

FRONTLINE

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The President's Farewell: Reflections and a Vision for the Future

By Joe Dirago, NCSSMA President

As I reflect back on my two years as NCSSMA

President, I am pleased with what we have achieved for our agency, the American public, and on behalf of our members. NCSSMA remains strong, vibrant and an essential part of the success of the Social Security Administration.

However, as an organization, we must continually reassess our positions, evolve, and strive for improvement. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said - **Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail!** Because of technology, our world is connected more than ever before. In an effort to respond to this, I formed the Innovation Committee to assist NCSSMA in addressing cutting-edge technology issues that will undoubtedly shape the future of SSA's service delivery. I am proud to announce that the Innovation Committee will unveil the **NCSSMA SharePoint Site** to the delegation at NCSSMA's 42nd Annual Meeting in Branson! This will become a primary communication vehicle for NCSSMA.

NCSSMA will also debate 28 proposed resolutions at the Branson Annual Meeting. One of the most dynamic resolutions to be considered would help shape the future of our organization and the agency.

The resolution proposes that NCSSMA formulate a service delivery vision statement to

conceptualize the Social Security Administration of the future. This vision would provide a framework for change, stimulate innovation in SSA service delivery, and help ensure NCSSMA is proactive in providing feedback and input on proposed modifications to agency business processes. NCSSMA has addressed potential changes in our agency in many ways, including communications on the rewrite of the Agency Strategic Plan and participation in the eMail and Mobile Application Think Tanks. However, the establishment of this vision statement will guarantee NCSSMA is aligned with technological advances and is adequately prepared to represent the interests of NCSSMA members.

NCSSMA's values and pursuit of its mission has helped Social Security become one of the most successful government programs in the world. 2011 has been an eventful year for NCSSMA, filled with many challenges, but a review of NCSSMA's accomplishments during the last year affirms that we have been steadfast in the pursuit of our objectives.

- NCSSMA has an outstanding relationship with agency leadership and they seek our input to improve SSA operations. We provide honest, unfiltered feedback and represent your interests in developing agency policy and operations procedures via meetings, conference calls, and written communications.
- NCSSMA has provided active participants on twelve work groups over the past year.

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"You never know when you will need help from a fellow citizen; Social Security employees are some of the best at offering help to Americans every day."

-Susana Diaz,
San Francisco Region



2011 Membership Drive Was a Success!

This year's membership drive exceeded all expectations, even topping last year's successful membership drive. Thanks to the efforts of the Membership Committee in partnership with each of the Regional associations, 201 new members joined NCSSMA. NCSSMA now represents 3472 members. This gives NCSSMA a strong voice, and an important duty, in representing front line managers across the country! Thanks especially to Ryan Nelson, Membership Committee Chair, for leading this effort.

President's Farewell continued

We continue to receive accolades from agency leadership on the value of the front-line perspective of NCSSMA workgroup representatives. NCSSMA is always ready to provide input to workgroups and prides itself on our contributions.

- Legislative representatives and agency leaders view NCSSMA as a strong advocate for the agency budget. With NCSSMA's efforts and the assistance of advocacy partners, SSA avoided disaster with the budget for FY 2011 and advocated for a better FY 2012 budget. NCSSMA's efforts to achieve adequate funding for SSA have included numerous meetings on the Hill, with agency leadership and the advocacy community, many communications including Statements for the Record, as well as important Congressional testimony. This was highlighted by my testimony at Congressional Hearings in March and June, and our Capitol Hill Day with over 70 meetings.
- With national debt concerns, SSA is facing an austere budget situation and federal employees have become targets for drastic spending reductions. NCSSMA conducted the **Federal Employee Pay and Benefits Grassroots Campaign** to express concerns about the attack on our federal pay and benefits. This was the most successful Grassroots effort in NCSSMA history with 740 submissions, generating over 2,000 letters delivered to your elected Representatives and Senators. The **Preserve SSA for America Grassroots Campaign** advocates for adequate funding for SSA in FY 2012 and we already have received 543 submissions.

- To achieve our mission, NCSSMA interacts with key groups regarding our issues and concerns. This has included meetings with the **Social Security Advisory Board**; involvement with the **Government Managers Coalition**; participation in the **Federal-Postal Coalition**; and leading the **SSA Advocacy Group** to support our legislative initiatives.
- Over the last year, NCSSMA has made a concerted effort to keep members informed and involved via the **NCSSMA Website, FrontLine**, and my attendance at seven **Regional Management Association Annual Meetings**.
- A healthy membership percentage in our organization reinforces the message that we speak with a united voice for front-line management! In 2011, we pursued a Membership Drive and recruited 201 new members! This surpassed our most optimistic expectations and resulted in the highest number of NCSSMA members in 2 years.

