

# News & Views online

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The monthly employee newsletter of the WORKFORCE West Virginia Division ♦ Available online at [www.wvbep.org/bep/](http://www.wvbep.org/bep/)



## Model and Solid

Story and photos by Bob Powell

Auditors from the U.S. Department of Labor described the Unemployment Compensation Division's Benefit Payment Control and Trade Readjustment Act section as being "model and solid." High praise for seven professionals who may give claimants support after losing their job to foreign competition one day, while recovering overpayments from a different customer the next.

That is why James Osborne, manager, BPC/TRA unit says it takes a unique group of individuals to handle customers when you have to recover overpaid benefits. "It takes a special person," says Osborne, "to deal with people who are unhappy with you. I'm fortunate to have a group who provides quality customer service with the proper attitude and understanding."

It is a quality of service that enables the Benefit Payment Control section to recover a monthly average over \$100,000 from overpayments. In 2004, the unit processed 8,383 repayments at the central office in Charleston.

The members of Benefit Payment Control and Trade Readjustment Act, Unemployment Compensation Division of WORKFORCE West Virginia are (back row) Ruby Wilson, Alice Martin, Joanne Stone, Kathy Robinson, Michelle Blaney; (front) James Osborne and Walter Huddleston.

Osborne is proud of the fact that despite the confrontational nature of their job, his staff gets thank you notes and Christmas cards from customers. "Anyone who works here has to learn a critical philosophy," says Osborne. "You recover the money, but you must do it professionally without beating up the customer."

Part of that is mandated by the Legislature, which establishes collections laws for the unit. Osborne says his staff works with customers to get a payment plan that works for the customer. If customers fail to make their payments, customers can expect civil penalties if fraud is detected.

The BPC staff first contacts the customer by letter and informs them of the overpayment. Successful contacts may lead to immediate repayment or a repayment plan agreed upon between UC and the customer. Currently the unit monitors nearly 1,000 active repayment plans, several hundred of which are court order plans. Whether a voluntary or court ordered payment plan, their plan is reported to credit reporting agencies, and upon default, the customer may face civil action to collect the remaining overpayment.

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This section is dedicated to the dedicated—to those who make a difference in the lives of our customers—both internal and external.

## Big Gold Star Page



The Honorable Governor Joe Manchin III

I would like to let you and your staff know how much I appreciate the help provided by Susan Newsome, Julie Roberts and Kerry Stephens, who provide services at the Point Pleasant Unemployment Claims Office.

During the time I needed their assistance, these very nice ladies were extremely kind, supportive and understanding. In addition, they were always available for questions and provided as much information as possible to improve the situation.

A brief relocation to Florida, a state that has very little interaction with the unemployment situation, made me aware of how important unemployment offices, such as the one at Point Pleasant, are.

With the financial difficulties so many states have today, hopefully, this letter may have a positive influence on continuing to maintain these offices in West Virginia, which, in my opinion, provide very important assistance with unemployment problems.

An Unemployment Compensation customer

### In Memoriam

Florence Srednicki Bias, retired Beckley JS manager, died July 13 in Oak Hill.

Charles Edward Dunavant, former Putnam JS employment programs interviewer, died July 22 in Crystal River, Florida.

Dorsey R. Starkey, grandfather of UC Benefits and Technical Support Rebecca Thornton, died Sunday, July 17 in St. Albans.

### Tribute

I was saddened to hear of Florence Bias' and Helen Johnson's deaths. I retired from Welch Job Service after 31 years service in 1988. Florence and I attended many seminars and workshops during our careers.

In the summer of 1999, I had to have treatment at Retina Consultants Inc. of Charleston and Beckley. On one occasion at their Beckley location, I had treatment and could not drive back to Welch that day. Florence and a coworker came to the optical center and helped me get settled in the Hampton Inn, and brought my dinner from Wendy's. I stayed overnight and drove back to Welch the next morning.

Florence was a wonderful friend and coworker. She and Helen Johnson will be missed. Much sympathy extended to their families.

