



# OPEDA NEWSLETTER

Organization of Professional Employees  
of the US Department of Agriculture

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## President's Message

Public Service Recognition Week is over, but there were many important programs and activities on the Mall and in federal agencies to remind us and management that our employees make great contributions to America. OPEDA conducted its annual Unsung Heroes Award Program which was a resounding success.



Congressman Frank Wolf of Virginia was the honored guest.

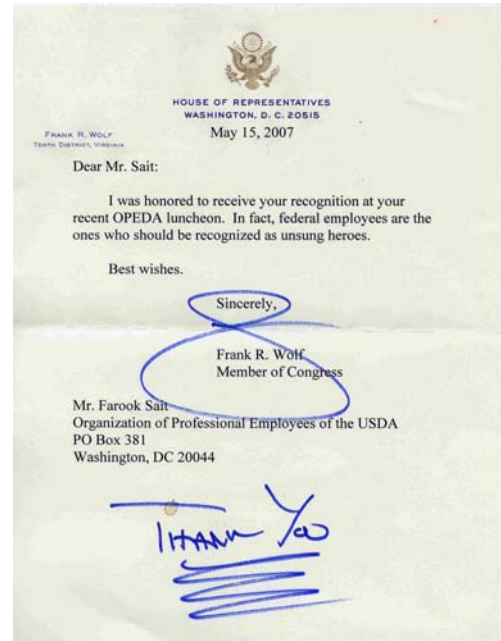
The 12 Unsung Hero honorees are: Norma Valdes, RD; Crystal Leonetti, NRCS, Alaska; Patricia Tippet, Office of Ethics; Dwight Gadsby,

ERS; Jane Tesch, RD, N. Dakota; Crystal Tolar, FNS; Curtiland Deville, CSREES; Rhonda Davis, ASCR; Steven Brammer, OGC; Pat Basu, FSIS; Nicole Tousley, FS; and Janet Head, FSA, Kansas.



Present at the ceremony were Douglas Faulkner, Deputy Under Secretary, RD; Boyd Rutherford, Assistant Secretary for Administration; Dana York, Associate Chief, NRCS; Dr. David Goldman, Acting Administrator, FSIS; Annabelle Romero, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights; and Dale Moore, Chief of Staff, who substituted for Secretary Johanns, and many other high level agency representatives.

## Congressman Wolf Praises Federal Employees in Note to OPEDA



## OPEDA Participation in Public Service Recognition Week Activities

Government Employees Insurance Corporation (GEICO) and The Council for Excellence in Government (CEG) sponsored activities for leaders in the organizations of government employees. Holly Hambley represented OPEDA at these events.

On Monday evening, May 7, GEICO presented Public Service Awards to 5 employees who were outstanding in accident and fire prevention, physical rehabilitation and substance abuse prevention and treatment. OPEDA will submit a USDA employee for such an award in the future.

On May 8, CEG and the Gallup organization sponsored a networking breakfast on "Attracting the

Best and Brightest Young People to Federal Jobs in Science and Technology.” On May 9, CEG hosted a reception recognizing the NASA James Webb Space telescope.

GEICO opened the Mall Event portion of Public Service Recognition Week with a breakfast at which Naomi C. Earp, Chair, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, spoke. Ms. Earp expressed high praise for the work of Forest Service employees with whom she had interacted earlier in her career. Attendees also learned from CEG President Pat McGinnis that in a CEG survey, the Forest Service icon, Smoky Bear, had a 99 percent recognition factor.

OPEDA, as a member of the Public Employees Roundtable (now an arm of CEG), participated with CEG and PER in planning Public Service Recognition Week.

### **OPEDA Encourages Agency Leadership in Fundraising for the Combined Federal Campaign.**

Our first ever, International Bazaar fund-raiser for the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) on the Patio, Whitten Building, attracted several other employee organizations and agencies to participate. We raised more than \$400 selling donated items and food. We urge all of you to engage in such activity so OPEDA can make an even greater contribution

### **Retirees Employment Changes**

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) submitted the legislative proposal to Congress that will allow Federal retirees to return to government and work part time, while earning their full annuity. This action is to help agencies the impending retirement wave that is being viewed as a serious brain drain. Currently, salaries for retirees who rejoin the federal workforce are reduced by the amount of their annuities. As a result, many retired employees end up working for federal contractors – at a higher cost to agencies than if they worked for federal agencies.

### **Personnel Records**



OPM says it is on track to convert all federal employee personnel records from paper to electronic so that retirement checks can be processed quickly and accurately. OPM and its contractor, Hewitt Associates, are converting up to 9,000 records a day. This is a \$290 million contract and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

### **Short Term Disability Benefits**

OPM is working on the details of a proposal to introduce new short term disability benefits for federal employees in 2008. Eighty percent of companies with 200 or more employees have a short term disability benefit and federal employees do not have it.



### **Information Security**

The latest report card on the federal government’s computer security is not encouraging. Eight agencies (Education, Commerce, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Treasury, Agriculture, Defense, Interior, and State) earned a grade of F. The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee derived the grades from annual reports agencies are required to produce under the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISA).

### **Membership**

Please notify OPEDA of any address change by E-mail to [opedata@usda.gov](mailto:opedata@usda.gov); by mail to OPEDA, P.O. Box 381, Washington, DC 20044; or by telephone at 202-720-4898. If we have your current E-mail address, we can greatly reduce mailing costs by E-mailing our newsletter and other items of importance to you. This is especially important for newly retired employees.

