"A Commitment to Excellence PASTG for the 21st Century!"

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

By Sherri Buxton, MWA Office, Peoria, IL, and Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

Many of you have indicated that you would be willing to work on special initiatives with the PASTG. Therefore, we are establishing working groups comprised of PASTG committee members and office professionals throughout the MWA who are interested in getting involved. We are looking for volunteers to work on projects such as updating the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Manual, maintaining the PASTG website, mentoring a new secretary, and other special projects.

Each project or area working group will consist of one or two PASTG members who will serve as the leader(s) and others who have expressed an interest in participating. Because we are spread over several States, working groups will communicate by e-mails, telephone calls, and conference calls when necessary. Some projects may be more time-consuming than others, so consider participating in a working group that would fit your schedule and your interests.

If you are interested in playing a part in shaping the future of the MWA Office Professionals, please contact anyone on the PASTG (see http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/pastg/pandp/pandp.htm for a list of current members), and we will provide you with the details.

NEW PASTG MEMBER REPRESENTS NADC

Karen Burianek serves as secretary to the Director of the National Animal Disease Center, Ames, IA. Karen started at the NADC as a 30-day temporary in 1973 and continued working part time while completing her B.A. in Business Education at the University of Northern Iowa. Following graduation Karen became secretary for the Environmental Health and Safety Unit at the NADC. In November 2000 Karen accepted her current position in the Director's Office. Outside of work, Karen enjoys spending time with her husband and two boys, extended family, reading, and shopping.

MWA BUDGET & FISCAL OFFICER VACANCY FILLED BY LAURA ABNEY

Laura Abney's previous employment was with the US Army in Rock Island, Illinois, US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island, Illinois, and the Farm Service Agency, Cambridge, Illinois. Her background is in financial management and she has held a number of positions over the years as an Operations Research Analyst, Capital Investment Program Manager, Financial Management Specialist, Plans Analyst and Regional Economist. At the USDA, Farm Service Agency, she worked as an Agricultural Management Specialist for 16 years before working as a civilian employee with the Army. She has a BS degree in

Agribusiness Economics from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and a Masters of Business Administration from St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa. Her husband Bob is a High School Math Teacher and she has two teenage sons, Troy 16 and Victor 14, and currently resides in Annawan, Illinois.

STAR TRAINING HELD IN PEORIA, IL

By Dianna Halcumb, Peoria, IL

Training for the newest version of STAR was held in the Computer Training Room at the Midwest Area Office in Peoria, Illinois, June 14 – 16, 2005. Seventeen members of the Midwest team were present, representing Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, and Minnesota. Two members of the Pay and Leave Team, Ted Nykiel and Monetta Harvey, came to Peoria to present the new training to a classroom of STAR students. Both Ted and Monetta did a great job making the training pertinent, fun, and rewarding - handing out STAR awards for completed worksheets.

Features of the new program were covered first. Some functions have been simplified, while others seem to have a few more steps. Some of the changes of interest that were covered are:

- Rollover needs to have all employees of a contact point highlighted before you make your "Rollover" selection in the Action Tool Bar (a drop down tool box located near the bottom of the screen). Rollovers also cannot be completed unless all records have been transmitted for the previous time period.
- A new employee can be added at anytime by selecting "Add Employee" from the Action Tool Bar.
- Another new feature is the codes that you will see next to each employee's name. Some of these codes are: NEW (for a new T&A), IN (in progress), VER (verified), and ERR (for a T&A that has an error). The other codes that you will see are covered with the T&A transmission process.
- On the T&A screen you will notice both a "Save" button and a "Verify" button. Utilize the "Save" button to save the data to the screen (dbase form), and "Verify" to save the record to the server. "Verify" must still be accomplished in order to transmit.
- T&As can now be transmitted all together or just a portion at a time, as long as all are transmitted by the deadline time (COB the Tuesday following the end of the pay period). During the Transmission process, you will need to monitor the transmission status. The status is indicated next to each employee's name with a REL (released to NFC), SUB (submitted to the server) or TRA (transmission complete). It is after the status has moved to TRA that a Transmission Report needs to be run, it is recommended that this report be maintained in the unit for one year.
- Corrected T&A's no longer cost the USDA money, and if transmitted by close of business

Thursday, actually write-over the original transmission and are seen by NFC as an original transmission. Don't worry if you need to complete a Corrected T&A after the Thursday deadline, because Corrected T&As can still be done at anytime in the pay period.

- Locations will no longer be doing the archiving, or the deleting of employees from the contact point. If an employee has moved on, and needs to be removed from your contact point, an email needs to be sent up to Deb Agee, who will remove the employee one pay period after the final T&A has been transmitted. Deb is also the key person to notify if you notice an error in a social security number.

