



## Reflections of Commissioner Astrue

By Kate Slusher, Boston Region

*“The most rewarding aspect of the position is the excitement of knowing you can come to work each day and have a real chance of improving the lives of millions of Americans.”*

-Commissioner Astrue



Michael J. Astrue was sworn in as Commissioner of Social Security on February 12, 2007, and his appointment expires on January 19, 2013. During his six-year term, Commissioner Astrue has focused his efforts on reducing the disability backlog and the use of electronic services to improve Social Security's service delivery. Despite the less than favorable budget climate during much of his term, the agency has made considerable progress in both of these areas.

The disability backlog reduction efforts have been successful. The time it takes to receive a hearing decision is at its lowest point in nearly eight years, even though the number of initial disability claims filed has significantly increased each year during that same period. In addition, while concrete efforts such as hiring new ALJs and opening new hearings offices have been crucial steps toward improving disability processing, policy and automation changes have helped a dwindling workforce keep pace with the increasing volume of claims. Under Commissioner Astrue's direction, Social Security began expediting decisions for claimants with severe disabilities using Quick Disability Determinations and Compassionate Allowance criteria. Nearly six percent of initial claims are now fast-tracked through these new processes, getting benefits to those most in need much more expeditiously.

Considerable progress has been made with SSA's electronic services as well. Over five million customers have now filed retirement claims using the online application. Each month, hundreds of thousands of customers opt to use the Retirement Estimator, introduced in July 2008, to obtain estimates for retirement. The recently announced My Social Security website has garnered immediate attention, with over one million uses in its first two months. This expansion of electronic services has not only helped Social Security meet current workload demands, it has also put the agency in a better position to move forward to continue to meet the needs of the public with a reduced workforce and a smaller administrative budget.

When asked about his legacy, Commissioner Astrue shies away from that discussion, saying, “around the office I have always discouraged discussion of ‘legacy’ because I think it tends to encourage initiatives driven by ego rather than the public good.” However, as his tenure draws to a close, he does share, “I have allowed myself to think about the taboo word and the broader backlog reduction successes just a little during the home stretch. I am hopeful that in hindsight people will appreciate: 1) the disability fast-track systems; 2) the user-friendly electronic services; 3) the two new state-of-the-art data centers replacing the fraying NCC; 4) the long-delayed replacement of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles in our

### Special Interest Articles:

- *Commissioner Astrue's Farewell*
- *Atlanta Regional Commissioner Shares His Advice For SSA Leaders*
- *The Origins of NCSSMA*
- *FEEA & NCSSMA—Working Together to Help Federal Employees*

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*“I am very proud of the Social Security Administration and all of you who serve the public with such grace, compassion, and expertise.”*

Michael J. Astrue  
Commissioner of  
Social Security

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## Commissioner Astrue continued

vocational determinations; and 5) the DCPS (Disability Case Processing System) common web-based IT system incorporating e-Cat and other important quality initiatives that will start testing in Idaho next month.” Considering the positive effects already seen from efforts begun during Astrue’s tenure as Commissioner, it is likely the agency will continue to appreciate these initiatives long after he departs.

Commissioner Astrue leaves Social Security during a vulnerable time. He acknowledges, “the greatest challenge [the agency faces right now] is the double whammy of rapidly rising workloads combined with deep budget cuts. People tend to focus on the baby boom generation as the driver of the workloads, but they overlook the extent to which new responsibilities have crushed us in the past ten years, primarily with work related to verification of identity for a host of Federal, State and local programs.” As uncertainty about next year’s budget is on most of our minds, Commissioner Astrue acknowledges the important role NCSSMA plays in securing funding for the agency. When asked about the organization’s impact on budget and legislative issues, he responded, “NCSSMA has been a critical advocate for the SSA administrative budget. As cynicism about Federal agencies increases in Congress, our line managers often have a credibility on the Hill that more senior executives may not have.”

