



# FRONTLINE

Issue 23

October 2008

National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.

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- Workstation Shortages
- In the Eye of the Storm
- Storm Victims Need Help

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## With regards to Hurricanes Ike and Gustav:

*"Officials are estimating property damage will far exceed the damage from Katrina and Rita 3 years ago—thank God that human life and injury will not!"*

Lynn King,  
Dallas Region

## A Talk with the Commissioner

By Bethany Paradis, Boston Region



Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue met with NCSSMA President Greg Heineman and Vice President Bethany Paradis on Monday, September 8 to discuss issues of concern to field and

TSC management. Greg expressed his appreciation for the agency's response on the Supervisory Position Evaluation Guide and their ongoing commitment to protect our current classification structure.

Commissioner Astrue holds little hope that SSA will get an exception to any Continuing Resolution (CR) passed by Congress. He is concerned that we may actually face a yearlong CR. In any case he has promised a better approach to allocating overtime during the CR period. ODAR will probably be allowed a 1-1 replacement ratio for staffing, while the agency overall is expected to be at a 1-3 ratio.

On the disability front, ODAR productivity has increased. The agency is still hiring new ALJs and expects to reach a total of 1250-1275 this coming year. Plans are underway to open new National Hearings Centers in Albuquerque and Chicago this fall in addition to five local hearings offices in the areas with the greatest backlogs. Compassionate Allowances will be launched in late October and QDD will be ratcheted up in an effort to identify and process cases that clearly meet SSA standards for disability more quickly. Due to training and learning curves, SSA does not expect to see the full impact of all these changes on the backlogs until

probably March of 2009. Unfortunately, the poor economy and other factors that are driving disability workloads upward may push the expected downturn in ODAR backlogs even further out than currently projected.

The agency has set a goal of 50% RSI iClaim filing by 2012. Even with this volume Commissioner Astrue does not feel that the agency currently has sufficient staff to meet our needs. He would like to see us at about 65,000 employees to enable us to do the work required of us well into the future. (SSA currently has about 61,000 employees.) Authentication continues to be a challenge for the agency. It must be resolved in order for SSA to expand and improve our Internet services.

Commissioner Astrue stated that he is committed to improving our IT. He is seeking funding to replace our National Computer Center as a separate line item in our budget. This would be a 5-year project and needs to be done sooner rather than later as he believes that it poses a risk for SSA 5-10 years out. SSA plans to replace our COBOL programming, but this is expected to take a number of years. His top IT priority at this time is to create a common IT system for the DDSs which will help the agency in the Disability arena. The Office of Systems is doing performance testing much earlier in the process of bringing on new applications to avoid problems and is positioning the agency to handle growth. In closing, Commissioner Astrue expressed his appreciation for NCSSMA and the efforts we expend on behalf of the agency.

## President's Corner: What Has NCSSMA Done for ME?

By Greg Heineman, NCSSMA President



*"...it's important to know that NCSSMA has been involved with many efforts throughout the years which have positively affected your life as a manager or supervisor."*

*"...we need your continued participation on our committees and in our regional associations."*



SOCIAL SECURITY EMPLOYEES'  
ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATION, INC.

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In the last FrontLine, I wrote about the projects NCSSMA was pursuing and stated that much of what we were trying to accomplish was "incomplete." While that may be true, and in a vibrant organization will always be true, it's important to know that NCSSMA has been involved with many efforts throughout the years which have positively affected your life as a manager or supervisor.

**Classification Actions:** Even before our current role in opposing the Supervisory Position Evaluation Guide (SPEG) and working with the agency to ensure the new guide does not adversely affect your grade, NCSSMA has made the case for Supervisory and Management Upgrades. In the mid 1990s, the compelling case NCSSMA made that Managers and Supervisors were under graded led to the upgrade of Branch Managers from GS-12 to GS-13 and many Level 2 managers to Level 1, GS-13 to GS-14. Other positions were also upgraded, and NCSSMA still supports additional upgrades in the Supervisory and Management ranks today.