I must recognize the support and assistance provided by the NCSSMA Executive Committee, our Washington Representative Greystone Group, our committees, as well as the Past Presidents. NCSSMA Leadership expended countless time and effort to advance our cause. Their dedication and contributions were invaluable in achieving the many notable accomplishments enumerated above. As always, many challenges remain and NCSSMA still has plenty of work to do! My challenge to all of you is to become more involved, spread the word about the positive impact NCSSMA has for our agency, and recruit new members. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President the past two years!

NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

CSSMA

Jennifer Resler
Engrid Matthews
Ijaya Harris
Jorge Munoz
Steven Wills
Byran Warga
Gail Hummell
Jeffrey Chimner
John Schutze
Katherine Zulegar
Nathalia Hanna

PRMA

Susan Bussman
Alexandria Byers
Elaine Cole
Lisa Ferrer-Motta
McKenna Sutton

DRSSMA

Mark Christmas



Contact Worldwide Assurance for Employees
of Public Agencies at www.waepa.org



The Myth of the Overpaid, Underworked Federal Employee

By Susana Díaz, San Francisco Region

Often, in our rush to close our busy offices and make the final inputs of the day, we forget the impact we have on so many Americans' lives each day. Lately, some of the public has developed an image of lethargic federal employees receiving excessive pay. Contrary to this belief, in a recent request to Social Security managers to nominate an outstanding employee who excels as a public servant and model citizen, we received overwhelming nominations of so many employees we can all be proud to call our coworkers.

Carol Sanderson, CR from Colorado Springs, CO, is a true example of a model Social Security employee who goes the extra mile in both her office and her community. In addition to her CR duties, she is a liaison for the Wounded Warrior Project. She assists new, active, retired, and reserve members of the military by helping soldiers and their families in their times of need. Three days a week, at Fort Carson, she takes applications for Social Security benefits and makes referrals to other local agencies so they can meet any needs not covered by Social Security. Ms. Sanderson "performs an extraordinary amount of work," states Michelle Douhaj, ADM in Colorado Springs, CO. Social Security employees throughout the country continue to work on this project to ensure soldiers' needs are met as quickly as possible upon returning home with injuries. Ms. Sanderson states, "I love to look into the public's eyes after I helped...I see them leave with hope for their future." When asked for words of encouragement for novice or seasoned employees, she states, "I start every day with a positive attitude."

Carla Martin, DM at the Hartford, CT District Office, and Melody Davis, DM at the Hollywood, CA District Office, are both examples of management personnel going the extra mile. Ms. Martin "rolls up her sleeves, answers calls so the staff can take a lunch break, and sets an example for the three other offices under her jurisdiction. She sets the bar high," states Mary Lynch, Staff Assistant in Hartford, CT. Through her willingness to do whatever needs to be done, whether or not it is in her job description, she encourages her employees to do more than what is expected of them also. Based on the quantity of outstanding employee nominations we received, this pattern of Social Security employees doing more than is expected is repeated throughout the country on a daily basis.

Ms. Davis developed a specialized outreach cadre to hire and develop current and future employees, including veterans and those with disabilities. A product of this initiative is Caesar Gonzales, CR, in the Hollywood District Office. He has not let his disability impede him from attaining his goals.

A graduate of UC Berkeley, he started his career in the private sector and, then, pursued a career with Social Security thanks to his passion to help others in need of a smile and assistance. Mr. Gonzales understands "the other side of the table"; he says, "I know how much of a difference a smile and positive attitude can make." In addition to the excellent service that he provides customers, he also takes the time to support his coworkers and his community. Ms. Davis states, "He organized several events in the office to improve employee morale including Disability Awareness Day." Most recently, Mr. Gonzales volunteered with the San Francisco Region's Hispanic Affairs Advisory Council at the Los Angeles River Clean Up event organized by the Tri Counties Area Vice President.

During Hurricane Katrina, we had several employees such as Jaclyn Zofrea, OS in Burlington, VT, who volunteered to help Katrina victims from New Orleans and the surrounding cities. Social Security employees from across the country travelled to the damaged area to assist the storm's victims. At the same time, Social Security employees in the communities that welcomed refugees from the hurricane assisted the displaced victims in pursuing their Social Security benefits as quickly as possible to help them quickly meet their financial and housing needs. The storm also affected the lives of many Social Security employees. Nina Des Vignes, Secretary from Memphis Downtown, TN District Office, is a victim of Katrina and was one of the very many federal employees relocated from New Orleans. She refers to her co-workers as the "epitome of love, generosity, care, and kindness." She continues to explain, "Only Social Security employees would help with burial costs for the loss of my mother. Only a person with such passion to help the 'misplaced' would give a dying lady her resting place."

There are many more untold stories that illustrate Social Security employees' dedicated service and sense of civic responsibility which they hold so close to their hearts. You never know when you will need help from a fellow citizen; Social Security employees are some of the best at offering help to Americans every day. In the current climate where federal employees are being unfairly characterized as lazy, overpaid workers, Social Security employees prove that theory wrong every day as they continue to do their best to meet people's needs during the most difficult times of their lives. Every day, they use their personal compassion, skills, and self-motivation as well as searching out local community resources in order to ensure the public's needs continue to be met despite the very limited staffing and supply resources currently available to the agency.

