



OPEDA NEWSLETTER

Organization of Professional Employees
of the US Department of Agriculture
www.opeda.net

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President's Message

It is six years since you elected me as President. I have worked hard to restore financial stability to OPEDA and also to raise its profile in the Department. Thanks in large part to the dedicated service of Holly Hambley, Fred Kaplan, and Bruce Marti, we have succeeded in both areas.

It is time now to elect new leadership. We have three excellent candidates for you to choose from. I am confident that whoever is elected, OPEDA will keep moving forward. Thank you for your confidence and support and best wishes to the new President.

I want to also take this opportunity to thank the generous support provided to OPEDA events by the following individuals: Dr. Ed. Knipling, ARS; James Bradley, ARS; Alfred V. Almanza, FSIS; Cindy Smith, APHIS; Clyde Thompson, RD; Anna Grayson, APHIS; Curt Deville, CSREES; Dana York, NRCS; Russ Ashworth, DA; the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights; and the Office of the Secretary.

Finally, I have one request - **PLEASE VOTE**.

Unsung Hero Award

The ceremony to celebrate Unsung Heroes of the U. S. Department of Agriculture was held on May 5, 2009 in the patio of the Whitten Building. The theme for the ceremony was "America – The Beacon of Freedom." Farook Sait, President, led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance; he then opened the meeting with a tribute to the United States as a beacon of freedom. After a welcome by **Alfred V. Almanza**, Administrator, Food Safety Inspection Service, The Honorable **Joe Leonard**, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights gave special remarks and The Honorable **Kathleen Merrigan**, Deputy Secretary, discussed "The Rewards of Public Service." Closing remarks by **Cindy Smith**, Acting Deputy Under-Secretary, concluded the ceremony.

nominees drawn from the fifty-five states and territories.

Cynthia "Cindy" Brant is a loan officer with Rural Development.

Robert "Bob" Kukachka, is a Soil scientist in Soda Spring, Idaho, and works for the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Dr. Tasha Thomas, FSIS, accepted the award on behalf of the EEO Advisory Committee, Springdale District, Arkansas. Other members of this team are:

- Dr. Lisa Tresp**
- Dr. Kari Holloway**
- Dr. Jorge Toledo**
- Dr. Mahmood Ramzan**
- Marcia Carpenter**
- Cyndi Unruh**

John Giler is the Director, Field Management Division, GIPSA.

Mark A. Wren is a Senior Special Agent, Office of Inspector General in Nashville, Tennessee.

Connie Myers, is the Director, Interagency Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, Missoula, Montana, Forest Service since its inception in 1992.

Michael M. Edwards, Esq., is a consummate advisor in the Office of Ethics.

Dr. Ronald Ochoa is a scientist in the Systematic Entomology Laboratory in the Agricultural Research Service.

Kirk Spencer is the Printing Foreman, Office of Operations.

Robert Hall, Jr., is the Editor of the USDA News, Office of Communications.

Stephanie Koziski is a Program Analyst in the Office of Outreach and Diversity, Assistant secretary for Civil Rights.

Willie L. Ruffin is serving in Iraq as an Agriculture Advisor, on loan from the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

The awardees also received a special citation from Congressman Chris Van Hollen, D – MD. Pictures of this event will be on the OPEDA website.

We also thank the following employee organizations for their dedication to the Department and for their unstinting support for OPEDA: Star Bryant, Blacks in Government; and Dr. Parveen Setia, Organization of South Asian Americans in Agriculture.

Triennial OPEDA Presidential and Council Election.

OPEDA is holding its triennial Election for National President. Three candidates have been identified: Louis Iacoletti, Parveen Setia and Justin Rhee. OPEDA is fortunate to have this superior slate of candidates. A ballot is provided with this newsletter. More detail on each candidate is provided on the reverse side of the ballot.

As described in the article immediately following, the OPEDA Council has voted to restructure the Regions. Members will be electing their Representatives to the Council from the new Regions. A candidate has been identified from each Region. These candidates, identified with the Region from which they are running, are on the ballot as well.

