

# SPSC News Notes

Volume I, Issue 1

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## Special points of interest:

- New Council members
- New Secretary in Fayetteville
- Helpful Websites
- Poem
- Foreign Travel Information
- RMIS Information

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## Mission and Goal

The mission of the SPA Secretarial/Program Support Council is to serve the SPA Secretaries/Program Support employees, Location Research and Administrative Management Team, and Area Director in an advisory capacity. Our goal is to strengthen and improve the professional image of all SPA secretaries and program support employees through orientation, training, and networking.



Current Council Members: L to R Phyllis Hoffman (Temple), Ruth Treat (Stillwater), Rayma Cox (Bushland), Karen Wilcox (College Station), Olivia Pedraza (Weslaco), Justine Flowers (Little Rock), Rhea Fryar (Lubbock).

## Welcome New Council Members

Phyllis Hoffman is the Secretary to the Laboratory Director/Research Leader of the Grassland, Soil and Water Research Laboratory in Temple, TX. Phyllis has worked for ARS for the past 10 years; the first six being the Secretary for the Natural Re-

sources Systems Research Unit. Her husband, Dennis, is a research scientist with Texas A&M at the Blackland Research Center. Together they share three children: Jay, who works as Assistant to the Director for the US Mint in Washington, DC;

Adam who will attend graduate school at Cornell University; and Sarah, a junior at Baylor. Phyllis's favorite hobbies include watching college sports, gardening, buying/refinishing antiques, or any activity that will get her outdoors.

## Welcome New Council Members

Justine Flowers is the Secretary to the Executive Director of the Delta NIRI Project in Little Rock, AR. She has worked with ARS since November 1997. Justine has five children and three step-children (one son is a Staff Sergeant in the Marines, and three of the sons are in the same business as their father). Justine and her husband have been blessed with fourteen grandchildren and one great grandson. A holiday is compared to a family

reunion in their home, with lots of laughter. Justine said she feels it is an honor to be a member of the SPSC and has met some very special people who feel that it is important to any new program support professional coming into ARS to be well informed and provide materials to assist them in their new duties.

Olivia Pedraza is the Secretary to the Center Director for the Kika de la Garza Subtropical

Agricultural Research Center, Weslaco, TX. She has worked with ARS for 11 years. She began her career in 1988 with the Location Support Staff as an Administrative Technician. She has served as Secretary to the Center Director since September 1996. Olivia has five children: Sandra is starting college this spring; Robert is a senior; Roger is a freshman; Roxanne is in 6th grade; and Analisa is in the 4th grade. Needless to say, all her free time is spent on their activities. Olivia and her husband, Robert, really get involved and enjoy going to Roxanne's and Analisa's soccer games.



## Happenings at Lubbock

After more than two years of construction, on December 6, 1999, the dedication ceremony and ribbon cutting took place for the new USDA-ARS, Plant Stress and Water Conservation Laboratory located on the campus of Texas Tech University at Lubbock, Texas. Approximately 250 people attended the ceremony and luncheon. Speakers included Dr. C. A. Onstad, Chancellor John T. Montford, Dr. Ed Hiler, Dr. John Abernathy, Dr. Jaroy Moore, Dr. Dan Upchurch, Dr. Dan Krieg, Dr. Jerry Quisenberry, Dr. Rex Johnston, Dr. Floyd Horn, and Congressman Larry Combest. The planning and design of the Laboratory involved a unique partnership between USDA-ARS, Texas Tech University, and Texas A&M University System Agricultural Programs. The new 64,000 square foot, \$15 million facility houses two research units, the Wind Erosion and Water Conservation Research Unit, and Plant Stress and Germplasm Development Research Unit. The facility is designed to foster scientific interaction while allowing flexibility for the future. The building houses 20 scientists, plus professional technical support personnel, numerous students and assistants, and administrative and maintenance staff. The ceremony in itself was a great success for all involved. So, a big congratulations to our co-workers at the NEW Plant Stress and Water Conservation Laboratory!



## Happenings at Bushland

Bushland had a field day on September 1, 1999. They had 240 people attend. There was a dedication of the new "Kenneth B. Porter Wheat Seed Processing and Storage Building." Kenneth B. Porter worked for TAES April 1, 1947 thru 1988, and has been a Professor Emeritus since then.