As Commissioner Astrue prepares to leave Social Security, his fondness for both NCSSMA and the agency is evident. He shares, “I want everyone in the agency to know that every day I feel that it has been an extraordinary privilege to return to this agency as Commissioner. I think most of us secretly dream a little about what it would be like to have our boss’s job. I guess I can confess now that I allowed myself to do that a bit in 1986 – 1988 when I worked for Commissioner Hardy, but I honestly did not believe that I would ever have the opportunity to take this great agency forward. I am very proud of the Social Security Administration and all of you who serve the public with such grace, compassion, and expertise.”

### NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

#### ARMA

Bernetta Dunn

Lynn Dominguez

Beverly Cates

Tara Casper

Louisa Knight

Olivia Suzanne  
Phillips

Marvin R. Banks

Kambria Giles

Kelli Kemp

Brad White

Michael Hales

Sheila Y. Lee

Cheyanna Paige

Agnes A. Rico

Marcus Osborne

#### ARMA

Michael Ramos

Nonquette L. Dunbar

Sabrina R. Pickens

Krystal C. Lyles

Sharon Rouse

Shay Hitchcock

Martin Watley

#### DRMA

Reatha Saure-Gray

Zipporah Westbrook

Lorena Ruiz

Rose Bradford

Erik Marple

Felita Jackson



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## President's Corner: A New Vision

By Stephen Clifton, NCSSMA President

During the 2011 NCSSMA Annual Meeting, a resolution was adopted directing NCSSMA to formulate a vision statement to conceptualize our position on the Social Security Administration of the future. To that end, after countless hours of hard work by many people, we formulated the following NCSSMA Vision Statement:

***The National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA) will advocate for a Social Security Administration that remains customer focused and provides excellent public service while embracing technological advances and innovation.***

To achieve this vision, NCSSMA will pursue the following strategic objectives and initiatives:

- Work constructively with agency leadership to ensure views regarding the SSA of the future and service delivery are considered in agency strategic planning initiatives;
- Advocate for a customer focused service delivery plan that best serves the changing needs of the American public;
- Be proactive regarding potential SSA technological and administrative advancements by working cooperatively and constructively with agency leadership;
- Promote initiatives to achieve a well-trained, technologically proficient and motivated workforce
- Encourage policies and procedures that will ensure the security of information and safety of the public and employees are paramount;
- Maintain a constructive dialogue with Social Security related advisory boards and panels to communicate views relative to the SSA of the future
- Work with SSA leadership, Congress, and partner advocacy groups for legislative and regulatory change to achieve policy simplification.

These are challenging times for our agency, federal employees and the American public. But, as Scott Hale, NCSSMA Vice-President said, challenges present opportunities to see the world in a different way and for our membership to step up and make a difference.

It truly was a team effort to refine our vision statement from over twenty pages included in the initial rough draft. I would like to extend my appreciation on behalf of the NCSSMA membership, to Scott Hale for overseeing this

initiative with the assistance of the Innovation Committee composed of:

- ◆ Scott Hale—Chair
- ◆ Michelle Ponce—Deputy Chair
- ◆ Justin Groshin, Vince Vicari, Roxanne Williamson, Tom Backmann, Clayton Wood, Dawn Salzman, Mike McWilliams, Sukey Austin, Jeff Lin, Twain Sierra

The efforts of the following people involved in three phases of reviewing and editing the NCSSMA Vision Statement were essential in creating our final product:

- ◇ Phase 1 – Twain Sierra, Dawn Salzman and Roxanne Williamson
- ◇ Phase 2 – Vincent Vicari, Charlene Morales and Darrin Salzman
- ◇ Phase 3 – Joe Dirago, Peggy Buchanan and Clayton Wood

Michelle Ponce deserves special recognition for her assistance to Scott throughout this entire process. Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to Joe Dirago, not only for the numerous hours he spent on this project, but also for his implementation of the Innovation Committee for just such an important project.

### NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

#### NWMA

Clay Kelley  
Chul Shirts  
Rachel Hunt  
Carol Dunford  
Kyung Joon Lee

#### NESSMA

Randy Henry  
Irene Morin  
Christopher Farrant  
James P Martin  
Wilson Osorio  
David Rixham

#### SFRMA

Marilyn Chunn  
Shannon Mason  
Araceli Ramos  
Jon Sagala  
Constance Soge  
Christine Womack

#### Ruby Figueroa-Vicente

#### PRMA

Jason Anderson  
Joanna Gool  
Deborah Rodgers  
Kimberley Holmes  
Janice Hutchinson

## Profile: Michael Grochowski, Atlanta Regional Commissioner

By Cory T. Allan, Kansas City Region



*You joined the Federal Senior Executive Service 24 years ago and have been a Regional Commissioner for 16 years, so you've seen many changes in budgets and politics. What is your perspective on the current political and budget climate for federal agencies?*

I will leave the politics to our elected representatives. I cannot recall a period in my career that was as fiscally challenging as today's budget constraints. Our staff's record of exemplary public service, despite constraints, is commendable. I just wish the American public knew how much our services positively affect so many people and households in our country.

With regard to the Atlanta Region, our current fiscal realities include managing increasing workloads and customer demands with reduced funding and limited hiring – no easy task for any organization, especially for our region with 22% of the national workload.

Despite these challenges, we continue to operate using a balanced approach to successfully achieve workload goals, assist colleagues at the Federal and State levels, and provide outstanding customer service. Challenges and change have been constants throughout my Federal career as an SSA employee, manager, and executive.

I believe that we, as an agency, have to continue to develop electronic services that are user-friendly, convenient for the public, and meet the changing demands thrust upon our agency.

I have always been proud to say that I am an SSA employee – especially in our current business environment.

*You have discussed your personal connection to our Armed Services as a veteran as well as the agency's commitment to working with the veteran population. Can you highlight some of the key considerations managers should be aware of as they are presented with the opportunity to hire or recruit veterans for employment with our agency?*

I am proud that I served our nation, especially my tour in Vietnam. As a military veteran, I appreciate the sacrifices that our service men and women make every day to protect the freedoms we enjoy and richly value. Some of our SSA colleagues serve a dual role as citizen-soldiers, working as Federal employees and members of the military. We should never forget to thank them for their sacrifices as their sacrifices are uniquely challenging.

I believe we have an obligation to actively recruit qualified veterans. Our regional practice is to recruit, hire, and retain the most qualified candidates. The Atlanta Center for Human Resources staff has several tools available for managers to consider when recruiting employees – including tools to assist with the recruitment and retention of qualified military veterans.

As our military personnel return from active duty, we need to continue outreach efforts with military installations in anticipation of future hires.

*Your biography indicates that you have completed both your Master's Degree as well as advanced professional-level training at Harvard University. What advice would you give managers who are looking to pursue advanced degrees or other professional training opportunities? Do you have any tips on how best to accomplish that personal goal and also maintain a sound work/life balance?*

Without equivocation, I would encourage people to take responsibility for their development. Our supervisors and mentors play an integral role in our success. However, each of us must determine our goals and the acceptable sacrifices we will make to achieve our respective goals. I also believe that my formal education prepared me to be a critical thinker, which is essential for any leadership position.

Although I encourage managers who have the time and means to pursue or advance their formal education, there are also excellent educational opportunities available outside of the traditional classroom environment. Many of these opportunities are inexpensive, or at no cost, and available to all managers.

I recommend that managers consider visiting the SSA Office of Learning's Intranet Website. The Office of Learning has several training tools available for managers. Their site offers video-on-demand courses, as well as e-Books, which managers can access from home at no cost. Information is also available to managers in the Atlanta Region on our Center for Human Resources One-Stop Intranet Website.

(Continued on Page 5)

## Grochowski continued

Finding consistent work/life balance is something we should all strive to attain. It can be difficult because our personal and professional lives are constantly evolving; and in many cases, the variables we consider when confronting and resolving an issue differ over time. I offer the following brief points, which apply both to personal and professional endeavors.