Ballot MUST be postmarked No Later Than July 3, 2009.

If your membership dues are current, you are entitled to vote in this election. Please vote for your candidate for National President and for Counselor (Regional Representative).

OPEDA Regions Restructured. The OPEDA council voted to amend the Constitution and Bylaws so that the number of Regions could be reduced. OPEDA will now have seven regions as follows:

Region 1 – Alaska, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and the Pacific Trust Territories.

Region 2 – Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming.

Region 3 – Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin,

Region 4 – Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas.

Region 5 – Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee.

Region 6 – Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia.

Region 7 – Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia.

OPEDA Holds Board/Council Teleconference

On April 16, 2009, President Farook chaired the quarterly meeting which all members of the Council and the Board of Directors could attend either in person or via teleconference.

The upcoming Election for President and Council was discussed. The participants discussed the upcoming Unsung Heroes Award Ceremony. Farook reported that this activity was supported by the Department and that Congressman Chris van Hollen would participate.

Farook arranged for the program to be filmed and a DVD will be distributed to the Regions and put on the website. Contact your OPEDA Counselor after the Election if you would like to have the DVD to use in an OPEDA program.

Farook stated that in the future OPEDA needs to push for greater membership. The teleconferrees suggested (1) that OPEDA give awards to those members recruiting the largest number of new members and (2) that Council set a goal fore number of members to be recruited over a specific time span.

Our President also said that we should try to increase the awareness of OPEDA. Whenever appropriate, this could be done at local, state and national agency meetings and gatherings. The National Office can provide support for these kinds of activities.

OPEDA Student Scholarships

Application for OPEDA Student Scholarships must be submitted to the OPEDA office no later than August 15, 2009. Please check the website for instructions and application form. A committee will review the applications and make the awards.

OPEDA Looks at a Theory of Management

Recently the New York Times published a column by David Brooks entitled, “In Praise of Dullness;” Brooks reviewed a study by Steven Kaplan *et al*, regarding skills that correlated with C.E.O. success. These turned out to be execution and organizational skills, so that, for a C.E.O., traits such as attention to detail, persistence, efficiency, analytic thoroughness and the ability to work long hours mattered very much in attaining success. Brooks did not expand on what Kaplan et al meant by “success;” one can only assume that success refers to the “bottom line.”

Although Brooks suggested that political success (or at least observable behavior of politicians in Washington) was linked to talents such as charisma, charm and personal skills, he did not focus on those individuals who actually perform the myriad everyday duties of government. As I read the article, it seemed to me that among federal civil servants, both those comprising the rank and file and those in top leadership positions, must possess both the skills that lead to the success of C.E.O.’s and the skills that insure success in interacting successfully with those politicians to whom they report.

Reactions in the “Letters to the Editors” section of the *Times* were mixed. No one appeared to consider factors that led to effective functioning of either the leadership or the rank and file in the large government organizations, although these are the individuals and groups who ensure the success of large and small government projects.

Any thoughts, OPEDA members?

USDA Scientists Participate in Sequencing the Genome of Domestic Cattle. Congratulations to those USDA scientists who participated in a successful world wide effort to sequence the genome of domestic cattle and to investigate differences in genomes among domestic breeds. The magazine, *Science*, reports that among the many scientists were cooperating entities from the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service of USDA. These entities included ARS scientists from the National Program Staff; the Meat Animal Research Center, Clay Center, NE; the Bovine Functional Genomics Laboratory, Beltsville, MD; the Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory, Miles City, MT; the Livestock Issues Research Unit, Lubbock, TX; and the Animal Disease Research Unit, Pullman, WA.

Two practical applications of this research could include identification of genes responsible for traits that are important agriculturally and potential use of livestock species as models for human disease. For those

interested in a “Green” future, it Practical applications of this research could include may be noted that the rumen, one of the 4 stomachs of cattle, contains bacteria that break down cellulose; these micro-organisms could be important for production of biofuels in the future.

