

News & Views online

Vol. 62 No. 9, September 2005

The monthly employee newsletter of the WORKFORCE West Virginia Division ♦ Available online at www.wvbsp.org/bep/



FAM/MIS Warren Wingo points to damage in and under the floor after water flooded up from beneath.



Blowers were set out to help dry carpet in the flooded Charleston WORKFORCE West Virginia Center.

Remains of the day

story and photos by Bob Powell

Disasters can strike in many shapes and sizes. While many people had their eyes glued to news reports about Hurricane Katrina late last month, a disaster of smaller scale was developing closer to home. WORKFORCE West Virginia staff in Charleston were set into motion on August 27 when a water main break behind the Plaza East complex sent nearly four inches of water into the building.

Marcella Townsend, chief administrative law judge for the UC Board of Review, walked in Saturday morning to her office to find the unexpected flood. She called Acting Commissioner Don

Pardue, and Deputy Commissioner Mark Miller to report the damage. Immediately staff from Fiscal and Administration Management, Workforce Development, Job Service, Unemployment Compensation and other workforce partners jumped in to begin recovering their offices, and look ahead to prepare for customers on Monday morning.

Arrangements were made with the state Office of Technology to use their offices at One Davis Square as temporary space for the WORKFORCE West Virginia partners. Several offices, like the BOR, were moved to secondary locations.

“The biggest lesson we’ve learned is that no office is guaranteed safe,” said Miller. “And that it’s harder to respond to a large office, like the Charleston office, with a reduced staff.” He notes that in the past most flooded offices have been the smaller, more remote offices. Despite that, Miller confessed that the WORKFORCE West Virginia and the Office of Technology/IS&C staffs came through. “We were able to open our doors for customers at 8:30 a.m. on Monday,” said Miller. “Everyone who came in are to be congratulated; they were yeomen.”

Miller says that the future for the Plaza East offices is uncertain. The property owner is assessing the damage, but is optimistic and eager to have his customers back. “The landlord has promised to have the building ready in 30 to 45 days,” said Miller. “He’s also looking at getting temporary office space in trailers in front of the Plaza East building as an option.”

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Employee of the Month selections
Unit profiles

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



Margaret Talbert
Summersville WORKFORCE West Virginia Center

I believe that we, as individuals and as organizations, fail in our daily lives to simply appreciate the people who make things happen for our convenience. You and your folks serve the business community and the public in a fundamental and critically important manner day in and day out. It is not too much for those of us who benefit from your effort to express our gratitude. Thank you!

Harry Hull, Brooks Run Mining, Summersville

Melody Lange, Weirton UC

I could not get this claim to work over the phone. Thank you for taking care of it for me. Thank you for all your help over the past year. You are a great help to me.

An unemployment customer

Morgantown UC staff

Attached is my form for weeks June 6 through June 18. I stopped by Monday to drop it of and forgot all about you folks having off for West Virginia's 142nd birthday celebration. Thanks so much for all of your overwhelming compassion and understanding for those of us seeking gainful employment.

An unemployment customer

Two Drinkers Achieve High Water Mark

"Chug-A-Jug," a wellness promotion designed to help participants consume a daily minimum of 64 ounces of water and exercise 30 minutes per day, ended July 29 at 112 California Avenue. Two participants, Bill Bone, who works for Management Analysis on the first floor, and Rebecca Thornton, from UC Benefits and Technical Support on seventh floor, were recognized as the top water drinkers in the promotion. Both received a promotional tee-shirt.

Rebecca Thornton was the leading female drinker with 560 eight oz. glasses of water consumed. Bill Bone was close behind with 550 eight oz. glassed downed, and was the leading male drinker. 43 participants began the promotion and 28 saw it through the entire 48 days.

However, more important than how many started and how many finished was the increased awareness of health benefits in reducing consumption of sweetened soft drinks and replacing them with plenty of water and being well hydrated.



From left: Rebecca Thornton, Fred Mixer

In Memoriam

Deborah Peery, employment programs interviewer 2, Huntington WORKFORCE West Virginia JS, died September 9 in Huntington.

Calendar for September

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Month. To educate the public about childhood health issues by educating them about ADHD.

Baby Safety Month. The Juvenile Products Manufacturer's Association, a national trade organization devoted to helping parents keep babies safe, disseminates information about baby safety.

College Savings Month. Encourages families to plan ahead for the cost of college attendance.