Mary Lou Hudson, retiree, Welch Job Service

### Let it begin with you Being the change at your workplace

No matter where you work, chances are there's room for improvement. Let change begin with you. No matter what your position is, you can be the catalyst for positive change in your workplace.

Let your employer or supervisor know that you'd be interested in organizing teams to enhance the work environment. Most employers will be open to this because it doesn't cost them anything. Talk about what changes you feel would benefit the company. Have a plan of action to present how positive changes such as fund raising, neighborhood clean up, or group yoga, could easily be instituted.

Going "green" is easier than most people think. Advocate for the use of natural cleaning products and the use of recycled materials at your workplace. Many places already have recycling programs, but if yours doesn't, it's easy to start one. Volunteer to be in charge of arranging for the pick up of paper, cardboard, cans, and bottles. Then set out marked containers for each item. This is all that most people need to cooperate in a recycling program. Also, look into programs that recycle computers and printer cartridges.

Encourage community involvement by starting food, clothing, and toy drives. Get walk teams together to fund raise for the many charity walks that happen several times a year. Enjoy fresh air and get some exercise during lunch by gardening and picking up trash around the neighborhood. You might even get together a group of volunteers to tutor children or start a mentor program at your work. Not only will you and your coworkers be giving back to your community, but you'll be building team spirit for a better work environment.

Working conditions are enhanced by creating a family atmosphere. Organize monthly potluck lunches or if your work place has a kitchen, take turns cooking. Encourage "veggie" lunches once a week. Instead of coffee breaks, lead your coworkers in yoga breaks, group walks, or a ten minute meditation.

Even if you can't implement big changes, you can be the positive change in your work place with your attitude of peace and cooperation. Start with small improvements and watch the joy spread. Be the change.

### Two philosophers go for a walk...

Did you hear the story about the two philosophers, Goethe and Kant? Kant was confused about something important and so the two famed philosophers took a walk in the woods. Later, Kant was asked if taking a walk in the woods with Goethe helped. Kant answered, "Definitely, yes. I'm still confused, but at a much higher level."

—adapted from the Tully Communications Web site

## Calendar for AUGUST

**Black Business Month.** Aug. 1–31. To focus on and build awareness of black-owned and operated enterprises.

**Children's Eye Health and Safety Month.** Aug. 1–31. To disperse information about amblyopia, a condition that can affect between 2 percent to 3 percent of children and cause permanent vision loss.

**National Immunization Awareness Month.** Aug. 1–31. To develop awareness that immunization is critical to maintaining health and preventing life-threatening diseases among people of all ages and cultures throughout the United States.

**National Inventors' Month.** Aug. 1–31. To educate the American public about the value of creativity and inventiveness and the importance of inventions and inventors to the quality of our lives.

**National Aviation Week.** Aug. 15–21. A celebration of flight, designed to increase public awareness, knowledge and appreciation of aviation.

**Vinyl Record Day.** Aug. 12. We all need a reminder sometimes that life is good. Favorite songs can bring back fond memories, and Vinyl Record Day encourages celebrating these music memories with family and friends.

**National Punctuation Day.** Aug. 22. A celebration of the lowly comma, the correctly used quote and other proper uses of periods, semicolons and the ever-mysterious ellipsis.

—First Draft



### Motorcycle Magnetism

Story and photo by Richard Westfall

Here's a quick quiz: What do MIS/WORKFORCE West Virginia's Warren Wingo, ES Business Services' Russell Frye, ES Operations' Steve Dailey, FAM Mail Services' Joe Creech, and FAM Policy and Communications' Robert Powell all have in common? The answer is they all regularly ride motorcycles. And, with the meteoric rise in gasoline prices, who can blame them? This is one alternate means of getting to work that can be economical as well as enjoyable.

FAM Policy and Communications' Bob Powell, pictured above, is a relative newcomer to motorcycling. He has been riding his BMW R850 (848cc) cycle for two months. He said that his bike gets about 48 mpg, and that normally he only has to fill the 5.5 gallon tank every three weeks or so. Bob says he loves to ride but is still learning. He stated that one of the downsides to riding his motorcycle to work is dressing for work and then dressing to ride, since riders need to be prepared for the weather and other road conditions. He also says that gravel parking lots are a problem, since the bikes are heavy and hard to maneuver on gravel.