**Overtime Compensation:** Prior to 2000, Overtime for Supervisors was capped at the overtime rate for GS 10-1 employees. For most, that meant overtime was paid at a rate far below straight time. Legislation advocated by NCSSMA partially corrected this problem, ensuring straight time compensation for Managers and Supervisors. We are continuing to advocate for true time and one half for Supervisors, but it should not be forgotten that NCSSMA's work in this area has moved us forward.

**Management Training:** For many years, management training was the first item cut during any budget crisis. NCSSMA made agency leaders aware of the need for this training, and agency leaders responded with the current competency curriculum. We are confident from talking to the new Associate Commissioner for Training, Dr. Stephen Patrick, that this emphasis will continue, and NCSSMA will continue to provide input to the process.

**Systems Access Policy:** NCSSMA advocated for several years for a review of the agency's systems access policy, to clarify the policy and establish an enforceable table of penalties. One of our Past Presidents, Ron Buffalo, was an integral member of the work group which led to the establishment of clearer definitions of "friends and acquaintances" and the referent powers of managers. The Table of Penalties described in this policy was also revised. While NCSSMA was not alone in pushing for these changes, I am sure that our persistent pursuit of these issues led to the changes that are ultimately good for managers throughout the agency.

The above are just four examples of areas where NCSSMA made a tangible difference for Supervisors and Managers. NCSSMA will continue to provide constructive suggestions and push for needed changes when necessary to improve both the lives of our members and the effectiveness of the agency as a whole. To do this, we need your continued participation on our committees and in our regional associations. We also need you to reach out to your colleagues who have not yet joined your regional association to tell them about the good work that NCSSMA has done in the past, currently and will do into the future.

## NCSSMA Goes To Baltimore by Bethany Paradis, Boston Region

On September 10, NCSSMA's entire Executive Council visited DCO to talk to executives. We first met with Linda McMahon, Deputy Commissioner for Operations and several of her Associate Commissioners. Linda provided an overview of the budget situation explaining that unexpected contract increases have presented a problem. SSA needs an increase of about \$450 million over last year just to stay even. Since there is a tendency for Headquarters to hire people from Operations at the end of the fiscal year, she was able to get the authority to extend hiring into the first two pay periods of the new fiscal year in order to replace those losses. Regardless of operating under a CR, there should be sufficient funding for new hire training as this is considered mission critical.

NCSSMA raised the issue of the shortage of workstations in the field and the difficulty of having employees take their computers with them to training. The results of the recent survey were shared to substantiate the need for more workstations. (See the Workstation Shortage story on page 7.) Current workstation replacement is on a 3-4 year cycle. Dual monitors will be available in field offices during the workstation refreshment process. This will enable employees to work much more efficiently and decrease the need for printing queries. Another exciting change for field offices is that self check-in kiosks with touch screen technology are being made available for all offices.

A discussion ensued about PACS and the challenges that managers had in applying the standards across positions. Linda stated that they are still studying the data obtained from the various workgroups to determine what should be changed. Some issues will have to be brought to the bargaining table with the new contract negotiations.

The Assignment Correspondence Tracking (ACT) system used to track congressional inquiries is very time

consuming for field office management. Linda agreed that SSA needs to revisit this program. She is working with other components to determine exactly what information is needed and how to provide that information in the most efficient manner. Hopefully relief will soon be on the way.



Donnell Adams, Associate Commissioner for Telephone Services, confirmed that VOIP implementation is on schedule. Although field

offices will have Management Information at their fingertips and might gain some efficiency with the new telephone systems, it will not significantly reduce our busy rates. These systems provide more flexibility and will allow integration with the 800#, but only more staff can make a real impact on the busy rates. Automated services for field offices are being considered in the long-term plan, but cost is an issue.

Jo Armstrong briefed NCSSMA on upcoming changes to SSA's online services. A Medicare only application is expected in 2009. It will be designed in such a way that a second claim to start payments would not be needed, but could instead be handled either as part of the first claim or as a post entitlement action. Streamlining the Internet Disability Report and integrating it into a seamless process with the iClaim is planned for the end of calendar year 2009. She stated that EDCS and the paper i3368 form will be changed simultaneously. They are also testing providing access to the source reference file with users of the i3368PRO. If the test is successful with third parties, the concept can be expanded to allow the general public to enter a doctor's phone number into the i3368 and if there is a match found, the system could propagate the correct name and address data from the source reference file for confirmation by the claimant.