Bushland kicked off their CFC campaign with a chili cook-off on September 10, 1999. The four participants were Eric Eggleston, Lynnette Lott, Carole Perryman, and Rayma Cox. Eric took 2nd place in Best Show, Rayma took 3rd in Best Tasted Chili, and Overall for ARS. Everyone had different

names for their chili. Rayma's was "Laboratory Surprise Chili," Eric's was "Highwired Hot Chili" and it was the hottest. Carole's was "Professor Hy Water," and Lynnette's was "Professor I. Spend." Everyone had a great time and plan to do it again next year.

## Welcome to ARS

Larry Altman is the new Secretary at the Poultry Production and Product Safety Research Unit at Fayetteville, AR. Larry recently retired from Active Duty with the US Air Force following a successful career in the military intelligence field. He is a native of Wynne, AR, but his military duties took him around the world to places such as the Republic of China, Greece, Italy, Germany, and to even more exotic locations like Wichita, KS, and Omaha, NE. His most recent tours of duty were in Stuttgart, Germany, and in Washington, DC, where he was detailed to the National

## Foreign Travel Processing Times

For first time issuance of an official passport: process foreign travel package at least 65 working days prior to departure date.

For renewal of an official passport: process foreign travel package at least 45 working days prior to departure date.

For issuance of a visa/country clearance with valid passport: process foreign travel package at least 30 working days prior to departure date.

If you ever need help with a foreign travel package or domestic travel you can call Freida Williams (409/260-9493) at the Area Office or you can contact one of the Council Members (see contact information on last page.

Security Agency.

Larry is married to the former Wanda Franklin of Wynne, AR, and they have two grown children who are both residing in Fayetteville. Larry and Wanda enjoy hiking and sightseeing in their leisure time.

## Foreign Travel

Foreign travel is probably the most difficult travel to complete because not everyone does this on an everyday basis. Here are some tips to use before you send the complete packet out to the Area Office.. Remember, if the foreign travel package is put together correctly the first time the sooner it can get approved. If it has to be sent back to you or more information is needed, it takes longer to process because a partial package cannot be processed, it must be complete.

1. Make sure the passport for the traveler has not expired. An official passport should be valid at least six months after the foreign trip is completed.
2. Check visa requirements guide in RMIS under the FTIS to ensure a visa is required for the country to be visited.
3. Get the airline itinerary from the travel agent.
4. Complete the AD 202 (with correct per diem, country/city code). When filling out the 202 always authorize for unexpected expenses that the traveler may not think they will need (example: taxi, airport tax, commuting train, etc.). On the back page of the AD 202, type a specific and detailed purpose for the international visit.
5. Complete the AD 750 (be sure to include all TDY stops). On the front page of the AD 750, place an X in the Airline Itinerary Attached box and an X in the Filled Out, See Back box. In the comments section on the front page, you should always have the traveler's date of birth, place of birth, work phone/fax, and email address. Omit the marital status, home address, and home telephone. When filling out the back page, be sure to include all stops. When the traveler gets to TDY be sure and give a specific purpose under the brief purpose box. Also, you should give a contact name for a person in the foreign country that includes address, phone, fax, email, and organization name.
6. Complete the FTIS report in RMIS
7. Sign off in RMIS the FTIS report and input the AD 202 into the on-line travel program and put on hold for the Area Office to approve.
8. A completed foreign travel package should consist of the following: official passport and passport receipt (if required); AD 202; passport/visa photos (if required); visa application form (if required); invitation letter; letter of offers/acceptance (if applies); copy of FTIS printout; and AD 750. Forward the completed package to Freida Williams at the Area Travel and Transportation Office for processing.

## RMIS

We all know that the RMIS User Manual is outdated to say the least. Staff at NPS, along with the Area Program Analysts, have been working on updating the manual and putting it online. Only a few chapters have been finished, but eventually the entire manual will be updated. Check out the website

<http://npstaff.ars.usda.gov>

The website also contains a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section that is VERY helpful to RMIS users. The Lightspeed software and instructions for downloading are also available through this website, among other items of interest.

## National Conference for Office Support Professionals

CONGRATUATIONS to all the office support professionals in the SPA who will be attending the Y2K National Conference for Office Support Professionals in May at Hunt, MD. This will be a great learning experience for everyone attending and CAN be a great learning experience for the people not attending. Remember when you return home from the conference to share the information gained with other office support professionals in SPA. The conference will be covering a variety of topics and that information will need to be networked throughout SPA. Please take advantage of this conference to network with office support professionals from other areas. The SPSC will have a display set up for viewing at the conference. If you have any ideas as to what you would like to see or what you think other people may want to see on the display, please contact Rhea Fryar at 806/749-5560.