Warren Wingo of MIS/WORKFORCE West Virginia has been riding his 800cc Suzuki Volusia (pictured at left) for about 14 months, but has ridden bikes most of his life. He rides to work as often as possible, and gets about 45 mpg from his cycle. Warren says that being an active part of the landscape is a great feeling, but that all cyclists need to watch out for drivers who may not see them. He particularly enjoys riding down country roads.

FAM Mail Services supervisor Joe Creech has been riding since he climbed on his first mini bike at the age of eight. He now rides a Harley Davidson Fat Boy, and participates in the

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Deadline for *News&Views online* is the first day of each month.

## E-changes reflect new identity, new software

Early this month, FAM/MIS Technical Support made changes in our e-mail addresses, as well as in our e-mail program. The change in e-mail addresses was made with little effort required on the part of employees. With just a couple of changes by Tech Support, we all now have a new extension on our address—workforcewv.org. In order to give us time to communicate the change to others, we will continue to get e-mail that is sent to our old address. Tech Support has set our accounts to accept mail to both the old (wvbep.org) and new (workforcewv.org) addresses for the current time. As of the date the change went into effect, all outgoing mail has the new tag on the end.

Our GroupWise e-mail system has been upgraded to version 6.5. Many new options are available on the program upgrade being rolled out by Tech. Support. The new version of GroupWise is a sharper, more user-friendly product. New capabilities available on GroupWise include, but are not limited to, new folders, junk-mail handling, categories, enhancements to filters, calendar and attachments, new headers, icons, toolbar enhancements and better interplay and control of address book.

We now have a **Contacts** folder. The folder represents the Frequent Contacts address book we currently use. Through this folder, addresses and other information can be more easily manipulated than it is through the Frequent Contacts address book.

Also new is the **Checklist** folder. You can move any items into this folder, arrange their order to suit your needs and assign due dates, as well. **Checklist** is a great tool to use to be sure tasks are completed on time. If you want to have other folders work the way the **Checklist** folder does, right-click the folder, click Properties, click the Display tab, then select Checklist from the Setting Name drop-down list.

**Junk Mail Handling** is an exciting new tool you can use to decide what to do with unwanted Internet e-mail that is sent to your GroupWise account. From your main GroupWise page, click on Tools, click **Junk Mail Handling**, and proceed from there to the various tabs, setting up mail handling to suit your needs. You can Junk, Block, or Trust from this area, making your controls suit your needs. **Junk Mail Handling** can also be accessed by clicking Action, Junk Mail, and then **Junk Mail Handling**.

**Categories** is another new option that can help you work smarter. From your main GroupWise page, click on Action; then click **Categories**. Use the four default categories to sort your mail or create new **Categories**.

**Calendar** has also seen new enhancements. A new header with new navigation and date-choosing controls is consistent in every **Calendar** view. Colors have been softened to allow category colors on **Calendar** items to be more noticeable.

To learn more about GroupWise 6.5, click on Help, select What's New and review the new features available on GroupWise 6.5. A User's Guide is also available under Help that will assist you in making the most of what GroupWise has to offer.

## Admin. Rule Changes Dictate Policy Revisions

Story by Richard Westfall

Changes in the Administrative Rule during the past legislative session have, so far, brought about revisions in two of WORKFORCE West Virginia's Administrative Directives. The following changes were announced earlier this month.

A change was made in **Administrative Directive 6400.20**—Disciplinary Actions. This policy has been revised to reflect a change in the section on suspensions. Previously, when an employee was to be suspended, the division was required to observe an eight-day waiting period unless it was a potentially dangerous situation. That waiting period has been reduced to three days.