*(Continued page 4)*

"Keep my word positive.

Words become my behaviors.

Keep my behaviors positive.

Behaviors become my habits.

Keep my habits positive.

Habits become my values.

Keep my values positive.

Values become my destiny."

~Mahatma Gandhi~



**FrontLine is  
Produced by the  
Communications  
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## Baltimore Trip continued

Assistant Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Retirement and Disability Policy (ORDP), Marianna LaCanfora, provided an overview of ORDP and shared some information on policy changes currently under consideration. (See Policy story on page 8.)



NCSSMA's visit ended with a discussion on training. Dr. Steven

Patrick, the new Associate Commissioner for Training, shared his goal of SSA becoming a learning organization. He has been visiting the regions and different components to learn what we are currently doing and talking to people to gather input. What are we doing well? What do we need to change? What new programs are needed? He will be using all of this data to draft a plan for the Office of Training. He believes that there is a core that cuts across all components such as writing, interviewing, customer service, etc. that needs to go along with technical training. He sees a need for standardized training packages for mentors and the possibility of a national coaching program designed to train mentors and provide ongoing support to them. Dr. Patrick stated that we need to look at how we count the time of trainees and mentors and that we need a national learning management system to enable us to track all of the training that is occurring. He added, "I strongly believe in measurement and evaluation. We need to measure the success of learning."



More detailed information can be found in the Minutes of this meeting which will be posted on our website at [www.NCSSMA.org](http://www.NCSSMA.org).

## Storm Victims Need Your Help

By Lynn King, Dallas Region



Three months ago, I was invited to serve as the NCSSMA Representative on the FEEA board. I have been a long time FEEA supporter, so I knew about the great things that FEEA has done for Federal employees, including scholarships and emergency

assistance. I did not and could not have known at that point how immediately the value of that assistance would become even more apparent and personal to me.

Over the Labor Day weekend, Hurricane Gustav hit the South Louisiana Coastal area with major evacuations ahead of it. Property losses and a long term loss of power impacted many Federal employees in the area. As I wrote this column, FEEA had already cut 32 checks to SSA employees in that area.

Next, Hurricane Ike plowed into the Southeast coast of Texas, destroying an estimated 80% of Galveston Island and surrounding areas, including the homes of some SSA employees. Ike continued its destructive swath up through the Houston Area (population over 4.5 million) and East Texas, and on into the State of Arkansas. Officials are estimating property damage will far exceed the damage from Katrina and Rita 3 years ago—thank God that human life and injury will not! Right now, as I write this, there are still 11 offices closed in the Southeast Texas Area, including the office of DRMA president Lenny Kanick. Over 600 employees in that area have been displaced due to the storm and some will not be able to return to their homes for weeks. Those who are in the area are lacking power, gasoline, and often water. The financial need from SSA employees alone in the area is going to be huge.

I just got a message from Steve Bauer that he is in the process of liquidating reserve investments to meet the needs of those who will apply for assistance. I implore you to consider making immediate donations to help support our fellow employees. You can make those donations at [FEEA](#). SSA has established a special fund for SSA employees; if you want to designate your donation to that fund specifically, choose that from the drop down menu in the block titled Gift Designation. Thank you!

**FEEA Hurricane Aid as of COB  
09/25:**

**1066 federal employees helped  
\$347,450 given out**

**Anticipated \$ needed: 1.5 million**



## Profiles Page Featuring Mary Glenn-Croft

By Leslie McAuley, Northwest Region



**To those of us in outlying components, senior executive staff officials are often nameless and faceless. With that in mind, could you tell us, “Who is Mary Glenn-Croft?”**

I was born in rural upstate New York. I received a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics from the University of New York at Potsdam and a Master's degree from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. I started out as a math teacher, and then I went to work at a county social services agency in New York. I was very happy and content in that job and had no inclination to leave. However, an SSA field representative visited our office every week, and she encouraged me to take the PACE exam. So a friend of mine and I drove through a blizzard on a Saturday and took the exam--we were the only two people who showed up! We were both offered jobs as CRs. I often joke that we got our jobs because we were the only two who took the exam that day.