International Strategic Thinking Month. A month-long effort to bring awareness of the universal need to improve thinking skills. The International Center for Strategic Planning hosts this month each year to draw attention to the value of seeking to expand individual views of the world and remove thought barriers that prevent professional achievement.

Library Card Sign-up Month. Public and school libraries join forces to try and ensure that every child has a library card.

National Dog Week. Sept. 18–24. To promote the relationship of dogs to mankind and emphasize the need for the proper care and treatment of dogs.



MACC training brings the above group together for another training day. Seated: Jennifer Watson, Tammy Hesse, Willa Brand, Cyndi Dennis. Standing: Ken Deel, Kimberly Surface, Diane Perdue, Julie Roberts, Lisa Bragg, Mona Payne, Alice Smith, Bill McMullen. Not pictured: Harley Tweed.

Southern diets can cause strokes, heart problems

Southern-style diets worry health experts because while the types of food in a typical Southern diet are not a concern themselves, the way they are prepared adds lots of unnecessary fat and calories and could be the reason that residents of Southern regions suffer more strokes and heart problems.

Concern for the way some Southern communities eat started in 1962, when a study showed that people living in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia were suffering disproportionately from high stroke death rates. Now the area of highest concern has shifted to the Mississippi Delta region.

Health officials from the Centers for Disease Control and other agencies have spent thousands of dollars on grants to promote healthy eating, even sending nutritionists in to educate the public in the South. These experts teach locals how to prepare Southern-style foods in healthier ways, such as reducing the amount of frying and fat used. But traditional Southern cooks often complain that changing the way the food is cooked also reduces flavor. Frying has long been a favorite Southern way of preparing food; the region seems to have latched on to frying long ago because it was a quick, inexpensive and flavorful way to cook food. Frying didn't heat up homes as much because it was such a fast way of cooking. But today's health conscious experts are striving to help find alternative preparation methods that will improve the health of the people who love to eat Southern regional cooking.

—adapted from the Aetna IntelliHealth Web site

How to live positively—and with passion

To get the most out of life, live with genuine passion and be a positive influence. By incorporating the following practices you'll be on your way to living the kind of life you want:

- Discover your true gifts and use them. You were born with your own set of strengths and gifts.
- Follow your own honor code. When you operate within your own moral code, success will come easily to you.
- Always be inclusive and compassionate. Try to recognize the value of each person who comes into your life.
- Set goals and develop a plan for reaching them. You have to know where you're going before you can figure out how to get there.
- Be positive. People will be attracted to your attitude, and before you know it you will be surrounded by other positive people—and life will be good.
- Become a better communicator. Learn how to communicate your visions and goals to others. And pay attention to what others tell you, verbally and in all the ways people choose to communicate.
- Motivate those around you. Making other people great will improve the energy that surrounds you in life. It will help move you toward your goals.
- Commit to education and self-improvement. Be receptive—always. When you stop learning and changing, you're in trouble.

— adapted from The CEO Refresher Web site

August marked 70th birthday for UC

On August 14, 1935 the Federal-State System of Unemployment Compensation in the United States was established by provisions in the Social Security Act of 1935. The act contained two titles that led to the adoption of the Unemployment Compensation laws and the expansion of the state Employment Service offices.

Still, after 70 years, some think of the unemployment compensation program as being similar to welfare or a needs-based program, which is far from the truth. The payment of unemployment benefits is social insurance bound by insurance principles. It was the original intent of the program to pay benefits to individuals to partially replace lost income for the involuntarily unemployed worker. While that was the primary purpose, a secondary purpose was to maintain economic stability by assisting in the purchasing power of individuals and businesses during economic downturns. Additionally, it assisted in retaining skilled workers. Public acceptance of, and political initiative for the system emerged from widespread hardship resulting from high unemployment during the Great Depression.

Following passage of the Federal Social Security Law, the West Virginia Legislature appointed a committee of 12 members to study the federal legislation and to report recommendations to the governor. The committee found that, unless a state unemployment compensation law was enacted, West Virginia employers of eight or more workers would pay a federal payroll tax, yet not provide unemployment compensation benefits for their employees. Accordingly, on December 14, 1936, an extraordinary session of the state legislature was called for the express purpose of enacting legislation dealing with unemployment compensation. The legislature enacted the West Virginia Unemployment Compensation Law, Chapter 21-A of the Code of West Virginia, on December 16, 1936. The law established the Department of Unemployment Compensation and such other divisions as the director of the department found necessary for efficient operation.