TSC Connection

by Andrea Wahle, TSC Representative



This summer, Teleservice Representatives (TSRs), and some ICTU Claims Representatives (CRs), participated in a record number of field office (FO) details. These details were beneficial not only for the FOs needing another employee on the front desk, but also for the TSC employees receiving the developmental opportunity.

TSRs bring a broad range of knowledge with them to the FO. They are proficient at reading many different queries, have strong interviewing skills, and are able to work independently of supervision. The best TSRs develop research skills to independently handle situations not covered in the Customer Help and Information Program (CHIP) or the Teleservice Center Operating Guide (TSCOG). Other skills that TSRs bring to the field offices include initiative, flexibility, and familiarity with online services. Phone Pro training, part of the CORE curriculum, also helps TSRs develop strong interviewing skills and the ability to control an interview. In return, FO details provide TSRs a chance to increase their knowledge base and experience the satisfaction of assisting a customer with an issue to completion.

The skills gained by TSRs in FO details varied from office to office, but included processing such workloads as SS-5s, SEP enrollments, overpayment remittances, returned checks, voluntary tax withholding, and eRPA nonresponder inputs. Most offices made a concerted effort to keep the TSRs off the phone, since that is their usual workload. TSRs appreciated the chance to work the front desk and gain more understanding of the Service Representative (SR) workload. A TSR from the New York Region commented on the professionalism in the FO, "I saw how the staff handles dangerous and irate visitors and marveled at how they get their jobs done despite numerous distractions." A manager from the San Francisco Region commented, "Experiencing firsthand what goes on behind the scenes in a field office has given the TSRs a better understanding of how their work at a TSC affects field offices." Understanding what the office can and cannot do allows TSRs to think twice before sending a referral. The same manager continued, "They've mentioned how busy their days are and how they enjoy the feeling that they are able to help the claimant to completion, rather than having to send an ePath to the field office."

Everyone benefits from TSR details to FOs. The misconceptions we have about the work processed in FOs and TSCs are dispelled when employees are able to share information. A manager from the Philadelphia Region stated, "TSRs found that most field office personnel thought taking claims leads referrals was the main function of the TSR position. The FOs were surprised to see how much more the TSRs actually knew."

It can be very eye opening to FO personnel once they understand how restrictive CHIP and TSCOG instructions are. While CHIP can be seen as a wonderful resource, some managers were concerned about the heavy reliance on this program. "Many of the TSRs were unable to schedule an appointment with the Appointment/Referral/Leads screens or input a change of address or death with the POS screens without having CHIP to guide them."

In several instances, TSRs were able to share information the FO employees were not aware of – a New York region TSR shared the TSC policy on SSA's letter forwarding service to find "lost" family members. TSRs are also asked to provide training when it is discovered they are subject matter experts on particular programs. A TSR in the Dallas region provided Medicare Part B training to SRs, and an Auburn TSC employee was asked to provide Windfall Elimination Provision/Government Pension Offset training in the Olympia, WA field office.

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FrontLine is Produced by the Communications Committee

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TSC Connection *continued*

Developmental opportunities within the TSCs are limited, especially since the hiring freeze means there are no new TSRs to mentor. The FO details ensure our TSC employees have a chance to develop new skills and increase their knowledge of SSA programs and policies. Many field managers stated they appreciated the opportunity to assess the TSRs themselves. A manager in the Chicago Region said, "I became familiar with a number of TSRs, so when a vacancy opened in my office, I could rely on my knowledge of the TSR in addition to the supervisor's recommendation." Several regions reported that TSRs who have completed a detail are more likely to be promoted to a FO position. In the past few years, the Seattle Region has offered Solicitations of Interest (SOIs) for TSRs to move to FOs as SRs. The details help the office managers know who has the skills they need and creates interest on the part of TSRs to try something new.

With the limited ability to replace employees, the workloads in the field continue to pile up. The TSCs can continue to provide assistance with in person and virtual FO details. So many of the managers who replied to my request for assistance appreciated the strengthened understanding between components and some suggested offering SR details to the TSC. I received so much wonderful feedback that it is difficult not to include more. I will close with comments from the New York Region, "Having a clear understanding of what each component of SSA does is a necessity to keep workloads small and manageable by an ever shrinking staff. By periodically using details to assist the field offices, TSRs can learn what needs to be done to assist CRs who have ever-growing caseloads and little or no time to complete the important tasks that need to be done to save the agency money and prevent overpayments and other costly agency errors. By working closely together, the TSCs and FOs can be an efficient team in managing the day-to-day business of SSA and continue to offer superior service to claimants and the American public."