- **Learn Patience** – As the saying goes, it is a virtue, and one worth passing along. You are successful, in part, because someone was patient with you.
- **Think Quickly, React Appropriately, and Forgive Often** – You are always on stage and others are watching what you do, and how you react.
- **Value Other Opinions** – Simply because you do not have all the answers.
- **Cultivate a Culture of Inclusiveness** – Create an environment where others feel welcome, can add value, and receive recognition.
- **Embrace Learning** – I believe that knowledge enhances our personal and professional growth, helps us develop as critical thinkers, and provides us with a broader perspective of life's ever-changing events.
- **Give Thanks** – A word of appreciation and encouragement goes a long way.
- **Share Success** – Remember that you did not do it all by yourself. Develop your subordinates and prepare them for success.
- **Leave a Legacy** – Your good deeds, encouragement, and lessons shared with others will live on long after one's personal and professional accomplishments.
- **Keep Your Family Close** – They are indispensable.

*In 2011, you received the very prestigious Presidential Distinguished Rank Award for exceptional achievement while serving in the SES. Can you discuss what this award meant to you as you reflect upon your career in the SES?*

I am humbled and grateful that the DCO and COSS recommended me for the Presidential Rank Award since this recognition represents the highest honor conveyed to a Senior Executive. I also know that I could not have received this recognition without the support of so many with whom I have worked over the years. For that support, I am most grateful. I just wish my parents were alive to share this recognition with me.

I also believe that as leaders, we should constantly look towards future challenges that present opportunities to succeed. This business approach does not lend much time to reflect upon past accolades. It is also worth noting that future successes may not always receive formal or noteworthy recognition; but that makes them no less significant.

*If there were one piece of advice you would share with leaders in our agency, what would it be?*

Actively listen to what others have to say and engage others in frequent, open, and candid conversations. Listen to the “dissenting” voice(s) as your answer may lie with that person(s) and not with those who are of one mind. As leaders, we must continuously strive to communicate effectively with each other and our employees.

Provide “context” for those with whom you work. Communication is the most efficient way to share information about things your audience needs to know. I also believe that when you candidly share information you lessen anxiety during challenging times and times of uncertainty, and in turn, build a stronger team.



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### NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

#### DRSSMA

Carolyn Spencer

Roshawn Barnes

Kyle McTighe

Keila Oliver

#### KCMA

Angela Walker

Maria Espinosa

Jessica Eaker

# NCSSMA: From Humble Beginnings to Great Accomplishments

By Sandra R. Perez, San Francisco Region

A walk down memory lane takes us to the mavericks who organized NCSSMA. The first years of the Council were challenging, but NCSSMA has diligently pursued its mission since its humble beginnings: ***Improve management and program administration in the Social Security Administration by assuring that the knowledge and experience of front-line management are included in all phases of agency planning and decision-making.***

During the spring of 1970, the New York and Boston management associations proposed the creation of a national organization to represent all district managers across the country so that field office management would have an opportunity to provide direct input at the national level. In May, managers from seven regions (New England, New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Dallas, and Kansas City) attended a meeting in Chicago. At this meeting, they worked late into the night! A Constitution and Bylaws were written and temporary officers elected. The National Council of Social Security Management Association's (NCSSMA) first elected officers were: Joe Collins, President; Joe Sewall, Vice President; and Max Stamler, Secretary-Treasurer. Joe Collins continued to serve as NCSSMA's President until 1972. In honor of his key role in creating this organization, NCSSMA established the Joseph P. Collins Award at the 1978 Annual Meeting shortly after he had passed away. This continues to be the highest award presented by the National Council, honoring the member who has done the most to further NCSSMA's objectives in the preceding year.

