



OPEDA NEWSLETTER

Organization of Professional Employees
of the US Department of Agriculture

<http://www.opeda.net/>

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President's Message October 13, 2010

I am pleased to share with you some of the exciting events and developments taking place at OPEDA:

-OPEDA is closely monitoring proposed legislation regarding Federal employee compensation and benefits as well as the pensions and benefits provided to our retired members. OPEDA has partnered successfully with other Federal Employee organizations to protect the interests of our OPEDA members.

- We are getting close to launching our new membership drive. Table, posters, and brochures will be set up across the Nation to advertise OPEDA's many contributions to USDA employees. Free gifts will be provided to new members who join OPEDA as well as to our current members to show our appreciation for their continued support. We have established a goal of recruiting 250 new members during the next year. If you know anyone who would like to join OPEDA, please encourage them to join. This can be easily be done by completing the Membership Application form on the OPEDA website at

http://opeda.net/member_application_form.asp

-OPEDA is working with Mass Benefits Corporation to provide many different types of insurance at reduced prices. This program will be tailored for Federal Employees as well as the unique needs of our members. More information will be provided in the near future on the OPEDA website.

-Seven family members of OPEDA members have been awarded scholarships of \$500 each. The winners are showcased in this newsletter. The next opportunity for OPEDA members and their family members to submit scholarships applications will be during the summer of 2011.

-Last but not least, on October 12, 2010, at the Department's Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)

Kickoff Celebration, OPEDA was honored to be the first organization to donate to CFC and presented a contribution of \$1000 to Shannon Hamm, USDA's 2010 CFC Campaign Manager. Please see the USDA Blog at <http://blogs.usda.gov/tag/shannon-hamm/> for details. OPEDA has contributed every year to the CFC campaign. All OPEDA members are encouraged to make individual contributions to CFC through e-Giving this year. This method is fast, simple, available 24/7, reduces overall campaign processing costs and gets to the non-profit organizations faster. It's easy. Simply go to <http://www.cfnc.org/> and click on "donate now, e-Giving."

Scholarship Awards

Scholarships have been awarded to seven students who are related to OPEDA members or who are OPEDA members themselves. The recipients are as follows:



Ivelisse Cardona-Rosario – Ivelisse moved to the United States from Puerto Rico last December. She has held two internships with FSA, USDA, during the past spring and summer. She is seeking a BA in Business Administration at the

University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg, VA and she hopes to attend law school.



Virginia Davis – Virginia is a junior pursuing a nursing major with a Bible minor at Cedarville University near Dayton, OH. She has spent two summers as a camp counselor and camp nurse. She teaches English at a local Chinese Church to Chinese and Taiwanese students.



Shelby Feistner was born in Missouri and graduated from Parkview High School, Springfield, MO. Shelby is a psychology major at Truman State University.



Shona Feistner – is a junior at the University of Arkansas. Her fields of interest are occupational therapy and kinesiology. She has volunteered extensively with young people; this work has included tutoring fifth grade students and working with the Girl Scouts of America.



Vincent Fracabrandera – Vincent graduated from Crestwood High School and currently attends George Mason University, Fairfax, VA where he is pursuing a major in criminology. He enjoys playing basketball, racquetball and tennis and spending time with his dog Bandit and his cat, Figgy. He also

enjoys his part-time job selling shoes at Lady Footlocker.



Rylie Saab – Rylie graduated from Garland High School last December and now attends Richland College. She plans to transfer to the University of Florida to pursue a bachelor’s degree in art therapy.



Candice Seawright – Candice graduated last spring from IRMO High School in Columbia, SC. She plans to enter the field of Elementary Education at Claflin University She works with young people in the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club and local

organizations. She believes that the reward in volunteering comes from the knowledge that you have helped an individual or a community.