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NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

ARMA

Laurel Perez
LeDusta Abner
Keegan Ray
Gloria Gladney
Alan R Cooper
Andy Cowan
Michelle Mosley
Lisa Edge
Dana Brannan
Garrett Cooper
Heather Reed
Carol Rice
Lee Russell Williamson
Doris Fajardo

NYRMS
Debbie Hanlon
Karen Johnson
Ed Gochman
Sandra Terkovich-Shapiro
Ines Vasquez Mendoza
Kathleen Sumner
Lydell Kirkland
Julio Fana
Chanel Matthias
Jonathan Kashdan
David Thomas
Jonathan Addy
Marlon Estevez
Emmanuel Fernandez
Sharon Cianciosi

SFRMA

Frank Smith
Esperanza Perez
Cherisse L Jones
Connie J Lee
Rolando Rivera
Shelley A Townsell
Martha D Sanchez
Terry A Middlemiss
Marcia Franz
Kathy J Lamothe
Diane Gomez
Sandra Velez
Tangela McWilliams
Clara A Pacheco
Marilou Ancla
Guillermo Barron
Josue Dominguez
Elina Mardres
Lynn Ikenaga
Fredonia Smith
Laurel Powers
Yvette Incera
Kareem Dphrepaulezz
Melissa D Pearce
Evelyn Elaine
Maria E Garcia
Sandra Vicente
Cory M Pecht

Around the Regions

Atlanta Region Management Association (ARMA)



In the town made even more famous with the publication of the book Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, the Atlanta Region Management Association hosted its 27th annual meet-

ing, and Savannah, Georgia did not disappoint! Our hearts were heavy, though, as Georgia Area Vice President Tommie Aaron, DM in Augusta, had died unexpectedly earlier in the week. We, nonetheless, soldiered on and gathered in her hometown of Savannah, a beautiful place she was extremely proud to call home and present to others. As August promises in the South, it was hot and humid, but to walk this historic town with its wonderful riverfront and many squares with moss-draped live oaks, one feels transported to another world and time. Savannah is truly a special place.

This meeting drew the largest crowd of ARMA members in recent memory with over 100 people attending the banquet Friday night in the historic Avia Hotel. Our guests were Atlanta Regional Commissioner Michael Grochowski, formerly the RC in the Kansas City region, along with NCSSMA President, Joe Dirago, and Rachel Emmons from the Greystone Group in Washington, DC. The internal meeting on Saturday morning, led by ARMA President Dwight Moberly, allowed for enthusiastic dialogue between speakers Joe and Rachel and the members in attendance. We also gave members the opportunity to sign up for our latest Grassroots letter-writing campaign. The meeting definitely served to show our members what NCSSMA does and how to get involved in their regional association. Members have already expressed greater interest in joining committees and becoming more involved, which will only lead to a stronger, more viable and relevant association. Though the meeting was touched by sadness with Tommie's death, by all accounts, it was a rousing success; exactly what she would have wanted and certainly what she worked for it to be.

-Mary Williams, ARMA Vice President

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Committee Spotlight: Grassroots Committee Efforts

By Rick Warsinskey, NCSSMA Committee Chair

Many members may not realize it, but NCSSMA has had an active grassroots effort to alert Members of Congress regarding SSA's funding needs and other issues of concern since the 1980s. These efforts require an organization to make it happen. That organization is centered around the NCSSMA Grassroots Committee.

The NCSSMA Grassroots Committee has ten regional chairs corresponding to the ten field regions and ten regional associations. Each regional chair is responsible for coordinating efforts to reach out to the members in their region whenever there is a NCSSMA grassroots campaign.

NCSSMA just completed its first campaign of the year. The focus of the campaign was sending letters to each participant's Senators and Representatives expressing concern about the future of pay and benefits for federal employees. 740 members participated in the campaign, the most members we've ever had participate in a campaign!

A number of measures were taken to improve our member participation.

Establishment of a Home E-mail Network. In 2006 we started gathering members' home e-mail addresses. In the past five years the number of members who have joined the NCSSMA e-mail group has grown to nearly 3,500. This total represents about 3,000 active members and 500 retirees. Using the group list, we have been able to quickly reach members. This is especially critical as the use of government e-mail and equipment is not permitted for grassroots lobbying campaigns.

Establishment of a Webpage to facilitate letters. Past campaigns were much more labor intensive. Thanks to Dean Dal Ben, NCSSMA's webmaster, we were able to generate electronic letters for delivery. Innumerable hours were saved.

Expansion and Strengthening of the Regional Grassroots Committees. From past experience, we found that if we had more members on each of the regional grassroots committees we achieved a better response rate. All of the regional committees added members for the most recent letter campaign. Some regions had one member for each state. This gave us more 'manpower' to communicate one-on-one with members from home. This certainly improved the number of members that responded.