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## Directory

The Council has been working on an SPA directory for permanent employees. We need your help in order to keep it up to date. Once we have completed the updated version, we plan to send out to everyone in SPA via email. We consider keeping this directory up to date a priority and, with your help, it can be accomplished. If you have any changes, please contact Rhea Fryar at 806/749-5560

## RMIS CLEANUP

Just a reminder that the following tasks should be done as part of routine RMIS maintenance.

1. **SY Updates.** When new Cat 1 or Cat 4 scientists (those with position #'s starting with 1 or 4) come on board, they must be added to an inhouse (D type project) 416/417 investigator field. They can be added to more than one, but their total time should never exceed 1.0. Along the same line, when a Cat 1 or Cat 4 scientist has left, they should be deleted from the 416/417. Also, check your sibling projects and 425's to make sure the investigators/contacts are current. Scientist time should always be 0.0 on a sibling project, unless that project is going to pay their salary (very rare).
  2. **ARS 425.** Every three months or so, review the 425's listing in the Active 425 file in RMIS. Those with a status of "F" (pending) should be checked for current status. You have the option to change the status to "E" (terminate) or "U" (unfunded). If a check has been received for the funds requested, the Area Budget Staff will post this amount to the 425 and the status will then change to "A" (active). SPA has had an excellent record of keeping the 425 system "cleaned up," so keep up the good work!
  3. **AD 416/417.** Because of changes made to the annual progress report process, projects can be terminated only during this yearly process. Since projects cannot be terminated during the year as they expire, an action needs to be done to expired projects to change the status from "A" (active) to "X" (expired). You will need to make a work record of any 416/417 that will not be extended and change status from "A" to "X." The remarks section should state "Project changed to expired status." NPS now requires that we treat expired projects in this manner. Once the final annual Progress report is done, NPS will change the status from "X" to "E."
  4. **ARS 115.** Approximately every three months, print a Detail by Author Report for each of your scientists. This will show them which publications have been entered into the RMIS 115 system. By doing this, you can avoid a lot of stress at the end of the appraisal period. This year's appraisal process was complicated by the fact that some of you were trying to put in numerous 115's at the last minute and the system was not cooperating. Remember, HQ can pull off productivity reports at any point during the year, so an accurate listing of publications is crucial to reflect your scientists' accomplishments.
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## Report for Payment From a Non-Federal Source for Travel Expenses

Some problems have been brought to the council's attention concerning the report of travel expenses paid by Non-Federal Sources. Semi-annually each location is required to submit this report to the Area Travel Office and once the area receives it, they then forward it to Headquarters. Recently, the Southern Plains Area has been consistently late in submitting their area report to Headquarters. We each have a hard time remembering what specific information is required to be submitted, so, Ms. Rhea Fryar in Lubbock, TX, has conscientiously created a generic form we can use with our word processor. Each time a travel voucher for expenses paid by a non-federal source is completed, fill out the form and all the information required will be at your fingertips when this report is due. If you would like a copy of this form, please contact Rhea Fryar at (806) 749-5560 or by e-mail and she will be happy to provide you with a copy.

# A Marine's Christmas Poem

This is a poem to help us remember  
Christmas and our veterans.

Twas the night before Christmas  
He lived all alone  
In a one bedroom house made of  
Plaster and Stone.

I had come down the chimney  
With presents to give,  
And to see just who  
In this home did live.

I looked all about,  
A strange sight I did see,  
No tinsel, no presents,  
Not even a tree.

No stocking by mantle,  
Just boots filled with sand,  
On the wall hung pictures  
Of far distant lands.

With medals and badges  
Awards of all kinds,  
A sober thought  
Came through my mind.

For this house was different,  
It was dark and dreary,  
I found the home of a soldier,  
Once I could see clearly.

The soldier lay sleeping,  
Silent, alone,  
Curled up on the floor  
In this one bedroom home.

The face was so gentle,  
The room in such disorder,  
Not how I pictured  
A United States soldier.

Was this the hero  
Of whom I'd just read?  
Curled up on a poncho,  
The floor for a bed?

I realized the families  
That I saw this night,  
Owed their lives to these soldiers  
Who were willing to fight.

Soon round the world,  
The children would play,  
And grownups would celebrate  
A bright Christmas day.

They all enjoyed freedom  
Each month of the year,  
Because of the soldiers,  
Like the one lying here.