So I joined SSA in 1978 as a CR and held numerous positions in field offices, regional offices, and the former Office of Hearings and Appeals (now ODAR). In 1998, I was selected to the SES candidate development program; this program provided me with many opportunities and experiences--including assignments as an Area Director, the ARCMOS in Philadelphia, and a staff position on Capitol Hill. After being appointed to the SES in 2000, I served as senior advisor to several Commissioners, as well as the Acting Regional Commissioner in Atlanta for 6 months. Prior to being selected to my current position, I was the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Operations for 5 years.

As you probably gathered from your recent interview with my husband, Kelly Croft, we like to garden, travel, and take long walks together. Believe it or not, we try not to talk about Social Security at home! I am an avid reader. I also like to spend as much time as I can with my 92-year old mother who lives in upstate New York and is still quite active.

**The OBFM website indicates that you have a very broad area of responsibility including budgeting, acquisitions, facilities management and developing the agency's strategic plan. Which area do you find the most challenging and why?**

When I came to BFM, I thought I knew what this organization did, but I soon learned I had no idea how

broad BFM's scope of responsibilities was. The level of technical expertise that BFM employees possess is just remarkable and mind-boggling. We have all kinds of specialists working here--including CPAs, industrial engineers, architects, security specialists, contracting specialists, warehouse specialists, safety and occupational health specialists, carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. BFM has six lines of business. In addition to the four you mentioned, we are also responsible for financial policy and operations, and publications and logistics. All six lines of business are very challenging. It seems the only time anyone knows about BFM is when something doesn't work--otherwise no one knows about us. I always thought working in a field office was similar to working in an emergency room--you never knew what you would be facing when you opened the doors. BFM is like that, in that you never know what is going to happen on any particular day. There is never a dull moment in BFM; we deal with an incredible range of issues. To do this job, a person has to love it. It is not for the faint of heart! I am very proud of all the dedicated employees who work in BFM.

**In a nutshell, how do you go about preparing the agency's budget request for the upcoming fiscal year?**

The budget is a continuous cycle of activity. Four budgets are always in process. Right now, we are closing out 2007, administering 2008, monitoring the implementation of 2009, and formulating 2010 to present to OMB. In formulating the budget, there are so many factors involved, such as Congressional interest, the Commissioner's priorities, and OMB input. The budget is driven by workloads. We have to look at staffing, payroll, space, equipment, supplies, travel, IT needs, DDS needs, etc. We are constantly refining the budget. In order to draft a budget, we request the budget needs from each component, then look at productivity and the impact of current initiatives on productivity. We constantly refine our data and analyze it.

*(Continued on page 6)*



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## Mary Glenn-Croft continued

The level of detail in terms of data we gather and analyze is incredible. The process is very complicated. When we complete a draft budget, we present it to the Commissioner. He reviews it and makes any changes he wants. Once the budget is finalized, we prepare a budget package--it's more like a marketing package which explains our needs--to present to OMB. After that, we work with OMB to answer questions and provide additional information.

**The area of Acquisitions is often challenging for Operations management to deal with. A question that frequently arises is why can't we centralize the purchase of paper, toner and envelopes so that we could simply order them through the SSA Supply System as needed rather than trying to find the best local pricing?**

It does not make good business sense for SSA Headquarters to maintain stocks of paper, envelopes, and toner cartridges in SSA's warehouses in Baltimore or elsewhere across the nation for delivery to offices throughout the country. The cost of establishing and maintaining a warehouse, as well as shipping costs, would be too expensive and would outweigh any possible savings obtained. Field offices don't need to shop around to find the best local pricing for general office supplies. BFM's Office of Acquisition and Grants (OAG) has established Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPA) for envelopes, toners, paper, and a variety of other office supplies. These BPAs typically require vendors to provide supplies at discounts from their GSA schedule prices. OAG has posted a complete list of BPAs on their website, along with an OAG point of contact who can answer questions on any BPA. It is our hope that these BPAs simplify the purchasing process for management. We are always looking to improve our website to make it more user friendly, but unfortunately, procurement is much more complicated than simply identifying products and their costs. But I want you to know that BFM continually looks at ways to help field and Headquarters components with their acquisition needs, and we are open to any suggestions you may have.