The biggest change is going to be the Leave Audits, and this was the final area covered in the training. A Leave Error Report needs to be run the Monday following the NFC deadline for transmission (or the electronic payday for direct deposit). If an error is reported, then a leave audit needs to be done. Both paper (manual) audits and spreadsheet (automatic) audits were covered in the training session. The Excel spreadsheets provided by Ted and Monetta came complete with formulas for all the various calculations of a leave audit, taking into consideration the employees leave status and employment status: full time, part time, 4-hour leave category, 6-hour leave category, or 8-hour leave category. While working with the automatic audit, however, a formula error was discovered, and our STAR Teachers promised a corrected version of the spreadsheets out to locations as soon as they can get it corrected. A special table showing leave earned and carryover hours for hours worked in the pay period for calculating leave earned and carryover hours for a manual audit of part-time employees was also provided. This table can be found in the Payroll/Personnel Manual, Chapter 7: T&A Procedures; Section 1: T&A Instruction, Appendix B. A great deal of information was given regarding audits and a whole article could be spent just on the leave audit, if you missed the training, take the next available class or contact someone who attended the training and have the process explained.

The training database has been reactivated and can be accessed at: https://tr1.nfc.usda.gov/star/, User ID: ARSTR01 through ARSTR10; password: help0605. A word of caution: more than *two* failed attempts will lock up the database and the password will have to be reset for all. The database will be wiped clean each Friday, with new contact points and names to practice on available each Monday.

DISPLAYING OUR FLAG

By Stephanie Brennan, West Lafayette, IN

June and July celebrate patriotic holidays (Flag Day and Independence Day) and many people buy flags to display. There is a right way and a wrong way to display the flag. The American flag should be held in the highest of regards. It represents our nation and the many people who gave their lives for our country and our flag. Here are the basics on displaying the American flag:

The flag is normally flown from sunrise to sunset. In the morning, raise the flag briskly. At sunset, lower it slowly.

Always, raise and lower it ceremoniously.
The flag should not be flown at night without a light on it. The flag should not be flown in the rain or inclement weather.
After a tragedy or death, the flag is flown at half staff for 30 days. It's called "half staff" on land, and "half mast" on a ship.
When flown vertically on a pole, the stars and blue field, or "union" is at the top and at the end of the pole (away from your house). The American flag is always flown at the top of the pole. Your state flag and other flags fly below it. The union is always on top. When displayed in print, the stars and blue field are always on the left. When displaying the flag from something other than a flagpole, be sure that the blue field is on the left side of the viewer.

Never let your flag touch the ground, never...period. Fold your flag properly when storing. Don't just stuff it in a drawer or box. When your flag is old and has seen better days, it is time to retire it. Old flags should be burned or buried. Please do not throw it in the trash.

Did you know there is a very special ceremony for retiring the flag by burning it? It is a ceremony everyone should see. Your local Boy Scout group knows the proper ceremony and performs it on a regular basis. If you have an old flag, give it to them. And, attend the ceremony. For more detailed information about this topic, visit the Boy Scouts' website at http://www.scouting.org/media/flag/.

CALENDAR

July

- Mid-July: Final day in ARIS for Permanent or Temporary FY fund transfers between D-type projects.
- July 15: Final day for extramural agreements adding current year funds or extending time in ARIS.
- Mid-July: Postdoc fund transfers to be included in next FY ARMPS are due (person has to be on board before funds can be transferred).
- Begin AD-421 Annual Report process.

August

- Office of International Cooperative Development (OICD) Scientific Cooperation proposals are due; Binational Agricultural Research and Development Proposals (BARD) are announced. A 425 must be entered into ARIS.
- Final ARMPS guideline dollars available for printing from briefing packet. Final ARMPS is due in mid-August to the Area Office.
- Finalize AD-421 Annual Reports.
- Run a list of approved travel from the upcoming FY ARMPS to have on hand to remind scientists.

September

- Annual Ethics training takes place in early September.
- Prepare AD-700 for Research Support Agreements (AD-700). Update related documentation.
- Prepare Blanket Travel Authorizations for the next fiscal year.

- Prepare new files for travel vouchers and other fiscal year filing.
- Update Investigator/SY time on projects in ARIS.
- Inquire with your scientists to see if any are preparing NRI grants.

HELPFUL HINTS

Converting a previous AD-421 to MSWord

In ARIS, Research Documentation, choose Active 421s. Add your Mode Code and FY (which would be 2004 for last year's reports) and hit Enter. This will bring up a list of all of the 421s entered by your Unit in 2004. Select the reports you would like to save as Word documents. Choose Print, Extract to Word, and then the specific Questions or All Questions. The report(s) will scroll to a document that can be saved, revised, and pasted into the 2005 Annual Reports.

FFIS Vendor Request Forms

These forms for the reimbursement of travel expenses for non-government travelers should be emailed to LaShay Brown, lbrown@mwa.ars.usda.gov.