The structure of the Council was established as a confederation of regional associations. The President of each association, plus the four national executive officers, form part of the Executive Committee. The Immediate Past President, the Teleservice Center Representative, and the Executive Officer are also part of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has met regularly with Central Office officials for over 40 years as well as communicating with the US Congress for the past 30 years. Steve Korn, President 1999-2001, recalls spending significant time trying to improve NCSSMA's relationship with Central Office executives. He recalls, "My objective was to improve both the level of honesty and openness of our communication as well as ensuring our input was actively solicited while decisions were being formulated." Active communication efforts at multiple levels are the mechanism that NCSSMA has used to successfully meet its mission of sharing front-line managers' knowledge with those who can change Social Security policy and regulations. As Tony Pezza, President 2001-2003, said, "The goals, interests and involvement of the NCSSMA extend significantly beyond the Deputy Commissioner of Operations (DCO) level and our leadership must never fall into the trap of being relegated to dealing solely with DCO on matters that properly transcend that level. Our primary focus needs to be at the Commissioner's level."

NCSSMA's first annual meeting was held in October 1970 in St Louis. At this meeting, the new officers began identifying the first issues for this new association to pursue, including restructuring of district offices and classification of management positions. These annual meetings have continued, rotating the location among all of the regions. Over the years, NCSSMA has focused on a variety of resolutions including the need for increased staffing, automation issues, contract issues, and disability policy initiatives. One of the principles stressed with Central Office during Robert S. Duncan's term as President from 1988-1990 was the negative effect that excessive staff reduction had on SSA's ability to deliver quality service.

NCSSMA's annual meetings have also produced several internal traditions. The first NCSSMA logo, created in 1979, was a shield with eleven stars representing the eleven regional associations, seven red bars representing the original seven regional associations, a scroll representing scholarship, and a wreath representing leadership. The logo was redesigned to its current form in 1983. In 1999, it was updated with the use of color to make it more attractive on the council's new website. There is also a tradition of passing a gavel from President to President. Doris Lissaman, recipient of the Collins Award, first presented it in 1979. Then, when it vanished after 23 years of service, Mike Chappell (DM in Dearborn, MI) kindly made a new gavel, which has just about completed its first decade of keeping meetings orderly.

## FrontLine is Produced by the Communications Committee

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**Jan Still**

**Clayton Wood**

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## Around the Regions

### Philadelphia Region Management Association (PRMA)



The Philadelphia Region Management Association (PRMA) has had a very exciting 2012. Our annual membership meeting was held in May in Virginia Beach, Virginia and we saw a record number of our members turn out. Our members

had an opportunity to meet and talk with our new Regional Commissioner, Terry Stradtman, who had arrived to the Region just a week before the meeting. They also had an opportunity to meet and talk with Eric Kressman, Acting Deputy Regional Commissioner; Mary Horne, ARC/MOS; Maureen Nichols, Executive Officer; and Roger St. John, Area 6 Area Director; as well as Steve Clifton, NCSSMA President, and Rachel Emmons, Washington Representative. Elections were also conducted and Charlene Morales was re-elected as President, Melinda Groom was elected as First Vice-President, Jill Russell as Second Vice-President, Nicole Morris as Secretary and Rick Wodowski as Treasurer. The new terms begin September 1st. In addition, most of our six areas held elections for Area Delegates and there were several new individuals elected for the upcoming year. We are excited to see so many new members wanting to get involved in PRMA!

In August, several members of the PRMA Executive Committee were invited to meet with Regional Commissioner Terry Stradtman and several members of his staff including Mary Lisa Lewandowski, Acting Deputy Regional Commissioner. We enjoyed an interactive discussion on topics such as budget, staffing, training and workloads. We look forward to having a positive and productive working relationship with Terry and his staff.

PRMA is also looking at initiatives to increase our membership, especially among GS-12s and TSC eligible members. Several of our newer members have jumped in and gotten involved and we are hoping their enthusiasm will encourage their peers to join PRMA and do the same.

