MSACOP News Notes

FEBRUARY 2009 ISSUE

Editor Sydney Beaumont

Mid South Area Council for Office Professionals (MSACOP) Annual Meeting, Starkville, MS

The MSACOP held its Annual Meeting at the USDA, ARS R. W. Harned Research Laboratory adjoining Mississippi State University Campus in Starkville, MS. Tammy Dorman, Sr. Chair, presided over the meeting with assistance from Ann McGee, Jr. Chair.

We were welcomed by Dr. Jack McCarty, Acting Location Coordinator, Laboratory Director for the Crop Science Research Laboratory. He explained about different varieties of cotton and how cotton fibers dictate manufacturing. We also learned how very destructive the tiny Boll Weevil is to cotton plant (pg. 4).
Our group also met with Dr. Scott Branton, Research Leader, Poultry Research Unit and Dr. Paul Williams, Research Leader, Corn Host Research Unit — (pg. 5).

(L to R) Marlene Coley, Support Assistant for Associate Area Director, Stoneville; Ann McGee, Jr. Chair (incoming Sr. Chair), Stoneville; Tammy Dorman, Sr. Chair, Auburn and Lynda Taylor, Recorder, Stoneville.

Office Organizing Tips *Submitted by Donna Signa*

Manage Your Time

- **Use a planner to track appointments and tasks. It can be a paper-based notebook, a computer software program, or an electronic handheld device.**
- **Create at least one hour of uninterrupted time per day to tackle projects and action items.**

Allocate twice as much time for a task as you think it will take. This accommodates for interruptions and stopping to get more information. Break large projects down into small, sequential steps.

Schedule these into your day with your planner.

Tame Your Desk

- **Keep only supplies you need on a daily basis on your desktop.**
- **Create a paper flow system for your incoming documents.**
- **Use your in box only for items that haven't yet been reviewed.**

Avoid looking at documents and placing them back on the desk. Follow through with the decision you have made about the document.

Supercharge Your Communication

- **Write an agenda before making a phone call so you don't forget the important points.**
- **Keep a record or schedule follow-up calls of what you've delegated so it doesn't fall through the cracks.**

Be clear about the response you need when sending messages to colleagues. They can then provide a full response, even if they don't reach you directly.

Conquer Your Filing

Create a filing system for your electronic documents that mirrors the one you have for paper. Sort, file, and purge electronic information regularly.

- **Keep a file index (a master list of file names). Check the index before creating a new file to avoid making duplicates. Also use it when deciding where to put new documents.**
- **Keep the most recent papers in the front of the file. Whenever you open it, the current information will be on top.**

Taken from the *National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO)* website

(www.napo.net)

USDA - WebTA Implementation

In an effort to increase productivity, ensure cost effectiveness, and standardize processes, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Finance Center (NFC) worked together to implement USDA's official enterprise time and attendance system **WebTA.**

The selection of webTA was made in concurrence with the recommendations from Agency financial and human resource management replaced the various time and attendance systems currently throughout the Department. This proven, automated system has been successfully implemented in a number of other Federal Departments and also in several USDA organizations.

WebTA Questions and Answers

What is webTA and how does it work?
WebTA is a web-based T&A program that the Department of Agriculture purchased to replace the current Time and attendance system. WebTA allows employees and/or timekeepers to enter time and leave data and to submit leave and premium pay requests through the webTA system. Managers electronically certify T&A's and may approve leave requests online.
The approved records are then transmitted to NFC salary processing.

Why are we changing to this system?
The change was mandated by the Department. We chose from 5 different systems of which STAR web was one. We selected the system that could best meet the requirements across all of REE. WebTA provides an online, easy-to-use process with numerous capabilities for efficiently managing timekeeping tasks. The system also provides a paperless, automated workflow and robust accounting and reporting functionalities (i.e. leave audits, employee schedules, leave requests, premium pay).

Are the User ID and passwords case sensitive?
Yes, all user ID's & passwords are case sensitive & REE will access the system using **their e-euthentication ID's and passwords**. Passwords cannot be changed within webTA. Passwords can be reset by the helpdesk.

I have logged into webTA and noticed that there are multiple buttons at the bottom of the screen. What do they represent?
The buttons represent different roles within webTA. Roles include: employee, timekeeper, supervisor, HR Administrator, and Administrator. Your access is based on your job function. If you have more than one role within webTA, you can move between these roles by clicking on the buttons at the bottom of the webTA screens. The button reflecting the role you are currently using will be grayed out.