To establish a fund from which benefits could be paid, the original law provided that all liable employers should submit payment to the West Virginia Unemployment Compensation Fund at the rate of 0.9 percent of their payrolls for the year 1936, 1.8 percent for 1937, and 2.7 percent beginning in 1938. No unemployment benefits were to be paid in West Virginia until 1938, after contributions for two years (1936 & 1937) had been paid into the State Unemployment Compensation Fund. Title III of the above-referenced Federal Social Security Act provided federal grants to states that would cover the expense of administering state unemployment compensation laws. The act required that the benefits be paid through public employment offices.

During 1937, the Unemployment Compensation Division determined the liability of employing units under the law, collected contributions and established a system under which

claims were to be paid. West Virginia and 21 other states actually began paying benefits in 1938. Thousands of unemployed West Virginians crowded into offices on January 3, 1938, to file claims under this new program. During the first calendar year of benefits, 1,256,577 checks were written, for a total of \$12,066,580.31. At that time, the weekly benefit amount ranged from a minimum of \$5.00 to a maximum of \$15.00, and the average weekly payment in 1938 was \$9.60, with the maximum number of weeks payable standing at 12. In calendar year 2004 average weekly benefit amount was \$219.07, the maximum weekly benefit amount was \$366.00 and the dollar amount paid out during this period was \$141,667,000. Currently, West Virginia's minimum weekly benefit amount is \$24.00 and the maximum is \$380.00.

Today, West Virginia's Unemployment Compensation Program ranks among the top in the nation in performance.

WORKFORCE West Virginia taps state parks

Beginning immediately, WORKFORCE West Virginia will be using the state's beautiful parks system as the location of choice for conferences, meetings and training sessions. Not only will the fabulous locales lend a positive effect to relaxation and ability to soak up the information, we will be helping support a system that helps bring visitors and additional revenue to many areas of the state. Nine parks have lodge accommodations, conference space and amenities and full-service restaurants and catering. Eight of those nine parks also offer cabins and cottages for a greater diversity of meeting settings.

Overnight facilities vary from 20 rooms at Twin Falls and Tygart Lake to over 200 rooms at Canaan Valley Resort. Conference center sizes range from 820 square feet of breathtaking view at Hawks Nest to 13,000+ square feet of modern facilities at Pipestem Resort and Stonewall Resort. Blackwater Falls, Cacapon, and North Bend will always be vacation favorites, but today they are also known for their retreat atmosphere and personal attention to groups.

State agencies using state park facilities is a proposal whose time has truly come.

News&Views online is published by the Policy and Communications Section of the Fiscal and Administrative Management Division of WORKFORCE West Virginia

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

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How are you locating evacuees eligible for unemployment insurance and disaster unemployment assistance?

- State and local workforce staff members are reaching out to evacuees at FEMA sites, community colleges, churches, community centers, evacuee sites.
- Mobile units are being deployed.
- Teams are going neighborhood to neighborhood with laptops to take claims.
- It is not necessary to return home to file a claim. Individuals can call the toll-free help line 1-866-4-USA-DOL, or go to www.dol.gov, for the location of the nearest site to make a claim.

How are you going to deliver unemployment checks to people whose homes have been destroyed and who have been relocated?

- The majority of survivors in all 3 states have relocated to areas where they can both receive and cash checks.
- In all evacuee centers, state workforce agency staff is making arrangements with local banks to cash UI checks, provide ATM cards and service vouchers.
- If there is no mail service, checks are held in central locations convenient to displaced persons.
- DOL is taking steps to empower states sheltering displaced persons to make Unemployment Assistance and Disaster Unemployment Assistance payments to survivors.

How long will it take realistically to get unemployment insurance benefits to Hurricane Katrina survivors?

- Claims are already being processed.
- More than 10,000 evacuee claims have been processed in Texas; Tennessee expects to process about 40,000 claims; and 3,419 evacuee claims have been processed in Georgia.

What will happen to displaced workers unable to provide any documentation about where they worked?

Waivers have been granted so that workers caught in these circumstances can get their benefits.

Is the Department helping the recovery effort in any other way?

OSHA has mobilized teams of technical experts to help workers involved in the dangerous job of trimming trees, cleaning debris, and restoring electrical power avoid further loss of life.



From left: Ken Deel, Cynthia Dennis

Cynthia Dennis wins quarterly veterans award

Story and photo by Richard Westfall

Cynthia Dennis of the New Martinsville Job Service is this quarter's winner of the Veterans Services Award. Dennis has been employed as a 50/50 LVER since March 1989. She offers her expertise in developing accurate and professional resumes for her veteran population to use in their employment pursuit. She also provides an ad hoc "Help Desk" for some of her customers who are experiencing problems with computer skills on their home computers.