New Pin for USDA Workers Enhances Interest in Department. The *USDA News* reports that Shirley Harrington-Watson (Office of Civil Rights) has taken the lead in the design and production of a lapel pin that identifies individuals employed by USDA. At his request, Secretary Vilsack has been given a supply of pins for his suits. Harrington-Watson reports that when employees wear the pin “people really take notice.” Should we have an OPEDA pin?

Presidential Scholars Program

The Presidential Scholars Program was established in 1964 by Executive Order to recognize and honor two outstanding graduating high school seniors from each state. In 1979 the program was expanded to include students who demonstrate exceptional talent in the arts. Each year up to 141 students are named as Presidential Scholars, one of the nation’s highest honors for high school students. The program is managed by the U. S. Department of Education.

OPEDA is sponsoring a reception for the Asian-American Presidential Scholars at USDA with support from the Agricultural Research Service, Food Safety Inspection Service and Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

The program is scheduled for June 24 at 10:00 a.m. in the Whitten Building Patio, with high level speakers from the Department of Education and USDA.

OPEDA would like to hear from you!

Some of our best ideas are suggested by members like each one of you.

If you live outside of Metro DC send an E-mail to opeda@da.usda.gov

If you work anywhere near USDA Headquarters, drop in!

Thank you for reading the OPEDA Newsletter. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Please write to us at OPEDA, P.O. Box 381, Washington, DC 20044 or send an E-mail to opeda@usda.gov

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Louis Iacoletti



Louis Iacoletti has over 25 years of Federal civilian service, the last 8 years at USDA. He serves as the Council Representative for Region 25 (representing FSA, FAS and Office of the Secretary) and also as VP for Member Services/Economics on the OPEDA National Board, he is a Certified Project Management Professional and will use these skills to improve the value of OPEDA's services to its members.

Louis pledges to:

Increase OPEDA membership by enhancing the value of the organization to its members and by providing special offers and incentives for USDA's employees and retirees to join OPEDA.

Use the OPEDA web site to establish new, secure capabilities to support OPEDA's legislative agenda and to better serve and dialogue with existing members.

Work with our business partners to obtain new benefits for OPEDA members such as reduced group rates for liability, legal and other types of insurance.

Establish and promote new member services such as reduced-cost or free legal support, training, and telework opportunities.

Maintain and improve the visibility of OPEDA with the leadership of USDA.

Parveen Setia, Ph.D.



Dr. Setia has 23 years of Federal civilian service. He is currently Chief, Policy Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS. He was a founding member and President of the USDA Economists Group. He has been a long-time active member of OPEDA and has taken a leadership role in the Unsung Hero Program, the CFC Fundraiser and the program to honor Presidential Scholars

Parveen's vision for OPEDA is to:

Establish a task force to develop a 5 year strategic plan and performance goals.

Expand the OPEDA website to provide relevant information to members.

Recruit new members and increase member interaction and networking among members.

Organize theme-based events to increase OPEDA visibility.

Facilitate OPEDA initiatives to increase Chapters nationwide.

Increase visibility of OPEDA by supporting the Unsung Hero Program, CFC and other Federal and Departmental programs.

Continue to support civil rights, diversity and outreach efforts by supporting and participating in Departmental initiatives, the OPEDA Scholarship Program and partnering with other USDA organizations.

Justin Rhee



Justin Rhee has worked in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights for 15 years. He has a MBA in Business Administration, a Master of Public Administration from Harvard and he studied at Oxford University, UK. During his service in the legislative branch of the U.S. Government, he worked for former Congressman Henry Hyde.

Justin has served as Treasurer of OPEDA for the past four years. He has recruited members for OPEDA and secured graduate students volunteers for the OPEDA office in the summers. Those with IT training instrumental in upgrading the data system for membership information.

Justin will dedicate himself to enhancing OPEDA's mission in the following areas:

Recruiting new members, especially new employees.

Strengthening the Scholarship program.

Continue the Unsung Hero Award Program and expand CFC fundraising activities.

Establishing partnerships with agencies.

Working with Congressional offices on OPEDA issues.

Working with academic, business, non-profit and trade organizations and associations.