Can I take a phone call or a short break while logged into webTA?
WebTA has a security setting that will time the user out after approximately ten minutes of non-use.

Can past certified Time & Attendance records be viewed and printed?
WebTA maintains a history of all records previously certified and submitted through webTA. These records are available to the Employee, Timekeeper and/or Supervisor as long as the employee is an active employee. To view a previously certified record, click on the button labeled "Certified T&A's" for the selected employee, select the pay period you wish to print by clicking on the radio button to the left of the pay period, scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click on "View Certified Record." If you wish to print the record, right click your mouse while in the view-only pop-up box, and select the print command. If the browser you are using doesn't have a print option when you right click your mouse, you can print by depressing the Control key at the same time you depress the letter P key (CTRL-P). Any previously certified record printed this way will have "Validated" listed as the status, even though it is actually the certified record. In order to have the record status listed as "Certified" the record must be printed (via Summary screen) after it is certified by the supervisor but before it is sent to NFC.

Can a record be changed after it is certified?
Once a record is certified, neither the employee nor the timekeeper can edit the record without the involvement of the supervisor. If changes are required to a certified record that has not yet been sent to the NFC, the supervisor can de-certify the record, and then the employee or timekeeper can make changes. Once the changes are entered, the record will need to be revalidated by the employee or timekeeper and recertified by the supervisor.
If revisions are needed to a certified record that has already been submitted to NFC, a corrected record will need to be created and validated by the timekeeper, and certified by the supervisor, in the next pay period.

NOTE: Employees should ensure that their email address in their e-auth account is up-to-date. (E-auth email is different from AgLearn email.)

Find out more about WebTA— **Guides for Employees, Timekeepers, Supervisors and HR Administrators can be found at the Department's website: http://www.da.usda.gov/webTA/**

To activate a URL in Publisher—hold CTRL key and left click on the URL

Submitted by Lynda Taylor

Federal Times reports that feedback from feds who are using the system say they want a more streamlined booking process. Many complain that the navigation system isn't intuitive and takes too many steps to finish bookings. All in all, the e-travel system, though a bit cumbersome, does appear to be saving the gov't money on booking fees.

The on-line vendor selected for our agency, GovTrip, takes a lot of time and creates frustration, but it's the system ARS has chosen to use. Office Professionals, please share ideas and tricks that might help us understand a specific aspect of GovTrip better, ways to make the process easier, hints to ease frustrations, etc. Send your helpful hints to me lynda.taylor@ars.usda.gov for distribution, until we get a distribution list in the Global Address List for access by anyone.

One recent item of interest is the new Bulletin 08-303 – 'Payment of Travel Expenses in GovTrip' found on the REE website. The following is a synopsis of the bulletin from Cack Norquist's email dated 7/21/2008.

Payment of Expenses in GovTrip: As you know arrangers are to be changing the settings from GovCC to personal for payment of expenses. Due to the recent change from Bank of America to US Bank the split payment of travel is not to be used until further notice. At that time the default for these expenses will remain at GovCC.

However, **if** a **frequent** traveler chooses, and conveys this decision to their travel arranger, the arranger may change the default setting from GovCC to Personal for the following expenses:

Lodging, Rental Car, ATM Fees, Gasoline, Hotel Taxes

The traveler must use their GovCC for these expenses but, you will select Personal on the authorization and voucher.

Some expenses already default to Personal and some expenses may not be changed to personal.

You may not change the following to Personal – These must always be paid with GovCC:

Common Carrier Tickets

TMC Fees (booking fee)

TAV Fees (voucher fee)

Changing the default from GovCC to Personal will trigger an **"Audit Flag"** on the GovTrip "Pre-Audit" page.

When reviewing this page, *prior to stamping document "Signed" or "T-Entered"* the preparer should enter

"**Directing payment to employee per REE policy**" for each pre-audit flag.

Please review the Bulletin 08-303 – Payment of Travel Expenses in GovTrip.