I couldn't help wonder  
How many lay alone,  
On a cold Christmas Eve  
In a land far from home.

The very thought  
Brought a tear to my eye,  
I dropped to my knees  
And started to cry.

The soldier awakened  
And I heard a rough voice,  
"Santa don't cry,  
This life is my choice;

I fight for freedom  
I don't ask for more,  
My life is my God,  
My country, my Corps."

The soldier rolled over  
And drifted to sleep,  
I couldn't control it,  
I continued to weep.

I kept watch for hours,  
So silent and still  
And we both shivered  
From the cold night's chill.

I didn't want to leave  
On that cold, dark night,  
This guardian of honor  
So willing to fight.

Then the soldier rolled over,  
With a voice soft and pure,  
Whispered, "Carry on Santa,  
It's Christmas day, all is secure."

One look at my watch  
And I knew he was right,  
"Merry Christmas my friend,  
And to all a good night."

This poem was written by a Marine  
stationed in Okinawa, Japan.

## Helpful Web-sites

Foreign Country/City Codes  
<http://www.nfc.usda.gov/pubs/bulletins/title2/travel/att1.htm>

Currency Converter <http://www.oanda.com/converter/travel>

Per Diem Table <http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/perdiem/travel.shtml>

Travel Management Policy - Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), amendments to FTR, Per Diem Rates and other travel information, Contract Airline Flight Schedules, Quick Reference Guide, State Tax Exemption Listings, POV rates, Interagency Travel Management Committee, and FAQ's <http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/mtthp.htm>

Fed Ex - they have an on-line computer program you can download and do all of your shipping and tracking from <http://www.fedex.com/us/>

GSA Forms <http://www.gsa.gov/forms/forms.htm>

Human Resources Division <http://www.ars.usda.gov/afm/hrd/hrdhomepage/index.htm>

Informs Index <http://www.metastorm.com>

Policy and Procedures <http://www.ars.usda.gov/afm2/ppweb/>

REE Word Perfect Forms <http://>

## Helpful Websites (cont.)

Policy and Procedures <http://www.ars.usda.gov/afm2/ppweb/>

REE Word Perfect Forms  
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/afm/hrd/hrdhomepage/wpforms.htm>

## How to Contact Council Members

Rhea D. Fryar  
USDA - ARS  
3810 4th Street  
Lubbock, TX 79415  
806/749-5560  
Fax: 806/723-5272  
Email: [rfryar@lbk.ars.usda.gov](mailto:rfryar@lbk.ars.usda.gov)

Rayma Cox  
USDA-ARS, SPA, CPRL  
P.O. Drawer 10  
Bushland, TX 79012  
806/356-5724  
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Please contact Karen Wilcox if you would like to contribute an article that supports the SPSC mission.

## NACOSP Link

Submitted by Ruth Treat, SPA Representative to the National Council.

Well, it's official...there will be a year 2000 after all. So there's nothing else standing in the way of the upcoming National Conference for Office Support Professionals. The hotel is contracted, speakers are being arranged, and your National Council is busy working on all sorts of projects that we think will make this Conference a special event for all participants.

But being that unique creature known as an "office support professional," we are certainly not new to managing multiple priorities. We're not likely to put all our eggs in one basket. In addition to planning for the National Conference, we have several other projects in the works.

That handy dandy Quick Reference Guide that came out a couple years ago is being updated. We lack just a couple chapters and it will be ready to send out to the Organizational Councils for further distribution. In addition, it will be posted to our web site and can be accessed there for reference or downloading. By the way, the HRD Training Division thought the QRG was such a great general reference source that they have included it in the newly developed orientation package for all new scientists. Hey, it isn't often we get to "officially" tell the scientists where to go...for information that is.

Another goal is to update our web site, assure quality links, and enhance the user's ability to utilize the information contained there. Those of you who manage web sites know that this represents a never-ending task, but one with great benefits.

Look for the National Council to be coming to a movie theater near you soon. During our last annual meeting we each were filmed for part of a video to be aired via ARS Live on National Secretaries' Day in April. (No, none of us wanted to do it live!)

Plans are underway for our next annual meeting to be held a few weeks after the National Conference. Among activities during the meeting, we set goals and determine projects for

the next year. We've already been approached with some issues that some of you want to see brought to light, and I want to encourage any of you to feel free to contact me with concerns or ideas that you would like to see the National Council look into. The National Council is interested in providing opportunities for you to enhance your professionalism and performance on the job...just tell us how we can help.

As always, you can contact me anytime.