**There has been considerable frustration surrounding the allocation of reception area space over the last few years. Managers have reported that they were not allowed to enlarge their reception area space even when it did not change the overall space allocation. What is being done to provide FO managers with more flexibility in determining the appropriate size of their reception areas?**

Currently the ROs have latitude to adjust space sizes for specific rooms within the overall space allocation. We know that less area might be needed for filing cabinets or the DCR room, so that space could be used to enlarge the reception area. There is a work group working on revising the space allocation standards. I expect to get a recommendation by the end of the calendar year or the beginning of 2009, at the latest. I feel strongly that we have to use space differently to meet our current and future needs. The cost of space is going up astronomically, so we have to make sure we have enough space without having more space than needed.

**As you know from your years in Operations, most of the off-the-shelf administrative programs that have been purchased for our use such as Travel Manager, Citibank Card Management and Sunflower Assets have been problematic for our managers to use. What is being done to improve these programs and to ensure that future programs are easy to assimilate?**

When I got this job, one of the first things I did was to talk to my folks to see what we could do to improve the Sunflower Assets program, since I knew this system was problematic from my days in DCO. We keep making improvements to the system. It really helps to get user feedback on this and other administrative programs. I know that changes will never be made as fast as the field would like, but we are working on it. We have improved response time and minimized down time for Sunflower Assets, and we are working on developing a training package. I want to pilot more administrative programs in the future and ensure that they meet the user's needs--and continuing to improve our lines of communication will be key. We need to know from managers what changes they think are best to make. I strongly believe in bringing in FO managers to work on these types of issues with us, so that we can get their input and insight. For example, a member of NCSSMA has been part of our eTravel work group and has provided us with valuable input.



## Field Offices Experience Workstation Shortages by Eric Williamson, Boston Region



Many field offices with front end interviewing (FEI) are experiencing a common problem; there are not enough computer workstations to cover each desk. In some offices, workstations used in the FEI are being moved from the FEI area to use at the employee's working desk to process work when they are not interviewing. In a recent NCSSMA survey one manager stated, "It is tragic to be in a position of having to remove workstations from FEI windows in such a busy location just so a Claims Representative can have a workstation at their assigned desk. It simply is not a good situation when front-line employees do not have adequate workstations to serve the public..."

This shortage of workstations is creating public relations problems. In some offices, claimants that have scheduled appointments actually have to wait until a workstation becomes available to be interviewed. This means that the claimant may have to wait much longer than their anticipated appointment time causing them in some cases to be irate and impatient.

To get a handle on the extent of the problem, NCSSMA recently conducted a national FEI workstation survey among field office management. The results showed that over half of the offices with FEI that completed the survey indicated that there was rarely a time when an FEI/ Reception Window workstation was not available. Additionally, the survey indicated that

for the majority of offices with FEI, the absence of workstations did not affect their waiting times. While this sounds like good news, an astounding 44% reported that they are experiencing shortages and 10% indicated that these shortages are occurring several times a week. 24% of the responders indicated that this is having a somewhat to very significant impact on their waiting times and 25% reported a slight impact on waiting times. These numbers are surprisingly high for an agency that prides itself on providing excellent customer service. As one manager stated, "The number of FEI workstations adversely impacts our ability to offer appointments. Most of our initial claims are in-office so we must limit the number of appointments offered to ensure there is an available workstation."

The data presented in the survey was also broken down by region. San Francisco stood out as experiencing the most difficulties. Seattle and Kansas City were also above the national average in experiencing times when workstations were not available.