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*According to **AVIS RENTAL:** **cell phones**, **wallets**, and **eyeglasses** are the three things most often left behind in rental cars. Source: www.budgettravel.com*

MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSTESS WITH THE MOST-ESS

SPECIAL THANKS TO
LINDA FULTON
FOR HOSTING & ORGANIZING THE COUNCIL AT MISSISSIPPI STATE.
ALSO -ALL OUR MEALS WERE PREPARED BY LINDA TOO!
SOME RECIPES ARE LISTED HERE

BUNDT PAN CHEESECAKE

Crust
1 cup graham cracker crumbs
1/4 cup butter, melted
2 tablespoons granulated sugar

Combine crust ingredients, and press into bottom of 12-cup molded Bundt pan.

Filling
5 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese
1 3/4 cups granulated sugar
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon lemon zest
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
6 eggs
1/4 cup whipping cream
In a large bowl, mix all ingredients except the eggs and cream. Beat until light and fluffy.

Scrape bowl occasionally. Add the eggs, and mix for 2 minutes on medium speed. Add cream, and mix well, scraping sides occasionally. Spoon into crust.

Bake at 300 degrees for 65 to 75 minutes or until set. Cool upright in pan for 30 minutes; then refrigerate 2 hours or longer. Invert on serving plate. Makes 8 to 10 generous servings. HINT: Warm the pan in hot water to help the cake slip out of the pan.

CHICKEN SALAD

4 cups of cooked, cubed chicken (I use chicken breasts)

1 c. dried cranberries
½ c. sliced almonds
1 c. mayonnaise
½ c. Lite Vidalia Onion Salad Dressing (this is "Ken's" brand)
1/3 c. honey
¼ tsp. pepper
¼ tsp. salt

Combine the first three ingredients. Then whisk together the remaining ingredients. Then combine the chicken and dressing .

PASTA SALAD

1 pkg. pasta, cooked
2 small yellow squash (sliced)
2 small zucchini (sliced)
5 Roma tomatoes (cut in chunks)
1 bell pepper (sliced in thin strips)
1 ½ c. sliced fresh mushrooms
1 c. bread and butter pickles (drained) (optional) 1 pkg. dry Italian dressing mix 1 bottle Lite Italian Dressing (apprx 12 oz)

Mix above ingredients and refrigerate several hours before serving.

CRANBERRY GELATIN SALAD

1 pkg. (6 oz.) cherry gelatin (I use the sugar free)

1 ½ cups boiling water

1/2 cup chopped pecans

1 can (20 oz.) crushed pineapple, undrained

1 can (16 oz) whole-berry cranberry sauce (Linda substituted 2 cans of drained Lite Fruit Cocktail)

1 ½ c. seedless grapes, halved

In a large bowl, dissolve gelatin in water. Stir in pineapple and cranberry sauce (or fruit cocktail). Refrigerate 30 minutes. Stir in grapes and pecans. Refrigerate until firm. **Thanks Linda!**

MSACOP Annual Meeting, Starkville, MS (continued from pg.1)

Pictures by: Lucienne SAVELL

(Above) Destructive Boll Weevil

Dr. Jack McCarty , Research Leader, holds cotton plant and describes different varieties

MSACOP ANNUAL MEETING, STARKVILLE, MS

Pictures by Lucienne Savell

Pictured Above (L to R) Linda Fulton, Mississippi State; Peggy Tubertini, Oxford; Janice Boyd, New Orleans; Kelli Greene, Kentucky; Marlene Coley, Ann McGee, Tammy Dorman, Lynda Taylor; Donna Signa, Stoneville; Drusilla Fratesi, Stoneville; Stoneville; Sydney Beaumont, New Orleans.

Ann McGee (L) presents Tammy Dorman a Certificate of Appreciation for Outstanding Leadership contributions to MSACOP.

Dr. Scott Branton, Research Leader, Poultry Research Unit gives talk on poultry research and tour of posters of their work..

Dr. Paul Williams, Research Leader, (pictured right) Corn Host Plant Resistance Research Unit, gave an overview of research for the Corn Host Plant Resistance group. He also gave the tour at the Beautiful Rose Garden located on Mississippi State University.

Stress Busters: 3 Ways to Stay Healthy

Stress Busters: 3 Ways to Stay Healthy

1) Stash Energy-Boosting Snacks

A surge in stress hormones leaves us susceptible to cravings for sugary, fatty comfort foods that, if you let them, can sabotage weight-loss plans **Tip:** Try munching on stress-fighting foods: almonds (packed with heart-healthy vitamin E and immune-system-building zinc); leafy greens and whole grains (full of energy-producing magnesium); blueberries, kiwis, melons &red peppers (rich in immune-system-boosting vitamin C).