Charlene Morales, President

### Northwest Management Association (NWMA)



The Northwest Management Association (NWMA) had the opportunity to speak with managers at several training sessions this year. The Seattle Executives consistently prioritize the development of new supervisors and managers; preparing them to face the myriad of tasks and challenges they encounter

after promotion. Regional Commissioner Stanley Friendship has been committed to providing high-quality training to our management team and states: "It is more important now than ever before to develop employees who are willing to move up into higher-level leadership positions. During these very austere times for budgets, it is important for all of us to continue creating opportunities for deserving employees that will assist them in learning and honing their leadership skills."

The NWMA spoke with the Seattle Leadership Associates, two groups of new supervisors at Nuts and Bolts training, and new facility heads at their Transition to Leadership training. This was a great forum to educate new supervisors and managers about the regional and national management associations and how the two work to advocate for field office and teleservice center management, giving members a voice to express concerns and share ideas.

This summer we held elections for the offices of Executive Vice President, Area 2 Vice President and the TSC Vice President and will welcome to office Andrea Wahle, Chris Detzler, and Jodi Shepard, respectively. Their terms will begin immediately after the NCSSMA Annual Meeting in October.

Mark Fansler, NWMA Treasurer,  
on behalf of Jari Frassenei, NWMA President

#### Disclaimer

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## Around the Regions *continued*

### Atlanta Regional Management Association (ARMA)

ARMA recently celebrated their 40th anniversary during the 2012 annual meeting. The meeting was held in Birmingham, AL on August 10th and 11th at the historic Tutwiler Hotel. This year's theme was "People, Purpose and Passion, The Pathway to Success." Guest speakers at the banquet included Michael Grochowski, Atlanta Regional Commissioner; Rose Mary Buehler, Assistant Regional Commissioner-PCO; and Carmen Wormely, Birmingham TSC Director. During the business meeting, NCSSMA President Steve Clifton and Washington Representative Rachel Emmons spoke about national issues and concerns that are important to members. The ARMA Community Service Award was presented to Matt Staley, District Manager in Conway, South Carolina for his dedication and commitment to others.

The following newly elected officers will assume their duties January 1, 2013:

Secretary-Karen Denton  
Treasurer-Susan Roberts  
TN VP-Connie Kennedy  
NC VP-Teresa Creel  
AL VP-Blake Chavers  
KY VP-Jeff Stewart  
MS VP-Evangeline Taylor  
SFL VP-Velma Blaine



Karen Denton, ARMA Secretary, on behalf of Mary Williams, ARMA President

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

Send your feedback to:  
[Patty.Maddox@ssa.gov](mailto:Patty.Maddox@ssa.gov)

### New York Region Management Society (NYRMS)

At the end of last year's report from the New York Region Management Society, we were anxiously anticipating the 2011 Annual Meeting, held in Hauppauge, New York on October 28 – 29. The Host Committee did an excellent job organizing the event and Area II really rolled out the red carpet for our guests and members.



Our Friday afternoon meeting began with a stirring performance by the Hauppauge High School Chamber Choir and a warm welcome from our host Area Director, Edison Best. Our guest speakers, Deputy Commissioner for Operations Mary Glenn-Croft, who joined us via Skype, and Bea Disman, New York Regional Commissioner, shared their perspective and insight on the issues and concerns raised by our members.

Friday night's banquet was highlighted by the presentation of our NYRMS awards. We recognized Naomi Diamond's outstanding service to field office management with the Regional Employee Appreciation Award and honored Susan Sobel with the NYRMS Distinguished Service Award. We also acknowledged our 2011 NYRMS Stephen DeLisle Memorial Scholarship winner, Elizabeth Zwierzynski.

Our Saturday business meeting included a presentation on Professional Liability Insurance by two of our NYRMS and NCSSMA Past Presidents, Joe Dirago and Tony Pezza. We heard about the National Council's many activities and important initiatives from NCSSMA President Steve Clifton and NCSSMA Washington Representative Rachel Emmons. At the meeting's conclusion, members were bidding farewell to Hauppauge as an early season snowstorm arrived.