The other change is found in **Administrative Directive 6700.80**—Other Paid Leave. The revision reflects a clarification of language in the section on Court, Jury, and Hearing Purposes (section B). Here is the revised language:

"Employees will not be granted Other Paid Leave in cases where the employee is the litigant, defendant or other principal party or has a personal or familial interest in the case or proceeding. This is not construed:

- to deprive, prohibit, or infringe upon the rights of the employee who is a party to, or a witness in, a grievance proceeding or a court of law proceeding resulting from the course of his or her State and/or classified employment; or,
- to deprive, prohibit, or infringe upon the right of any employee in their pursuit of personal or civic responsibilities while on annual leave or a personal leave of absence.

The legislature also passed a law concerning leave while participating in an organ donation program. The Division of Personnel will be issuing guidelines on this law in the near future. Anyone with questions concerning this law prior to guidelines being released should contact Richard Westfall at [rwestfal@workforcewv.org](mailto:rwestfal@workforcewv.org).

## New mouse frees you up during presentations

If you're tired of being tethered to your laptop while you're giving a presentation, maybe you need IOGEAR's handheld wireless Phaser Mouse. According to the California-based company, it's operated by radio frequency technology and affords users the opportunity to walk around the room while they speak and give presentations. This also affords the presenters the golden opportunity to maintain eye contact with the people they are communicating to. Users don't have to point the mouse toward the laptop or any sensors to make it work. It can be operated from any direction or any location in the room. And as a bonus, the Phaser Mouse has a built in laser pointer, so you can help direct people's attention as you go along in your presentation.

—adapted from Selling Power

## Congress recesses; workforce issues on hold

Congress spent its last hours before beginning a month-long recess wrapping up a number of legislative priorities and leaving until at least September the approval of legislation to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and establish FY 2006 appropriations for labor programs. A number of workforce system advocates met informally this week to share the latest information from Capitol Hill on both WIA and appropriations with a consensus that no one really knows when either will be completed.

## FY 2006 Appropriations

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved Labor, HHS and Education spending bill is \$3 billion more expensive than the House spending bill and \$4 billion above the Administration's request. Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS and Education changed the payout date for monthly social security disability benefits to give the Senate Appropriations Committee an additional \$3 billion to appropriate. House majority party members have said they will not accept Specter's budget gimmick and will insist, much as they did last year when the same scenario occurred, that the Senate bring down the total cost of its bill in conference. Some fear the savings will be applied to workforce programs, i.e. workforce programs would be cut. No one knows exactly how appropriations will be wrapped-up, a stand alone bill is unlikely, omnibus bill is more likely or year-long continuing resolution with an across-the-board cut to meet budget limits, which is least likely. In all regards, appropriations for workforce programs appear in greater jeopardy this year than in previous years because the Senate is more sympathetic to cuts as it scrapes for savings.

Some in the meeting said appropriators will increasingly look to cut funding for WIA programs because it has not been reauthorized. Some in the meeting said the longer the reauthorization of WIA takes, the more it looks like it is of little importance to Congress and the Administration, opening its programs to further appropriation reductions. Ralph Regula (R-OH) is responsible for restoring the \$58 million to WIA programs on the House floor. This amount was taken originally to fund the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). This cut could resurface in conference because it was Representative David Obey (D-WI), who offered it, and will be a conference participant. Regula's final year to serve as appropriations subcommittee chair is 2006. Regula lists funding for workforce programs in his top three priorities. Many believe cuts to workforce programs would have been greater over the past few years had it not been for Chairman Regula.

A chart comparing FY 2005 final appropriation levels to the Administration's FY 2005 Budget request and FY 2006 levels that would be appropriated under House and Senate bills is available on the Workforce ATM by selecting Appropriations on the Subject Locator or by visiting the NASWA Legislative Advocacy page in the Member Services section.

## NASWA urges more study on DVOP/LVER qualifications

NASWA recently urged a House panel considering draft legislation that would authorize the Secretary of Labor to establish professional qualifications for disabled veterans' outreach program (DVOP) specialists and local veterans' employment representatives (LVER) to review state personnel systems before instituting nationwide standards. The Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity conducted its hearing on the draft bill along with a handful of others impacting veterans' services. Subcommittee Chairman John Boozman (R-AK) opened the hearing stating "anyone believing in program status quo is not supportive of the highest quality of service to our nation's veterans."