Dennis conceptualized, produced and distributed a quarterly general information newsletter for veterans, *Vets Page*, that is available in the New Martinsville office for veteran walk-in customers. In the past, this newsletter has also been made available to Veterans Affairs Officers, other LVERs, DVOPS, and local Veterans Service Organizations via email.

Dennis worked with Lon Dittebrand and Ken Deel in developing and maintaining the West Virginia Veterans website. She also serves as a lead staff for the MACC system and provides particular assistance to veterans representatives concerning this system.

Because of all these things and many others, Cynthia Dennis is this quarter's Veterans Services Award winner. She received a monetary award of \$2,327.50

—Workforce ATM

Silence is the best substitute for brains ever invented.

—Henry F. Ashurst

I-9 requirements eased

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced last week that it will not sanction employers for hiring victims of Hurricane Katrina who, at this time, are unable to provide documentation normally required under Section 274A of the Immigration and Nationality Act. DHS will not bring sanction actions against employers for hiring individuals evacuated or displaced as a result of Hurricane Katrina otherwise eligible for employment but who currently lack personal documents.

U.S. employers are responsible for completing and retaining Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9) Forms for individuals they hire for employment. This form requires employers to verify employment eligibility and establish identity through original documents presented by the employee. For victims of Hurricane Katrina, many individuals lack these documents as a result of being evacuated from their homes, loss or damage to personal items and records, and ongoing displacement in shelters and temporary housing. Additionally, as a result of the widespread damage and destruction to government facilities in the area affected by the hurricane it can be expected that many victims will be unable to apply and receive new documents in the period of time required by the employment verification rules.

Therefore, the Department of Homeland Security will refrain from initiating employer sanction enforcement actions for the next 45 days for civil violations, under Section 274A of the Immigration and Nationality Act, with regard to individuals who are currently unable to provide identity and eligibility documents as a result of the hurricane. Employers will still need to complete the Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9) Form as much as possible but should note at this time that the documentation normally required is not available due to the events involving Hurricane Katrina. At the end of 45 days, the Department of Homeland Security will review this policy and make further recommendations.

—Workforce ATM

Jobs and Income Support for Workers Displaced by Hurricane Katrina

Frequently Asked Questions

How is DOL helping those who have been put out of work by Hurricane Katrina?

- The Department is responding with 3 major income support programs:
- National Emergency Grants (NEGs) to create temporary jobs that provide paychecks to dislocated workers and help recovery efforts;
- Unemployment Insurance (UI);
- Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA)

How many NEG grants have been made after Hurricane Katrina?

- √ \$191.1 million in National Emergency Grants have already been awarded to create more than 40,000 temporary jobs in the region:

- √ \$4 million for Alabama awarded on August 31, 2005;
- √ \$50 million for Mississippi awarded on September 2, 2005;
- √ \$62.1 million for Louisiana awarded on Sept. 3, 2005;
- √ And \$75 million for Texas on Sept. 6, 2005 to serve Louisiana evacuees. As soon as an NEG grant is approved funds are transferred to the state.

Is DOL going to give NEG grants to states that have taken in displaced persons?

Yes. States accepting evacuees can apply for National Emergency Grants to serve individuals displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

How does one participate in the NEG grant jobs program?

Individuals dislocated as a result of Hurricane Katrina are eligible for jobs funded by National Emergency Grants, as well as other dislocated workers, and the long-term unemployed.

How much will NEG grant jobs pay?

- Participants may earn up to \$12,000 and work for a six-month period.
- Overtime and fringe benefits can be added on top of the base.
- Wages can be increased for specialized jobs.
- Workers must be paid prevailing wages for comparable jobs.
- The state can request a waiver to extend the six-month period.

How soon will these jobs be available?

As soon as a NEG is approved, funds are transferred to the state to begin the process of recruitment and deployment.

If these jobs require specialized skills, how will you get training to people?

- Skilled individuals are usually hired to serve as work site supervisors to help provide on-the-job training to bring lower skilled workers up to speed as quickly as possible.
- Most NEG funds support lower-skilled workers in temporary "laborer" jobs to complete clean up work.

How will people find out about these jobs?

DOL has set up a 24/7 toll free number (1-866-4-USA-DOL) where displaced persons can find out how to apply for these jobs or how to apply for unemployment and disaster unemployment insurance. States are setting up toll free numbers, as well.