Fast-forward eleven months, to September 7 – 8, 2012, when we held the 2012 NYRMS Annual Meeting at the Pearl River Hilton in Pearl River, New York. Once again, we heard from DCO Mary Glenn-Croft and RC Bea Disman, as well as OGC NY Regional Chief Counsel Steve Conte, on Friday afternoon. Our awards banquet on Friday evening featured the announcement of the recipient of the 2012 NYRMS Stephen DeLisle Memorial Scholarship and presentation of the 2012 Regional Employee Appreciation Award to Barbara Caldone, Human Resource Specialist, and the Distinguished Service Award to retired NYRMS Area V VP Frank Bayersdorfer and former NYRMS Executive Officer Theresa Ferguson.

NCSSMA President Steve Clifton joined Rachel Emmons as scheduled speakers at our Saturday morning business meeting. Results of the NYRMS Executive Officers election were also announced, with President Debby Banikowski, Vice President Valerie Fisher, Treasurer Hal Golio and Secretary Lucie Voss re-elected for two-year terms.

Debby Banikowski, NYRMS President

## Committee Spotlight: Innovation Committee

By Scott Hale, Committee Chairperson

What an exciting year for the Innovation Committee! Committee members were involved in a number of endeavors including creation and design of a new NCSSMA SharePoint site and establishment of a new home email network with over 1800 members registered to date. However, one of the most important ventures for the committee was the creation of the NCSSMA Vision Statement. With challenging times ahead for our agency, NCSSMA leadership felt it prudent to create a statement to conceptualize NCSSMA's position on the Social Security Administration of the future.

We completed work on the NCSSMA Vision Statement in phases and it certainly was a great team effort. The initial phase involved soliciting feedback from the NCSSMA Executive Committee (EC), including Regional Presidents. The outcome was over twenty pages of feedback. Next, a subcommittee composed of Innovation Committee members and Regional Presidents worked to consolidate and condense this large volume of information. This resulted in a draft vision statement, along with seven supporting strategic objectives. After a review by the NCSSMA EC and Regional Presidents, we finalized the NCSSMA Vision Statement.

These are exciting times for NCSSMA despite the many challenges facing the federal government, our agency and its employees. NCSSMA leadership felt strongly about the need for a vision statement and it was included in our resolutions at the 2011 NCSSMA Annual Meeting. The following is an excerpt from the resolution: **This vision will provide a framework for change, stimulate innovation and help ensure NCSSMA is proactive in providing feedback and input on proposed modifications to agency business processes. Furthermore, the vision statement will guarantee NCSSMA is aligned with technological advances and is adequately prepared to represent the experience and knowledge of NCSSMA members and their employees.**

NCSSMA and the Innovation Committee are inspired and motivated to seek opportunities to contribute to the success of SSA. These are challenging times, but these challenges present opportunities for leaders to step up and make a difference. NCSSMA members are true leaders and I challenge each of you to seek out innovative ways and ideas to make a positive difference for our organization, our agency, and the American public.



### NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

#### SFRMA

Leandra Arevalo	Cassandra Soper	Loan K. Nguyen	Eleonora Garcia
Sae Ibarra	Tennille Garner	LaKetha Williams	Nora Ippongi
Rosalina Pena	Leah Guibor	Jason Phelps	James Vieira
Michelle Felicetta	Susie Sherer	Denise Blevins	Charles Camp
Graciela Flores	Cindy Velasquez	Nicole Ojeda	Jeffrey Consolacion
Mirna Sanchez	April Doyle	James Ekeroma	Guadalupe Corral