As you read this article, the Grassroots Committee will have already started our second campaign focusing on SSA's FY 2012 budget. We believe the measures that we have already put into place with the first campaign will make this new campaign equally successful!

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

Send your feedback to:
Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov

Around the Regions continued

New York Region Management Society (NYRMS)



Last October, the New York Region Management Society held its 2010 Annual Meeting in Princeton, New Jersey. The Host Committee did an excellent job organizing the event and the members who attended the meeting agreed that it was both productive and interesting. Area V AD Dean Frenkian started things off with a warm and informative welcome to New Jersey. Our afternoon speakers,

Deputy Commissioner for Operations, Mary Glenn-Croft, Associate Commissioner for OLMER, Milt Beaver, and New York Regional Commissioner, Bea Disman, really kicked off their shoes (literally) and told it like it is!

Friday night's banquet was highlighted by the presentation of our NYRMS awards. We recognized Alice Briloff's outstanding service to field office management with the Regional Employee Appreciation Award and honored our webmaster, Nancy Kirman, with the NYRMS Distinguished Service Award. There were a couple of special awards as well. NCSSMA President and NYRMS Immediate Past President Joe Dirago presented retiring Area I VP Evie Davis with a photo book commemorating the 2008 NCSSMA Annual Meeting in West Point, acknowledging her exceptional contribution as chair of that event. The Executive Committee surprised Joe with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his many accomplishments and continuing dedication to the NYRMS and NCSSMA. We were also honored to have our 2010 NYRMS Stephen DeLisle Memorial Scholarship winner, Ruhi Srinivasan, in attendance at our banquet.

At our Saturday business meeting, we heard about the National Council's many activities and important initiatives from NCSSMA President Joe Dirago, who was joined by NCSSMA Vice-President Steve Clifton, and NCSSMA Washington Representative Rachel Emmons for the presentation.

The meeting ended with the election of our current Executive Officers: Debby Banikowski, President, Val Fisher, Executive Vice-President, Hal Golio, Treasurer, and Lucie Voss, Secretary.

Plans are now being finalized and registration is currently underway for the 2011 NYRMS Annual Meeting, which will be held on October 28 – 29 at the Hyatt Regency Long Island in Hauppauge, New York. We will again hear from DCO Mary Glenn-Croft and RC Bea Disman on Friday afternoon, followed by our awards banquet on Friday evening, where we will also honor Elizabeth Zwierzynski, recipient of the 2011 NYRMS Stephen DeLisle Memorial Scholarship and daughter of Area V Program Expert Mike Zwierzynski. We expect that the newly elected NCSSMA President will join Rachel Emmons as featured speakers on Saturday.

-Debby Banikowski, NYRMS President

Northwest Management Association (NWMA)



It is hard to believe it has been nearly a year since we hosted the 41st NCSSMA Annual Meeting in Portland. We chose the timely theme "Blazing the Trail for the Next 75 Years". I want to again thank all those who made the meeting go off without

a hitch. I especially want to thank our Host Committee Chairperson Joyce Sullivan for the great job she did representing NWMA. We truly hope that all who attended enjoyed themselves and enjoyed seeing the great Northwest.

Our relations with the Seattle Regional Office continue to be very good. NWMA members continue to be asked to sit on important Regional workgroups and to comment on various memos and program circulars. I was also asked to participate on the 2011 Seattle Operations Plan workgroup. We were not able to have a face-to-face meeting with the Seattle Executive Staff this year due to budget concerns. We hope we will be able to have this meeting in the upcoming year.

We have elections coming up for NWMA Executive Committee officers. The positions that are open this year include President, Treasurer, and Area 1 VP. My term as NWMA President will end this year after the NCSSMA annual meeting in Branson in October. I have truly enjoyed being the President of NWMA. I really want to thank my Executive Committee for their hard work and dedication to our association. I would also like to thank the NCSSMA Executive Committee for their hard work and genuine concern for the managers that they represent.

-Darin Park, NWMA President

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Profiles Page With Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security

By Fred Bourjaily, Chicago Region



What is your vision for the expansion of eServices given the current budget situation? When can we expect to see Registration of Most Everyone (ROME) and the linking of the iDIB application to the SSA-3368?

Our next big step forward comes this fall, when we launch the online Spanish retirement, Spanish Medicare-only, and Spanish *Extra Help* applications. With authentication, we expect to launch "My SSA" first with the online

Statement and later the iBeve. The timing of linking of the DIB application to the SSA-3368 is uncertain and highly sensitive to the budget. 2012 is possible from a technical perspective, but with budget constraints 2013 would be a more realistic expectation.

Your attention to our disability backlogs has been met with great success. Now that we have moved into an era of constrained budgets, what are your plans to maintain that momentum?

We will continue to emphasize making the right decision early and efficiently. We are fast-tracking now over five percent of the disability claims, and we have a chance to increase that figure significantly in the coming year. There's no reason to file a full application if you can confirm a disability diagnosis without it, and our revised online disability application now requires much less information for a Compassionate Allowance case. This change moves cases faster for the public, reduces our workloads, and even eliminates unnecessary paperwork for employers and health care providers.