Two separate panels of Washington based veterans' service organization (VSO) representatives testified before the Subcommittee, with all supportive of the Subcommittee's goal of improving DVOP and LVER professional qualifications. A representative of the National Military Family Association said her members believe DVOP and LVER personnel must make significant steps forward in improving their skills sets before services are improved. The Vietnam Veterans of America representative said pay for DVOP and LVER personnel should be based on experience, performance and productivity and stressed the need for state personnel systems to account for the unique role of these workers. He said being a DVOP and/or LVER is a tough job with high job turnover rates reflecting this.

The subcommittee learned from John McWilliam, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations and Management with the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), that the integration of a federal employment standard into diverse state personnel systems might be more difficult than proposed. McWilliam's said, he too, supports the goal of improving DVOP and LVER qualifications, but a study of state personnel systems including analysis of skills gaps is needed before legislation is enacted. The subcommittee's ranking member, Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) asked McWilliam if VETS would complete the work he outlined without Congressional prodding or legislation. McWilliam said VETS was already reviewing training provided at the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) and is looking at other ways to improve DVOP and LVER qualifications.

NASWA's statement, developed from feedback received from the NASWA Veterans' Affairs Committee expressed support for the goal of improving DVOP and LVER qualifications and echoed the VETS statement by pointing out a need to review state personnel system complexities. NASWA recommends the subcommittee study state personnel hiring systems and assess how these systems would affect and be affected by the proposed legislation. NASWA also recommended more than the 90-day time period proposed in the draft bill for states to implement any new requirements after the Secretary establishes such qualifications. NASWA's statement also expressed concern with the requirement to meet the minimum qualifications for all DVOP and LVER staff hired prior to the date the Secretary establishes.

—Workforce ATM

## Human Resources

Story and photo by Bob Powell



The Human Resources Office located at 112 California Avenue, includes, Leone Wilson, Bunny George, Tom Rardin, and Julie Shoup. Not pictured, Pam Phillips

The Human Resources office for WORKFORCE West Virginia has the responsibility for maintaining all the personnel records for the 440 employees of the agency. The five member staff is responsible for ensuring that employee's work records are updated.

Tom Rardin, assistant director in charge of human resource operations, took over the agency's HR office in 1992. He described the offices duties simply as handling all the personnel activities for all the divisions under WORKFORCE West Virginia. "Our human resource function is in fact one of the most efficient and effective units in state government," said Rardin. "Everyone in this group knows how to handle human resources issues."

In addition to maintaining the official personnel records for WORKFORCE West Virginia,

the office is responsible for enforcing and maintaining W.Va. Code 29-6—Administrative Rules of the West Virginia Division of Personnel, all DOP administrative directives, advertise approved job postings, and review agency policies relative to personnel issues.

They have been especially busy in the past several years with the departure of staff to the Workers' Compensation Commission, and the recent merger of the Governor's Workforce Investment Division with the Bureau of Employment Programs.

Bunny George, an administrative services manager with 19 years in state government, admits that while there are mandated forms that have to be in everyone's files, technology has made transferring personnel information easier.

"Our work has been improved significantly with the use of technology," said George. "It has allowed us to share information between agencies much easier."

There are more difficult duties within the office, most of which fall on Rardin's shoulders. "I am responsible for handling all disciplinary, unemployment claims and grievance activities for the agency (director)," said Rardin. "Along with legal council, I represent the agency in those matters in administrative court, as well as hearings up to the (state) supreme court."

Among the other functions within the office, they coordinate any mandated internal or external training for the agency, such as sexual harassment prevention, and supervisory training; and maintain all training statistics. The office also is responsible for coordinating agency personnel policies to accurately reflect DOP policies.

Rardin admits that information technology has been important to his office. "The IT components have greatly improved our productivity," said Rardin. "We continue to review our needs with MIS to develop specific programming to address those needs as it's identified."

It reflects how an office of five professionals can handle critical information for an agency the size of WORKFORCE West Virginia.