## OPEDA Networking

OPEDA continues to attend the meetings of the Coalition for Effective Change. This government-wide coalition is made up of organizations such as the Senior Executive Service, the Public Managers Association, Blacks in Government, Federally Employed Women and the Association of Technical and Supervisory Personnel (USDA-FSIS employees), Federal Asian Pacific American Council, Asian Pacific American chamber of Commerce and other groups. The organization is called upon by Congress for testimony and by various top-level members of agencies in the Executive Branch, such as OPM, to for comment and advice. CEC also initiates communications with Congress and the Executive Branch regarding employee concerns over pay reform, government reorganization, ethics issues and so on. It has been estimated that this coalition represents well over 400,000 federal employees. The next meeting will be held on May 23, 2007.

## OPEDA Scholarship

The Peterson OPEDA Scholarship is available again this year. The deadline for applying is extended to July 30, 2007. Application forms are available on the USDA website, [www.usda.gov/opeda](http://www.usda.gov/opeda) or can be obtained by contacting the OPEDA office at [opeda@usda.gov](mailto:opeda@usda.gov) or 202-720-4898 or P.O. Box 381, Washington, DC 20044.

## Regional Information - OPEDA

Every OPEDA member is assigned to a Region based primarily on geographic location of the workplace. Twenty four of the Regions are outside central Metropolitan DC. Employees in Beltsville are in Region 24, Delaware and Maryland, although these employees often participate in activities as though they were in Central Metro DC. The Regional Coordinators will be listed on the website and the OPEDA office can help you contact your Coordinator/Representative. Current Representatives include: Region 1. AK, ID, WA – **Hal Swenson**; 2. OR – **Ray Brokken**; 3. N. CA, NV – **Wallace Yokayama**; 4. S CA, HI, GU – **Joe Smilanick**; 5. AZ, NM – **Richard Shaw**. 6. CO, UT, WY – **Ray Anderson**; 7. MT, ND, SD – **Dale van Eckhout**; 8. IA, NE – **Richard T. Clark**; 9.

KS, OK – **James Krueger**; 10E. East Texas – **Robert Purdom**; 10W. West Texas – **Eddy M. Spurgin**; 11. AR, LA – **Burthel Thomas**; 12. MO – vacant; 13. MN, WI – **Michael Lieurance**; 14. IL, IN – **Randy Edwards**; 15. KY, TN – **Larry Duewer**; 16. AL, MS – **Carl Pennington**; 17. FL, PE – **Michael Botelho**; 18. GA – **James M. Terry**; 19. NC, SC – **Curtis Hobbs, Jr.** 20. VA, WV – **Holly Hambley**; 21. MI, OH – **Howard Terry Nicholson**; 22. New England – **Julian Drelich**; 23. PA, NJ – **Kathleen Rajkowski**; 24. DE, MD – **Willie Pittman**; 25. DC area – FAS, FSA, OSEC – **Louis Iacoletti**; 26. DC area – Economics, Extension, Statistical Agencies, Research – **Dwight Gadsby**; 27. DC area – AMS, APHIS, FGIS, FNS, FSIS, HNIS – **Winona Scott**; 28. DC Area – RD, RUS, NRCS, FS – **Ed Dickerhoof**.

Do we have a volunteer to represent Missouri on the Council?

## Council Member News

Richard Clark, our Representative from Iowa and Nebraska, retired from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL) in August, 2005, after a distinguished career as Professor of Agricultural Economics and Interim Department Head. Enjoy your retirement years!!

## New Website to be Launched

OPEDA is opening a new website; it will be launched in June. OPEDA hopes that there will be more interaction with the website in the future. Staff will also try to refresh the website more frequently.



## Future Activities

Historically OPEDA has vigorously supported recognition, both tangible and intangible, of the contributions of USDA employees and retirees to the welfare of our nation's inhabitants. OPEDA believes that significant contributions on the job deserve significant, long term acknowledgement. OPEDA members are encouraged to communicate

their views on this topic, especially in terms of implementation, to OPEDA officers.

OPEDA always wants to consider *your* suggestions concerning activities that would provide efficient and effective support to you as an employed or retired member. Sometimes local chapters can serve as a conduit for providing information to members regarding issues surrounding health care, retirement, Thrift Savings, remuneration for travel, ethics, and effective on-the-job communication to superiors, subordinates and co-workers, etc.

OPEDA outreach activities have often been developed around the areas represented by the Vice Presidencies and Committees for Professionalism, Public Service and Legislation. Recently, in the area of Public Service, OPEDA has presented the Unsung Hero Award, has selected recipients of the Scholarships and has supported the Combined Federal Campaign. These activities have required the support of OPEDA members across the nation. In the past, under the VP for Member Services, information and, sometimes, discounts on insurance premiums have become available. Occasionally, OPEDA has facilitated the provision of requested information on specialized topics to individual members as their needs became apparent.

### **Areas of Interest to Regional Representatives (Council Members)**

Council members have reported member interest in the following topics: streamlining of programs; staff restructuring and reductions; health insurance,

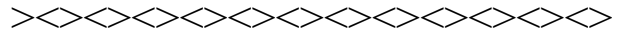
particularly dental insurance; pay comparability; teleworking, expedite getting laptop computers, blackberries, cell phones, etc.; training; converting temporary employment to count toward retirement

### **OPEDA Represented at Meeting of Undersecretary for Civil Rights**

On March 21, 2007, OPEDA attended a briefing for employee organizations presented by the Undersecretary for Civil Rights, Margo M. McKay. Secretary McKay outlined plans for future programs planned by her office.

### **OPEDA Supporter and Former OSAAA Official Retires**

Arun Basu, NRCS, a former President of the Organization of South Asian Americans in Agriculture (OSAAA), retired effective June 2. Dr. Basu, a fiercely loyal member of OPEDA, has promoted co-sponsorship of events by the two organizations and has actively participated in preparation for and execution of these events.



Thank you for reading the OPEDA Newsletter. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Please write to us at <mailto:OPEDA@usda.gov>.

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