We appreciate that field offices are now closing a half hour earlier to the public. What additional assistance can field offices expect as our workloads grow because of the hiring freeze and limited overtime? Will we see changes to the Agency Strategic Plan (ASP) as our workloads begin to backlog?

Through better communication with the public and smarter use of our telephone resources, we have reduced calls and held field office visits about level despite rising workloads. We are hoping to improve and then mandate use of iAppeals to reduce another dull and unnecessary workload for the field offices. We are looking for similar opportunities, but many of them require legislative action.

Considering our current situation of limited budget and the wide range of workload expectations that we face as an agency, what should our agency's top priorities be right now?

Backlog reduction remains number one. We've gone from an average processing time of 532 days to 345 days in just a few years, and I'm determined to reach our goal of 270 days. Expanding, improving and promoting our online and automated services will continue to be important.

In response to new Congressional priorities, you will see a greater emphasis on program integrity. We expect to do substantially more CDRs next year. We will expand AFI, which has a \$20 to \$1 return, and we are testing new systems similar to AFI for checking property records for Title XVI.

Your term expires in January 2013. What legacy do you hope to leave at SSA and what would you like to do once you leave?

I hope that my legacy will be:

1. An eliminated hearings backlog
2. Compassionate Allowances and QDD
3. State-of-the-art electronic services
4. State-of-the-art data centers in Maryland and North Carolina
5. Clearer, more polite notices; and
6. A new generation of terrific leaders to replace our huge losses in the SES

When I leave, I expect to lead a quieter life in Massachusetts, unless I am asked to become Commissioner of Major League Baseball. That way I can still wear my "Commissioner" T-shirts.

Would you comment on your relationship with the NCSSMA over the past four and half years? What value do you see the organization bringing to SSA?

NCSSMA has been great. We had unprecedented success in our budget requests from 2008-2010, and NCSSMA's advocacy was indispensable. If we had not been successful in that period, life would be very grim indeed today.

In conclusion, is there any message that you would like to share with SSA management across the country?

2012 will be a difficult year, but I am optimistic that we will start to get some relief from an improving economy. Hang in there and keep serving the public with the same dedication!

2010 Resolutions: NCSSMA Continues Success with Initiatives

By Albert Alvarez, Dallas Region

NCSSMA held its 41st Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon in October 2010. One of the main purposes for the meeting is to chart the course for the NCSSMA Executive Committee for the upcoming year. The attendees adopted twenty-one resolutions to pursue throughout the year. With the next annual meeting in Branson, Missouri just around the corner, we thought this would be a good time to reflect on the progress of some of last year's resolutions.

Resolution #3: NCSSMA will work with Central Office and Congress to formulate and support strong enforceable measures that provide increased security for all agency employees.

NCSSMA Executive Officers have held a number of discussions with the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner for Operations concerning security issues for employees. Both NCSSMA and Central Office are committed to making security a top priority for the agency. NCSSMA's Management Committee and Executive Officers continue to bring forth a number of security initiatives and continue to provide input on suggestions and ideas presented by DCO.

Resolution #4: NCSSMA will encourage agency leadership to recognize that additional staff is needed to provide timely and responsive telephone service. NCSSMA will also advocate for the agency to assess the service delivery implications that have resulted from the Telephone System Replacement Project (TSRP) and to adjust resource allocations based upon that assessment.

With the inception of the Telephone System Replacement Project (TSRP), telephone service in field offices is receiving more attention than ever before. Not since the creation of the national 1-800 Number and Teleservice Centers has so much emphasis been placed on telephone service. With the implementation of TSRP, management is able to obtain viable management information regarding telephone traffic in their individual offices for the first time. Members of NCSSMA's Executive Committee have participated in a number of meetings and conference calls to address TSRP issues and make suggestions on balancing SSA's telephone service. In addition, the Service Delivery Committee is conducting a survey to solicit information about TSRP's impact on service delivery. The committee will analyze survey responses to determine any significant changes in reception wait times, appointment calendars and claims processing times as managers devote more staff to answering telephones. This information will likely help NCSSMA determine whether any resolutions should be pursued on this topic next year.

Resolution #7: NCSSMA will work with Central Office to address quality issues.

Competing priorities, increased workloads, and limited staffing resources all contribute to quality issues. Since maintaining a high level of quality improves public trust in our administration and increases our efficiency, Central Office and NCSSMA are both eager to share suggestions for achieving the highest possible quality. In support of this resolution, the Executive Officers have participated in several conversations on this topic with both the Deputy Commissioner for Operations and Commissioner of Social Security throughout the past year.