During NCSSMA's recent visit to Central Office this issue was raised. Nathan Holmes, Acting Deputy Associate Commissioner for Automation Support, explained that the current formula for workstation allocation is 1.5 for each interviewing employee and printers are 1 for every 10 workstations. They are currently reviewing the workstation allocation to see if it is outdated. Linda McMahon, Deputy Commissioner for Operations stated that she believes that there are enough workstations out there, but they are not in the right locations. The regions and areas need to determine where they are and move

them as needed. Typically this is done during the refreshment process, but maybe we can't wait that long.

It is clear that some offices are truly suffering from limited workstations. This can be very discouraging for a variety of reasons. These offices risk not being able to meet the customers' needs, causing public relations problems. They also lose efficiency which adversely affects productivity. It can also be very bad for the morale of the staff. If there are limited tools to perform their job tasks, how can employees be expected to perform up to their expectations? It also creates a bad impression for new employees who may not want to work at a place with limited computers available to do their job. Lastly, since we are nearing the time when the baby boomers are expected to file for benefits, how can field offices be expected to handle this growing workload if there are not sufficient workstations to go around?

Paul Lucas, District Manager in the Norwich, CT office offered his opinion on how to resolve this problem: "For offices that may have actual shortages of workstations or printers, my recommendation would be for a rewrite of the allocation formula. It does not seem to adequately consider offices that get new hires or serve as training centers. Also, offices that do receive additional hires/transfers should receive additional workstations and printers (if applicable) when the new  
(Continued on page 8)



## Workstation Shortages continued

employees arrive. Likewise, if an office loses an employee and did not have a shortage of workstations, a workstation should be transferred to an office that is short."

If that idea does not work, there are other alternatives. For example, laptops could be used for training purposes if set up properly. Some offices rewired their photocopier to work as a network printer. This not only offers flexibility and options to the staff, it also saves money for the agency. Other offices are redesigning their space so that all interviewing employee desks face a window into

the reception area which meets safety needs and eliminates the need for duplicate workstations. This can realistically only be done when offices are moving to new space which makes it a long-term solution at best. No matter what recommendations are offered, it is very apparent that there is a lack of workstations in field offices across the country which is negatively impacting service. This is a problem that needs to be resolved sooner rather than later!

*A workgroup is being established to look at this problem. Tim Crews is NCSSMA's representative.*



## Policy Changes are Coming—Are You Ready?

By Tim Crews, Philadelphia Region

Although we are certainly no strangers to change, a heightened need for policy change is a reality. This article is the first in a series intended to increase your understanding and spur your participation with regard to decided and proposed changes. In future editions we will provide you with information about policy changes currently under consideration such as questionable retirement, simplifying date of onset for disability or simplifying work incentives. In the meantime, consider the following quotes made earlier this year:

*"The program (Social Security) was designed primarily decades ago, and it made sense at the time. But like so many federal programs, it is not reviewed and reassessed in order to ascertain whether or not it still make sense for today and for tomorrow."*

*David Walker, former Comptroller General*

*"The truth is that Social Security policy systems and procedures are in need of a major overhaul. Several witnesses stated that it takes two to three years or three to four years to fully train a field office employee. That's longer than it takes NASA to train an astronaut."*

*Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA)*

### What are some of the significant drivers for SSA policy changes?

- Retirement and disability claims will increase by 40% and 10% respectively over the next 10 years.
- Heavy losses of institutional knowledge compel us to refine policy so that it is straightforward and can be applied consistently and accurately.
- Ongoing enhancements in computer equipment and programming help us to better leverage technology and accomplish our work in a more efficient manner.

### What is the best way to submit recommendations for policy changes?

There are four avenues through which ideas for change can be routed. Ideas can be submitted through the Employee Suggestion Program (ESP). Thousands of suggestions each year are received through the ESP. From the ESP, Central Office is looking for suggestions that will not cost large amounts of money, require significant systems changes, create large amounts of new work, require multi-year planning, or require legislative changes.

