationality are you?
- Where were you born?

**Religion: Affiliation with a religious organization (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.), or absence of any such affiliation, is a private matter of the candidate.**

- What church do you go to?
- Do you attend church regularly?
- Are you active in any church groups?
- What religious holidays do you observe?

**Age:**

- How old are you? (Or other questions that will help identify a person's age, such as high school graduation).
- Do you think you have the necessary maturity/energy for this job?
- What do you expect to be doing five/ten/15 years from now?
- What are your retirement plans? (Especially for someone you think might be nearing retirement age).

**Miscellaneous**

- What do you like to do in your spare time?

## Veteran's Day Observance Activity in Ames, Iowa

*By Kelly Barnett*

For the Veteran's Day Observance and increasing awareness of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder/Wounded Veterans, the AACRAC committee is planning to bring Becky Beach, founder of The Puppy Jake Foundation (PJF), to speak about training service dogs for veterans with PTSD or other wounds. PJF dogs are trained to perform tasks such as opening doors, retrieving items, 'block', 'check' and much more. Once paired with a wounded veteran, the service dogs are trained for additional skills, specific to the needs of the individual. Ms. Beach will describe why the dogs are necessary, how they are selected and trained, and how each dog is paired with a deserving veteran. She may also bring a dog-in-training. The event will occur late fall or early winter. For more information about the Puppy Jake Foundation, please visit <http://puppyjakefoundation.org/>.

**We'd love to highlight your Outreach event or share your story.**

**Contributions can be sent to your unit's ODEO representative**

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**EEO and Compliance Branch:** 202-720-3410, 800-340-4289,  
TDD: 202-720-3303

**Reasonable accommodation:** 202-720-6161

**Outreach and Recruitment Branch:** 202-720-6161

**Cooperative resolution program:** 202-720-6161

[WWW.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/](http://WWW.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/)