Federal Retirees COLA and the Lame Duck Session of Congress. This year there has been no COLA for federal retirees. There is no certainty that federal retirees not eligible to receive Social Security will receive the \$250 payment to seniors. Retired OPEDA members who are not eligible for Social Security should E-mail or call their Congressmen

<https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml> and Senators http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm and urge them to support the following:

“Include those federal, state and local government retirees who are not eligible for Social Security in the legislation to be introduced in the lame duck session to offer a \$250 payment to retirees receiving Social Security.”

Projected role of Federal employees in reducing the U.S. deficit. A recent article by Joe Davidson in *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2010 summarizes a portion of the draft proposals released recently by the co-chairs of President Obama’s deficit commission, Erskine Bowles and Alan K. Simpson. The draft suggested the following:

Federal workers would face a **freeze on “federal salaries, bonuses and other compensation at non-Defense agencies for three years,”** saving \$15.1 billion. A similar proposal for Pentagon civilians would save \$5.3 billion.

The federal workforce would be cut by 10 percent (about 200,000 people) by hiring only two workers for every three who leave federal service. This would save \$13.2 billion.

The National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) stated that “if enacted, the above two proposals...would have an unfair and disproportionate impact on the federal employee and the retirement community.”

Perhaps most disturbing is The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) is very concerned about another **proposal to “achieve mandatory savings from civil service retirement by recalculating retirement payments**

and requiring higher contributions for pension benefits and health insurance premiums.”

As always, OPEDA encourages its members to use the internet to E-mail, or write to their representatives in the House of Representatives and in the Senate to voice their opposition to these draft proposals.

Congressmen

<https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

and Senators

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

As an alternative to using the internet, OPEDA members may also send written letters to their representatives in the House and the Senate as this also can yield positive results; however, many members of Congress prefer to be contacted by internet or E-mail. Regular mail is significantly delayed by the process of screening the letters. Each office has limited staff and telephones, and internet/E-mail provides more accurate records.

Every employee has a right to communicate with his/her Congressperson using personal time, equipment and supplies. OPEDA members are reminded that government time, facilities and supplies should not be employed in such activities.

OPEDA Participates in Discussions of Compensation with Coalitions. OPEDA participated in discussions with the Fed/-Postal Coalition and the Coalition for Effective Change. These coalitions represent several hundred thousand federal and postal employees and both groups are vitally interested in maintaining the compensation levels of those who work for the federal government.

Your Elected Regional Coordinators and OPEDA Council Members

Region 1 – Alaska, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and the Pacific Trust Territories. Regional Coordinator: *Hal Swenson*

Region 2 – Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming. Regional Coordinator: *James Krueger*.

Region 3 - Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin. Regional Coordinator: *Randy R. Edwards*.

Region 4 – Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas. Regional Coordinator: *Robert Purdom*.

Region 5 – Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee. Regional Coordinator: *Michael Botelho*.

Region 6 – Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia. Regional Coordinator: *Kathleen Rajkowski*.

Region 7 – Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia. Regional Coordinator: *Ed Dickerhoof*.

Highlights of Recent OPEDA Board/Council Teleconferences

The OPEDA National Board of Directors and Council Members held teleconferences on August 17, September 28, and October 26, 2010. In addition to the legislative issues mentioned in this Newsletter, some of the more important OPEDA initiatives discussed during these meetings included:

- Our new Vice President for Membership, Jeff Williams and Ed Dickerhoof, Council Representative for Region 7 and OPEDA Executive Vice President are leading the 2011 membership drive. They have already developed printed recruiting materials and have procured and are evaluating several types of gifts for newly joining and existing members such as OPEDA embossed Polo Shirts, lanyards, lapel pins, pens, USB Drives and many other items in preparation for the 2011 membership drive which will be nationwide.
- Continuing to pursue a partnership with USDA Departmental Management and the Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) to further and promote the implementation of the USDA’s Transformation Initiative.

Change in OPEDA Electronic Connections

OPEDA is now obtaining its electronic communications services through the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO).

Thank you for reading the OPEDA Newsletter.
Your comments and contributions are welcome.
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