*(Continued on page 9)*



## Policy Changes Continued



The next two avenues are workgroups at SSA Headquarters designed to find policy simplification ideas. These two groups are the Policy Experiment Group (PEG) and the Legis Team. The PEG is focused on "low hanging fruit," or ideas that can be implemented without systems, regulatory or legislative change. The Legis Team, on the other hand, is focused on finding useful statutory change proposals that can be advanced to the Commissioner and the Office of Management and Budget for further consideration. Ideas for either team may be funneled through your regional Center for Program Support or Center for Disability. They can be used as a conduit for ideas. Regional Office staff members have regular contact with headquarters employees in Operations and Policy. At any time, they may surface policy ideas for consideration. Ideas that simplify and streamline procedures while maintaining the integrity of the process are always welcome.

Finally, you may send your ideas to NCSSMA through your regional associations. Our Disability, T2, T16 and Management Committees often solicit and fine tune ideas to forward to the appropriate components in Headquarters. We have sent in both streamlining ideas and proposed policy changes which you can view on our website at <http://www.ncssma.org/our%20views.htm>.

Marianna LaCanfora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Retirement and Disability Policy (ORDP), graciously provided details for this article. Check out the ORDP Newsletter, which is issued periodically to communicate news in the policy arena. Here's the link: <http://co.ba.ssa.gov/disability/ordp/newsletter/index.html>



## The Teleservice Connection By Barb Perian, TSC Representative

*"TSRs all across the country are receiving desperate calls of help from those affected by Gustav and Ike."*

*"Many callers simply do not know where to turn. They call SSA out of desperation."*

The television pictures of the devastation caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike are very sad to see. The wide spread destruction is unbelievable. As Gulf Coast residents struggle to survive most of us wonder how we can help. Some may donate to the FEEA, Red Cross and other worthy organizations. We know our donations make a difference in the lives of those affected but sometimes we wish we could do more. SSA's 800 Number agents in the national Teleservice Centers are helping. You may not realize that there are over 5000 Teleservice Representatives (TSRs) working in cities far away from the Gulf Coast and the hurricanes that can and do help.

TSRs all across the country are receiving desperate calls of help from those affected by Gustav and Ike. Monday after Ike hit a TSR received a call from a lady sitting in her car on a roadside in Texas. She was crying and homeless and felt helpless. She needed a benefit verification letter for the Red Cross. In her desperation she wasn't thinking clearly and couldn't figure out how she would get the letter because all of the local field offices were closed. The TSR knew exactly how to help and quickly went into action. Other TSRs receive calls from folks needing money. When possible, TSRs send critical payments so folks will have their money as quickly as possible. Calls for the hurricane affected field offices were redirected to the

national 800 Number. The TSCs are receiving calls to reschedule appointments, change addresses and direct deposits. We even had a call from a federal employee asking for the FEEA phone number to apply for assistance.

Many callers simply do not know where to turn. They call SSA out of desperation. Using information on the SSA and FEMA websites, TSRs help calm folks and steer them in the right direction for help. A sympathetic ear and calm voice helps to sooth callers. At the end of the day TSRs feel fortunate to have a job that affords the opportunity to help folks in need – it's good work and we are proud to be doing it.



## In the Eye of the Storm by Mike Wilson, Dallas Region

*On Monday morning, August 25, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, one of the most devastating natural events in history, roared ashore on the Gulf Coast of the United States. The amount of force produced by the hurricane at landfall was equivalent to 7,500 times the amount of destructive energy dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. A short time later, two other storms, Rita and Wilma wrought havoc on southeast Texas and southern Florida.*

On Monday morning, August 25, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, one of the most devastating natural events in history, roared ashore on the Gulf Coast of the United States. The amount of force produced by the hurricane at landfall was equivalent to 7,500 times the amount of destructive energy dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. A short time later, two other storms, Rita and Wilma wrought havoc on southeast Texas and southern Florida.

*FrontLine* asked for stories from employees who were directly affected by that historic 2005 hurricane season. There was no shortage of volunteers willing to tell their stories of triumph over tragedy, but we selected two individuals to highlight their heroism in what surely must have been one of the most difficult periods in the lives of these employees and their families.