What is the difference between Unemployment Insurance and Disaster Unemployment Assistance?

- Both programs provide unemployment benefits for 26 weeks.
- But after a natural disaster, some workers are affected who are normally not eligible for Unemployment Insurance benefits. Disaster Unemployment Assistance is for them.

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August Employees of the Month

For more than 16 years, **Deborah Bell** has been a familiar face to Martinsburg WORKFORCE West Virginia's customers. For the past five years, Bell has been the primary interviewer for the office, providing services to customers through registration of applicants, job order intake, and personal reemployment accounts to working the front desk and keeping the office's time records.

Bell has a wealth of experience with tax credit programs and unemployment insurance profiling. She is the first to lend a



hand with the workload when coworkers are developing special projects for veterans or migrant and seasonal farm workers. Though she stays more than busy with those duties, she also has

accepted the assignment to be trained through staff sharing with the unemployment compensation staff, and has become a very productive team member when taking claims and entering data about claimants.

Not everything in Bell's life has been as rosy, though, for quite some time Bell has had the additional stress of having her son serving as a U. S. Marine in Iraq. Finding herself in this less than stellar situation, Bell has consistently remained cheerful of spirit and highly productive while bearing the emotional burden.

From her continuing endeavor to provide excellent customer service, to her courtesy, empathy and caring for her customers, a coworker described Bell's contributions best: "Her presence makes our office a better place to work." What better a compliment to be had?

Somebody has to do it! Let's call Wanda. **Wanda Smith** gets calls on a host of curious complaints. From "OHMYGOSH, there's water everywhere!" to "We saw a rat!" But nothing fazes Smith. She takes the complaints as they come, and calls for the appropriate assistance. Smith is the administrative secretary for FAM Administration, and works for deputy executive director Mark Miller. She juggles her duties for Miller while dealing with agency identification card and building access card issues, maintenance concerns for building 4, and general answerer of questions on most anything one would need to know. Smith loves solving problems, so when she is presented

with one, she excels. Always cheerful and kind, Smith shirks from no responsibility, whether it be batting around in the yon reaches of the building with exterminators, or helping someone with a quick parking problem.

Smith takes special care that everyone is treated fairly and with respect. She also keeps her coworker's privacy in mind, and never fails to keep confidences. Her primary job duties with Miller require Smith to guard confidentiality in the forefront of her every action, and she cannot be surpassed in her efforts.



Smith's commitment to her job and to her coworkers set her apart from the rest. She truly cares about her job and those with whom and for whom she works. Smith has made her mark in the more than six years she has worked for the agency.

With staff shortages and increased duties, our local field staff have taken on more and more responsibility. **Angela Denis** is one of those individuals who looks to each new task as an opportunity. Her duties vary from customer interviews data entry, writing job orders, and even writing local radio broadcasts of job openings in



the area. Denis performs these tasks eagerly and with quality service in mind. Working in the agency's Morgantown WORKFORCE West Virginia Center,

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Denis sees a steady stream of customers. She also accepted the role of MACC lead person for her office. Denis learns and shares new information concerning MACC with her coworkers as it becomes available.

Always willing to step up and accept extra duties and responsibilities, Denis can be counted on to keep the shop running when the office manager is unavailable. She is always the first one at the office each morning, and starts the coffee to help her coworkers face the day as they come through the door. Denis is more than willing to assist with information, support and empathy, whether customer or coworker.

Denis's regard for the customer has given her a following. Customers ask for her because they know she treats them with respect—a compliment to her dedication.

How to run a race well

There was a Special Olympics race and eight children glowed in anticipation of the event. Excitedly the children all took their places and got ready for the start of the race.

A starter gave them the signal and shouted, "Get on your mark, get set—goooo!" And the children sprinted out. Soon one girl clearly took the lead with the other children running to catch up.

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However, back in the pack of runners one boy, who had gotten off to a slower start, tripped and fell. He began to cry on the racetrack. He whimpered and tears spilled down his cheeks.

The leader of the race, a girl with Down syndrome heard her opponents anguish—and though she was clearly set to win the race she stopped and ran back to the boy. When she reached him, she gingerly dropped down and gave him a kiss on the knee and then she wiped away his tears.

When the other runners saw what was going on they also turned around and ran back. Together they pulled the boy up—then they set off to finish the race they had begun.

As the children approached the finish line it was hard to find a dry eye among the spectators. The runners came down the final stretch toward the finish line—with their arms linked. And each one of them was absolutely delighted to be together.

—adapted from Relationships of Grace, by Chris Karcher

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