In June, NCSSMA President Joe Dirago recommended to the DCO that the FO/PSC/TSC/ODAR/DDS Cooperative Efforts Workgroup be tasked with identifying quality concerns for study, proposing potential solutions resulting from the analysis of the studies, and recommending actions to strengthen our commitment to quality.

Resolution #10: NCSSMA will strongly advocate for the Work Incentives Simplification Pilot (WISP) legislation and any future proposals that will result in lowered program costs, reduction of time spent developing these complex issues, increased public understanding of work incentives, and a greater number of beneficiaries returning to work.

The Disability Work Provisions currently in place provide different and confusing work incentives for SSI and for Social Security Disability. Since the public has difficulty understanding these provisions, they do not take advantage of these work incentives and overpayments are common. With a large number of experienced employees retiring, with limited time for training new staff and with the agency's increasing workload volume, processing these workloads has become increasingly difficult. With the current Work Incentives Simplification Pilot (WISP), the public would be better able to understand and take advantage of the work incentives. The agency would also benefit from the reduced costs of administering these programs.

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2010 Resolutions *continued*

NCSSMA President Joe Dirago testified March 9, 2011 before the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies. One of the recommendations from his written testimony is as follows: "NCSSMA recommends consideration of legislative and/or regulatory proposals that can improve the effective administration of the Social Security program, with minimal effect on program dollars. This includes enacting the **Work Incentives Simplification Program** pilot, requiring quarterly reporting of wages, requiring that SSA be automatically provided with information on workers compensation cases, and developing an automated system to report State and local pensions affecting the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset (WEP/GPO).

This provision would simplify the entire work incentive process for the beneficiary and SSA. Work years saved by SSA currently spent in enforcing the prior provision could be redirected to other priority workloads." Although WISP has become a demonstration project instead of a legislative proposal, based on an OMB decision, it remains in the President's 2012 budget request.

Resolution #11: NCSSMA supports the implementation of a comprehensive plan to allocate resources to community based field offices to effectively process sensitive and urgent workloads received as a result of increased staffing and resources in the Disability Determination Services, Disability Processing Branches, Extended Service Teams and the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR). This plan should include additional staffing, enhanced technology, policy simplification, and flexible goals.

NCSSMA has continued its work with the agency to assess the impact of the additional workloads being received in field offices as ODAR and the DDSs reduce disability backlogs. Grassroots and Hill initiatives continue to focus on ensuring that resources are allocated in an equitable manner so the field can address increasing workloads received from ODAR and DDSs. During the inception of this resolution, field offices were allowed a significant amount of overtime to offset a hiring freeze and to help with increased workloads. Due to significant cuts to SSA's budget, overtime to all production components in SSA has been drastically reduced and, in some cases, eliminated resulting in serious concerns about accomplishing workloads and meeting service delivery objectives. With the hiring freeze in effect, many offices will face significant challenges as employees retire, change positions, or leave the agency, and July.

During the Capitol Hill visits in March 2011, the Executive Committee conducted over 70 meetings to raise concerns about what would happen to SSA with any further budget cuts and to make a case for additional resources. The NCSSMA President and our Washington Representative reiterated this in subsequent Capitol Hill meetings in May

Resolution #13: NCSSMA will work with the agency to revise the Teleservice Center Operating Guide (TSCOG) to authorize Teleservice Center Representatives (TSRs) to make the same post-entitlement inputs as field office Service Representatives.

Expanding the ability of TSRs to make post-entitlement inputs continues to be an extensive discussion. The TSC Committee has identified a number of references in the TSCOG that prohibit such inputs by TSRs. This causes additional contacts having to be made by the field office instead of one person taking care of the action during the initial telephone call.

The committee is working with DCO and OTS to make recommendations to get the TSCOG changed. During a March conference call with OTS and NCSSMA Andrea Wahle, TSC Committee Chair, introduced specific topics and recommendations for change. During their June conference call, NCSSMA followed up with OTS on the status of developments to change the TSCOG allowing such inputs by TSRs.

We have only described progress on a few of the resolutions that resulted from last year's annual meeting. Please visit our website at www.NCSSMA.org for additional information. All of NCSSMA's committees, as well as the Executive Committee, work actively throughout the year to pursue the resolutions with the intention of making Social Security the best agency that it can be. NCSSMA appreciates the willingness of both the agency Executives and Congressional staff to listen to our concerns and consider the data that we gather. Stay tuned to our website for the new resolutions that will soon be decided at NCSSMA's next annual meeting which will be held October 2-6, 2011 in Branson, Missouri.

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Take a Trip...to Work: The Life of a Foreign Benefits Officer

By Daniel O'Connor, Philadelphia Region

Imagine yourself managing Social Security operations in *Athens, Greece or even Rome, Italy*. Sure, they may not sound as exotic as Joe Dirago's Newburgh, NY or even my own Philadelphia, PA office. But, to Janet Huenink and Loretta Terry they are dream locations. Both women serve as Regional Federal Benefits Officers (RFBO). They are two of the seven Officers managing the United States' Foreign Service Posts, also located in Frankfurt, Manila, Mexico City, San Jose, and London.