Judith Hamilton is an excellent case in point. Judith was the ADM in the busy downtown New Orleans field office. Her home and most of her possessions were totally destroyed in the storm and subsequent flooding. Immediately after leaving New Orleans, Judith found herself in the regional office in Dallas, assigned to lead a human resources team helping other employees who were displaced by Katrina and later Rita. Keeping busy and focused on other peoples' needs kept her mind from dwelling on all that she had lost

personally. She and her team were able to locate all the affected employees and ensure that those employees received the appropriate services to assist them in recovering from the impact of the storms.



AP Photo/Dave Martin

Despite losing her home in New Orleans to the flood waters of Katrina, Judith continued to dedicate herself to the Social Security Administration, and in February of 2006, she was promoted to her current position of district manager in the Beaumont, Texas field office. Recently, Judith was once again forced to flee her home in advance of another hurricane, in this case, Ike.

Earline Marchand is the ADM in the Lake Charles, Louisiana field office. Although not directly in the path of Rita, Lake Charles took a good swipe from the storm as it made landfall in the Sabine Pass area of southeast Texas. To further complicate matters for Earline, she was serving on a detail in Baltimore at the time the storm hit, and was completely isolated as her children tried to evacuate the area. They fled the Lake Charles area in advance of the storm, but the evacuation plans in place at the time did not take into

account all of the people who would be fleeing from the Houston area. Interstate 10 became more of a parking lot than an interstate highway. Earline's husband was an essential person at a local hospital, and therefore could not evacuate with their children, who were diverted by state police onto unfamiliar roads. Earline did what she could from Baltimore to direct the family to safety. Since the storm came ashore in the Sabine Pass area, near Beaumont and Port Arthur, Lake Charles was on the northeast or so-called "dirty" side of the storm. The northeast quadrant of a hurricane spawns most of the tornadic activity generated by the storm, and Rita did not fail in that respect. Earline's entire neighborhood was blasted by tornadoes. Many houses, including

hers, suffered significant damage. She returned from Baltimore five days after the storm only to discover the Lake Charles



office had suffered severe damage with no electrical power and had to be closed for six weeks. During the office closure, Earline worked at the FEMA locations in Lake Charles and the surrounding area assisting the public with all matters dealing with Social Security. In her words, "I was a traveling field office."

*(Continued on page 11)*

## In the Eye of the Storm continued

For Earline, this was one of the highlights of her career as the customers were so much in need and appreciative of our presence that she was glad to be there for them. Earline says that she and her family are just now completing all the home repairs that resulted from that storm. In the end, though, her family was safely reunited and no one was injured--she is very thankful for that.

To be certain, there are many more stories of the 2005 hurricane season that will continue to be told and retold.

As this article is being written, officials are just beginning to assess the damage left in the wake of Hurricane Ike, and the two individuals featured here are currently dealing with the fallout of that storm as well. *FrontLine* salutes the brave men and women who, despite tremendous personal adversity, still maintained a positive "can-do" spirit and showed the entire world that the worst of times can bring out the best qualities of humanity.

## You Can Make a Difference!

To help SSA employees affected by the Hurricanes, checks may be sent to FEEA SSA Fund, 3333 South Wadsworth Boulevard, Suite 300, Lakewood, Colorado 80227. Credit card donations can be made by calling FEEA at (303) 933-7580 or visiting [www.feea.org](http://www.feea.org). On the web, click on the "Give Online" button at the top of the page, then proceed to the on-line donation page. Choose "SSA Fund" from the drop-down list then complete the form as instructed on the site. You can also donate through the Combined Federal Campaign. You should mark your CFC pledge card with FEEA's CFC number of 11185. Then, make a copy of the pledge card and write "SSA Fund" across the top of the form. You may block out identifying information, but FEEA's CFC #11185 and the amount designated must be visible. Mail the copy to the FEEA SSA Fund address shown above. Submit your original CFC pledge card as usual.

**We welcome your stories, comments, editorials or suggestions for future articles.**

**Send your feedback to: [Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov](mailto:Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov)**

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