## 25 Years of Service - FEEA's History of Helping

By Elizabeth Bass, Dallas Region

The Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund (FEEA) is celebrating a monumental milestone this year. Twenty-five years ago, two federal employees - one a Union leader, and the other a leader of executives - put aside their contentious past. They sat down to lunch and left with an idea that has helped over 13,000 of our federal counterparts with no-interest loans and grants and over 8,000 students with college scholarships. FEEA has grown from a small group of like-minded individuals in 1986 to a large-scale network of federal employees taking care of one another. NCSSMA has been a part of FEEA since its very early days. Steve Bauer, current Executive Director of FEEA, was the President of NCSSMA in 1986, the year of FEEA's founding. Steve saw NCSSMA's involvement in FEEA "as another step forward in NCSSMA's evolution from an entirely internal SSA organization to one with a far greater reach. It was part a realization that as federal employees, members of NCSSMA were part of a larger universe that determined such things as pay, benefits, classification and respect."

FEEA has provided over \$7.7 million in no-interest loans to federal employees, including assistance provided during some of the largest disasters our country has faced. FEEA has been on the front lines, providing immediate support when our colleagues needed it most. Steve's greatest personal memory of his work with FEEA was during Hurricane Andrew. His story is a wonderful reminder of the resilience and fortitude of all Federal employees, and especially those at SSA.

*"I think that to this day my greatest personal memory still has to be flying in to Florida in 1992 with an envelope stuffed with cash, being picked up at Miami International Airport by the US Customs Service in a Blackhawk helicopter, and whisking down to Homestead to provide much needed relief to federal employees from a multitude of agencies who needed funds to purchase basic necessities such as food, water, and generators. There was no electricity and the roads were impassable so no one had access to cash. And, while there, I personally witnessed SSA employees driving around in US Postal Service jeeps helping to deliver SSA checks in devastated neighborhoods (few had direct deposit back then). In just a few days, 401 federal employees were helped in a timely and efficient manner. Employees were continuing to do their jobs even though their own homes and cars had been damaged or destroyed. It certainly demonstrated to me that bad things can happen to good people, that federal employees often need help, and that FEEA could indeed provide that assistance."*

Steve also reminds us, as SSA managers, that FEEA can be a powerful tool in assisting our own employees, even when disasters are not on the scale of Hurricane Andrew. FEEA has helped over 1,300 SSA employees over the past 25 years through the emergency assistance program. This program has provided funds for personal emergencies, such as divorce, a family member's death, car accidents, children's illnesses, and many others. I have personally witnessed FEEA in action during the recent tornadoes in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Although our office was not affected, a tornado destroyed an employee's home. We tried to assist him in whatever ways we could, but it still felt like we were not doing enough. FEEA was able to step in and provide him with funds to help his family while they worked to rebuild. He received money within 24 hours of his first call to FEEA.

FEEA has experienced tremendous growth over the past 25 years. In 1989, Steve Bauer's first year as executive director, FEEA provided \$40,000 in scholarships and \$100,000 in emergency assistance. Currently, each of these programs provides well over \$500,000 annually. According to Steve, "success and growth has traditionally come from our Board organizations such as NCSSMA spreading the word and reminding employees on a regular basis that we exist and that we need their support." FEEA has a very proud past, and NCSSMA has played an integral part in this much needed organization. Donations have leveled off in recent years, however. Last year, FEEA received a little over \$1 million in donations and distributed \$1.4 million in assistance. Steve points out that "we cannot do that forever but as all of you do every day we have learned to work smart and to live with limited resources without sacrificing service to our constituency."

FEEA needs our support to continue its unique mission of exclusively supporting civilian federal employees. You can contribute to FEEA through the upcoming Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) using pledge number 11185 or through online donations to the Friends of FEEA program at [www.FEEA.org](http://www.FEEA.org).

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FEDmanager, the FREE weekly e-report written exclusively for federal managers, executives, supervisors and HR representatives, invites NCSSMA members to stay up-to-date on the current news in the federal community. Each week, FEDmanager gives you the news, insight and expertise you need to help manage the federal workplace.



Please Support FEEA's efforts  
 to provide scholarships and  
 to assist federal employees in need:

Visit [www.FEEA.org](http://www.FEEA.org)

or contribute through

CFC # 11185

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