Janet Huenink, the newest RFBO selectee, spent a year in the Office of International Operations (OIO) before reporting to Athens, Greece in 2008. She came from the Kansas City Region where she was the former Treasurer of the Management Association. She started her SSA career as a Claims Development Clerk and was promoted to the SR and CR ranks. The technical skills she learned early in her career have proved useful in her current position managing an office overseas. Employees are hired by the US embassies through recruiting of local residents. SR training is done in-house, but those hired for the CR position are sent to Baltimore, Maryland for Claims Representative training. They also receive training on handling claims for the VA, OPM, and Railroad Board. CRs interview and fully develop all SSA claims, but the claims must be adjudicated in the US by staff in Central Office.

Janet said she felt very emotional when she took this job because she had to resign her position as an SSA employee and then take an oath as a State Department Employee. Like all SSA managers, she must learn to quickly shift priorities. However, she must also follow the Department of State protocol as her 19 employees serve 50,000 beneficiaries in 40 countries throughout the Middle East. The education level of many of their clients is very low and most will ask to have everything translated to their language. Staff must choose their words very carefully so they do not offend anyone's religious beliefs. Janet loves living in an area with so much history and finds it fascinating to be living there while new history is unfolding (Cairo, Egypt for example). All the changes happening in the Middle East during the past year have caused her to have contingency plans ready for all countries in the area.

The biggest challenge Janet handles is not having systems access from 8 a.m. to noon due to time zone differences. They are able to make effective use of this time using ReMBR, a day late abbreviated MBR they have access to 24/7. Many of the foreign countries have power supplies that go up and down daily, so she has learned to deal with power outages. The Multi-Language Gateway found at www.socialsecurity.gov is a very useful and popular website for her staff. They are anxiously waiting for October 29, 2011, when our website will be able to handle claims from people with foreign addresses. Greece is the fastest growing country for Internet usage in the mid-East, but some governments in her service area also block Internet access.

While visiting her staff in different countries, Janet calls Greece home. However, when her career is finally over "home" will be back in Missouri with her children and grandchildren. In the meantime, she takes advantage of Skype and video conferencing to keep in touch with her family each evening.

Loretta Terry is our most senior RFBO. She started her SSA career in 1977 as a Generalist CR in the New York Region and, eventually, found herself in the Dallas Region as their IVT Program Coordinator. Later, while she was a member of the National Advanced Leadership Program, she applied for the RFBO position in Athens, Greece in 2003. She managed operations there until 2008 when she moved to the same position in the Rome, Italy Region.

When first selected for the position, she attended an 8-week Consular 101 Training Course on Foreign Service work. She was taught how to provide services for Americans overseas – particularly what you can and cannot do for Americans abroad.

A typical day for Loretta's 37 employees usually involves half claims and half P/E work. They deal with local banks on many direct deposit issues and handle many requests from our totalization partners. There are several US military bases in Italy and many veterans retire there. This generates a significant VA workload, including TRICARE Health Care questions.

(Continued on page 12)

NCSSMA is proud to represent over 3400 members of SSA's management team, from 1262 field offices and 35 teleservice centers!

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Foreign Benefit Officers *continued*

Like Janet, Loretta must deal with time zone complexities. They do not get PCOM until 11 a.m. each day. "I'm at work before Baltimore is awake, and I go home before they have lunch." It was not until 2001 that the overseas office finally got systems access. Prior to that time everything was handled via paper, which was then faxed to Baltimore.

Loretta has found the work to be challenging and has found that her many years of SSA work experience have equipped her to handle many challenges. She too has seen lots of world history unfold and has had to handle unique situations for Americans abroad. Libya has not received mail or any banking transactions since February 2011. Her staff is frantically working on a way to get Social Security benefits to those Americans who still live there.

She strongly encourages managers to consider applying for the RFBO positions when they open up. She does remind people that you don't get to visit "home" very often, so please keep that in mind when applying. When Loretta and her husband (an artist) retire, they will head to New Mexico to be closer to family.

The RFBO position falls under the guidance of the Office of International Operations. Their mission is to serve claimants and beneficiaries residing outside of the United States. Assistant Associate Commissioner Vance Teel, himself a former RFBO for Manila, Mexico City, and San Jose said that all but the Manila RFBO are State Department Foreign Service Officer positions. But, by agreement between the agencies, the RFBOs are selected by SSA. The Manila RFBO is a SSA position, working out of the Veterans Affairs Regional Office in Manila.

Vacancies are posted to the USAjobs.gov website. Vance Teel said that he looks for candidates who have an outstanding qualitative level of experience in five disciplines: people management, political savvy, process management, program expertise, and systems expertise. To learn more about international operations please visit them at: <http://ocoweb.BA.SSA.gov/oio/>.

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