



NACOP Newsletter

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Message from the Co-Chairs

By Debra Duckworth, SAA
Veronica Cullum, PWA



The NACOP held our Annual Meeting June 13-16, 2005, at the Jean Mayer Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts (HNRCA) in Boston, MA. Stephanie Sullivan, NAA, hosted this year's meeting with the assistance of Theresa Watson, Program Office Assistant, HNRCA.

The Council set the following goals for 2006: Implement "Travel Tips" page on the Council website; maintain a scrapbook for the Council; continue to improve and update website; continue quarterly newsletters; continue mentoring efforts; and update resource list quarterly.

Veronica and I are very excited about assuming our duties as Co-Chairs and will work hard to ensure the goals set by the Council are met

The Council welcomed several new members at our annual meeting. New members are nominated by their respective Area Directors and accepted by the Council. This year's incoming members are Pat Berry (AFM), Heather Lewandowski, (MWA), Patricia Coyle, (ERRC), Sue Hurd (GMPC) and Rosetta

Proctor (NPS). The criteria for nomination to serve on the NACOP is (1) present or past membership on a local Area Council; and (2) a willingness to assume an active role and work diligently towards building a successful National Council.

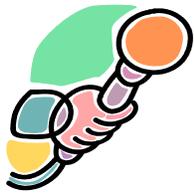
Veronica and I very much look forward to the challenges of the year ahead.

Condolences

By Cathy Lonaberger, OA



On Friday, April 15, 2005, Mary Silva, HRD, died after a lengthy fight with cancer. Mary joined ARS in 1979 as a Secretary in the Personnel Division and shortly thereafter began her 18+ years with the National Agricultural Library in the Director's Office. She became an Employee Development Specialist in 1998 and significantly contributed to the programs of the Human Resources Division by developing the New RL Training Program, Congressional Briefing Conference, and the Mid-Level Leadership Training Program (to name a few). Mary very capably served as a founding member of NACOP from 1995-1997. Mary was a wonderful, valuable member of the ARS family, and we will miss her.



Interview with Sandra Warren

By Madeline Hall, MSA

Sandra Warren, Program Analyst at the Mid-South Area Office, retired in June 2005. Before her selection as Program Analyst, Sandra served as Executive Assistant to the Area Director from 1984 through 2000. She began her career with ARS as a clerk in 1972, and in 1973 she was selected as the Secretary to the Assistant/Associate Director. Sandra served on the Mid-South Area Council for Office Professionals as well as the National Advisory Council. She was recognized for her many contributions to ARS by being named the 1998 ARS Secretary of the Year.

We thought it would be interesting to interview Sandra and glean some of her thoughts about working with ARS. The following interview was conducted by Drusilla Fratesi, Office of the Director, Mid-South Area.

How did you happen to come to work for ARS?

My husband, John, started in May 1971 and loved it. He said, "This is the place to work." The only thing I knew about Stoneville, Mississippi, was that my grandfather had lived there for a little while and helped build a lot of the houses in Stoneville in the 1940s. I knew nothing about ARS, but the attorney I worked for at the time said he could never match the benefits and encouraged me to work here.

What was your first job?

In 1972, I started as a Clerk/Stenographer, permanent, part time, at 38 hours per week in the BioEnvironmental Insect Control Lab. I was hired by Dial Martin and Ted Pfrimmer.

Of all the changes that have occurred over your career, what stands out?

From the time I was hired, I was expected to type and proofread. Technology has really

changed. I always said that if I had been out of the workforce during that time, I would have had to go to college to get back into the workforce. We went from a Selectric Typewriter to Memory to Word Processing then to computers. Another big change was the mail and how we handle it. [In the past,] everything came by hard copy. We used to get mounds of mail daily from the Post Office that had to be sorted and routed. Now, it is e-mail (that never stops). The office assistant role has changed dramatically from answering the telephone and typing to managing.

What was your favorite part of your work?

People often asked me how I stood working for so long in one place. But supervisors changed often. Every new boss had a different management style; the work was always changing. And I liked that about the work. Besides Dial Martin and Ted Pfrimmer who hired me, Area Directors and Associate Area Directors I worked under included John C. Stephens, Edward B. Knipling, James R. Gifford, Earl E. King, L. W. Larson, C. D. Ranney, Paul A. Putnam, W. G. Chace, J. Neil Rutger, Peter B. Johnsen, Arthur L. Schipper, Thomas J. Army, Noelle R. Bertoniere, Edgar G. King, and Deborah L. Brennan.

What specifically will you miss about your work with ARS?

ARS as a whole. It is a great organization. ARS is not publicized enough. The food we eat and the clothes we wear are all affected by ARS research, and people forget about that part of it. The work of ARS does not get out to the public enough. And, I will miss the people. They are like family. I have made many, many friends. Professionally, all I am is due to ARS.

Would you like to add anything about your career?