## July Employees of the Month



**Barbara Goldsmith**, (above), has seen many changes in her 21 years of service. She has seen at least four name changes for what now has become WORKFORCE West Virginia. One thing that hasn't changed, though, is Barbara's commitment to her customers. She is unfailingly polite to her customers and is extremely professional in her role as manager of both Clarksburg and Elkins UC offices. When working as a deputy, Barbara was known to hold to the highest standard in upholding unemployment laws and regulations. Sharing knowledge with others is a trait in which Barbara excelled. Though she attempts perfection in all tasks, and asks that of her workers, she does so in a positive manner, ever mindful that mistakes will be made when people are working. Employees at both locations are extremely glad to have Barbara in charge, as she is highly respected from her years as a deputy and then as manager.

**Sandra Mullins**, (top, right), works in an office that, for the most part, gets infrequent notice, though *News&Views online* has recently profiled it. Not often does the UC Board of Review make headlines. With Sandy's selection as Employee of the Month, we can take a look at what it takes to make the Board the successful unit it is. Sandy is efficient and fast when it comes to transcribing administrative law judge decisions from tape. Though an accident from years past has left Sandy with chronic pain, she comes to the office everyday, on time, wearing a smile and ready to work. She never hesitates to correct spelling or grammar in anything she prepares as she always strives for excellence. One who can always be counted on, Sandy never hesitates to help others with the BORS case management system when necessary, nor any other task. Considered an accomplished professional by her supervisors and peers, Sandy is an easy selection for Employee of the Month honors.



**Angie Richardson**, (above), has spent several years in state government working in banking, economic development and, prior to here, in the Governor's Office. She has been with WORKFORCE West Virginia since March 2003. Angie has an unenviable job of handling complaints from customers. She handles the customers making those complaints effectively, and most importantly, with compassion. Her professional demeanor has also landed her the role of responding to letters from the Governor's office, as well as from our Congressional delegation in Washington. Angie is a perfectionist in all she attempts and is always cheerful and pleasant to her coworkers and customers. Her professional manner and appearance provide representation for the agency in which we all can take heed.

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The unit has four crossmatch processes that allow them to check individual's claims. Currently, they can crossmatch customer's Social Security numbers against databases related to workers' compensation, new hires, wages and other states through an internet database. Additional searches related to the Social Security Administration and a new national new hire database will provide them with additional tools to combat fraud.

"Office automation and technology has helped considerably," said Osborne, a 29-year veteran of the unit. "The electronic crossmatches have helped us catch fraud, and customers are beginning to realize that they can get caught."

While benefit payment control may be a stick to some customers, the Trade Readjustment Act section provides a carrot for others.

Established with the Trade Act of 1974, the TRA section coordinates training and benefit payments to displaced workers who have lost work due to foreign competition.

Osborne and Joanne Stone are the sole staff members of the section. Stone serves as the state's TRA coordinator. Her job is to determine benefits for customers. Together they work with interviewers and deputies in the agency's field offices to prepare them for helping customers faced with job displacements.

"Our TRA benefits have tripled in the past three years," said Osborne. "In 2002, the president signed a TRA reform act which extended the program until 2007." This, Osborne believes, will provide benefits for future displaced workers.

Another important function the unit performs is the processing of Internal Revenue Service 1099 forms for all claimants who received unemployment benefits throughout the calendar year, usually 60- to 70,000. They also forward information to the IRS from customers about a health care tax credit available to displaced workers.

The BPC/TRA section is successful, according to Osborne, in part because there has been little turnover within the unit. It is just another reason why the BPC/TRA section is a model unit and a solid team.

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Capitol City (W.Va. Chapter) Harley Owners Group (HOG). Joe rides in poker runs, including a Children's Miracle Network ride and a Christmas Toy Ride. He recently made a trip down the Blue Ridge Parkway, and said it is a fabulous experience to take in the scenery while riding on a motorcycle. His bike gets about 45 mpg.

As gasoline prices continue to climb, more and more people will be seeking out cheaper means of getting to and from work. Motorcycles have been and continue to be the transportation of choice for several WORKFORCE West Virginia employees.

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