2) Start a Relaxing Ritual Tip:

Make a commitment to taking care of yourself by scheduling **30 minutes of downtime a day.**

Relaxation techniques (deep breathing or meditation) can reduce stress hormones in your body, slow your heart rate and quiet your mind. call a faraway friend; light a candle, put on soothing music. Whatever activity you choose, **the key is consistency**.

3) Stay Connected

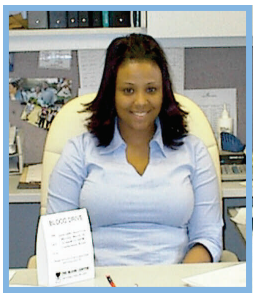
Tip: Set up a weekly chic-flick night with your girlfriends or go to a comedy club with your guy. Laughter expands blood vessels (which increases blood flow and reduces the physical symptoms of stress)and that releases those endorphins we all know and love!

www.shape.com

Submitted by— Sydney

Welcome

Valerie Reed is a Program Assistant in the Food & Feed Safety Research Unit. Valerie comes to us from the Louisiana National Guard where she worked for 21 years.



Dawn Reed has been selected as the new Program Assistant for Cotton Fiber Bioscience Unit. Dawn worked previously in our SRRC Human Resources Office.

Ingrid Blache has been selected as the new Program Assistant in the Cotton Structure and Quality Research Unit and will be working with Dr. James Rodgers. Ingrid is transferring to us from the National Finance Center where she was a secretary.

Teresa Robinson-Privott (not pictured) has been selected as the Area Human Resources Assistant for the Mid South Area. Originally from Indianola, MS, Teresa now resides in Greenville. She received her BS in Psychology and Biology from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

Submitted by Rita Keeling, Drusilla Fratesi and Althea Hunt

Mid South Area Council of Office Professionals

MSACOP

MSACOP Council: (L) Back row: Kelli Greene, Peggy Tubertini, Marlene Coley, Ann McGee, Dr. Deborah Brennan, Drusilla Fratesi and Tammy Dorman.

(L) Front row: Lynda Taylor, Sydney Beaumont, Janice Boyd and Lucienne Savell.

Not pictured: Althea Hunt, Dawn Reed and Donna Signa.

The **Mission** of the MSACOP is to provide a resource for the Area Director's Office and all levels of management for matters relating to office professionals.

The **Goal** of the Council is to enhance office professions through training, networking, mentoring, and recognition of office support employees. It is the desire of the Council to work with all levels of management to assure that office support staff are highly skilled and motivated professsionals and to assure that the clerical and administrative needs of the Mid South Area and ARS are met.

THINK OFFICE DEPOT WOULD CARRY THIS CALCULATOR?

ANOTHER ARTICLE ABOUT CHOCOLATE?

just one more

The Super Snack Couple: Pretzels and Chocolate

Q: Quick --

What packs antioxidants, nutrients like magnesium, calcium and copper, fiber and grains while satisfying sweet and salty cravings and serving as a convenient, portable treat?

A: It's a match made in snacking heaven -

pretzels and chocolate.

AN ADDED TWIST, NEWS NOTES CAN BE CHOC FULL OF FUN INFO!

Even better, there are scores of potential partnerships that bring out the best of both foods, depending on the type of chocolate and pretzel and any embellishments. Pretzel and chocolate fans of all ages can satisfy their hankering by picking up a snack at their local supermarket.
Pretzel Dips from Snyder's of Hanover, for example, are available in milk chocolate, white chocolate, special dark chocolate and chocolate peanut butter and have quickly become a hot product line.

For those who want to try their hand at home, chocolate and pretzel snacks are also easy to make.

The biggest challenge is deciding what match-up to try first.

They are simple to create.

First, slowly melt the contents of one bag of chocolate chips or melting discs (dark chocolate, milk or white chocolate all work well) in a double boiler or in a microwave-safe bowl.

Next, using small tongs or holding on to the edge on the side, lower the bottom 2/3 of the pretzel rod into the melted chocolate and twist the rod until it's coated with the chocolate. Finally, lay the rod on wax paper and let the chocolate set.

Optional: After the chocolate sets slightly but does not harden, roll the rod in the topping of your choice, like sprinkles, miniature candies, colored sugar, mini-marshmallows cut in half or chopped peanuts.

*Remember— Stressed spelled backwards is **DESSERTS***