When I received the Secretary of the Year Award in 1998, I felt like I had done all I could do. My goals had been accomplished. Then, I

had to take care of me. I accomplished that by changing to the Program Analyst position. People look at me like I have three heads when I say I love my job, because it involves mostly ARIS and Peer Panel Reviews (OSQR). The scientists don't always like having to do those things, but you have to hold on to what ARS does and the review process is how we do that.

Do you really plan to write that “tell-all” book you’ve always talked about?

I guess it's good that your memory fails as you get older. We'll see. It's a good thing my memory is not as good as Dr. Knipling's.

How to Get Direction From Your Supervisor in Prioritizing Your Work



By Jennifer Roberson and Alice Redditt, MSA

In the book, “Productivity Power” by Jim Temme, there are many suggestions on how to increase your productivity. One suggestion the author offers is clearly stating what you *can't* do right now. I know you're thinking, “If I said that, I wouldn't have a job tomorrow!” What one needs to remember is the “USA” method to saying no when you feel overloaded. Here is the “USA” way to say “I can't do that right now.”

Understanding statement: “I know this new project you want me to do is significant.”

Situation: “Currently, I'm working on project A, project B, and project C.”

Action: “I would appreciate your assistance in helping me schedule this new project in relation to the other three. How will this new project fit in?”

What you have helped your supervisor do is look at life from your perspective. What you are asking your supervisor to do is:

- Take action - help you to decide how best to schedule the new project in relation to the rest of your work.
- Take responsibility - to provide you direction.
- Consider reassigning the task to someone who may not be as busy.
- Communicate with you so you understand his or her perspective.

If you were to ask your supervisor, “Which of these projects/activities/tasks is more important?” you might hear:

They are all important.

Just get them all done.

You decide. That's what I pay you to do.

I am too busy to help you right now.

None of these answers are helpful, as they offer you no direction. Oftentimes, supervisors are just as overloaded as you; they are not being difficult on purpose. They are looking at the workload from their own perspective. Jim Temme suggests this as a solution to the problem: present a handwritten memo to your boss that says: “Here are the projects I am working on for the next three months (or whatever time frame you choose), and the schedule for completing each one, as I see it:

Project A, completion date:

Project B, completion date:

Project C, completion date:

Unless I hear differently from you, I will work on them accordingly.”

By giving a note such as this to your supervisor, you will not only get their attention but also open communication lines. In this way, you may receive better clarification and direction on which project is most important to your supervisor. Just remember to use the “USA” method to say no. If you never say no, what is yes worth???

Foreign Travel Tip

By Olivia Pedraza, SPA

Here's a tip you may find helpful when managing foreign travel for employees in your office.



Travelers on foreign travel cannot depart without their country clearance. As Passport Retention Officer for the Kika de la Garza Subtropical Agricultural Research Center, Weslaco, TX, I am responsible for making sure the traveler has country clearance before releasing their passport. I use Optional Form 67, Activity Schedule, to keep track of all foreign travel for the Center. I write down the traveler's name and country visiting on the dates travel will take place. When I receive the country clearance, I highlight, in green, the entry. If I am out of the office, then my backup, can look at the Activity Schedule and see if the country clearance has been received in order to release the passport to the traveler.



Surviving the "Blue Screen of Death"

By Phyllis Davis, NAA

The following article was written in May 2005 by Diane Moore, Editor of "The Office Professional." It certainly provides some perspective, as well as a little humor. I hope you find it as enjoyable as I!

"I recently saw a program on television showing funny videos of people committing violence against office equipment. They were unaware that they were being caught on videotape as they went about pounding their computer keyboards with their fists, smashing telephone receivers on their desks and, in one over-the-top situation, toppling the entire computer, monitor and all, on the floor and stomping on it.

While I would never advocate taking out your anger on company equipment, I think we can all sympathize with the frustration of working with uncooperative equipment. As a writer who has learned the hard way to save my work on the computer frequently, I've had my share of moments when I've faced "the blue screen of death" on the computer. You probably know what I'm talking about: that moment when your computer screen turns blue and the system freezes up – without giving you any warning whatsoever.

If they can put a man on the moon, why can't they create a warning system in the computer that it's about to crash and burn? (I'm imagining something like the "Danger! Danger!" message shouted by the robot in the television show, "Lost in Space.") By the time the blue screen of death shows up, it's too late and you frantically try to recall when you last saved your work. You're tempted to put your hands on your cheeks and scream like the kid in the movie, "Home Alone."

I can remember working in the "good old days" on a computer that, even if it froze, kept displaying the screen as I last worked on it. At least that gave me the option of writing down anything from the screen that I hadn't saved before it froze up. Of course, in the even older "good old days", when I worked on a manual typewriter, I never had to worry about the blue screen of death at all.

I'm far from being a Luddite, but when I face the blue screen of death, I do think back fondly on the times when I could easily retrieve any lost ideas by simply picking up the crumbled bits of paper strewn about the room. As one of my favorite computer poems says, "I guess I'll stick to my pen and paper and the memory in my head. I hear nobody's been killed in a computer crash. But when it happens, they wish they were dead!"