



Adding 'Diplomat' to a Scientist's Credentials

By Greg Rosenthal



Alan Franklin displays a gift (above) he received during a trip to China, where gift-giving strengthens personal relationships. The Chinese saying, "The gift is trifling, but the ceiling is profound," translates loosely as, "It's the thought that counts."

APHIS Achieves NAIS Milestone

By Kathleen Davis

When Etiquette Becomes Mission-Critical

U.S. diplomats understand that, when abroad, Federal employees never really clock out.

As Dan Sheesley—Deputy Administrator for International Services—has seen, however, this wisdom isn't always intuitive for APHIS employees overseas. Sheesley recalls in particular a group of agency technical experts who unintentionally slighted their host government by skipping an official dinner.

"An invitation is not necessarily discretionary," Sheesley says dryly. After 20 years as an APHIS foreign service officer (FSO), he should know.

Like Sheesley, the agency's other deputy administrators can recall similar diplomatic stumbles. In combination, agency leaders felt the missteps indicated an expectations gap between APHIS' professional diplomats—the FSOs—and the agency's technical employees working overseas. To close the gap, the APHIS Management Team (AMT) asked Sheesley to create the APHIS

International Training Program (AITP), which graduates 23 students from its pilot class at the end of April 2007.

Well Beyond Charm School

Mary Ellen Keyes, AITP's project manager in the Training and Development Branch, implemented the program. "I took Dr. Sheesley's dream and put it in black and white," she says.

Keyes helped design a "blended learning" curriculum, which includes two 4-day classroom sessions, online classes, a team learning project, personal assessments, and coaching. APHIS hired the GilDeane Group, Inc., a consulting and training company, to create the course materials.

The AMT identified three core competencies for the program to build: leadership, intercultural adaptability, and negotiation skills. "We want to instill leadership as well as diplomatic and representational awareness in every APHIS employee carrying an official passport," Sheesley says.

To Sheesley, appreciating a country's sometimes minimal conveniences only begins to define

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This past January, APHIS achieved an important milestone in the implementation of the National Animal Identification System, or NAIS. With the help of State and industry partners, APHIS succeeded in registering 25 percent, or 350,000, of all U.S. livestock premises.

Premises registration is the foundation of NAIS. Having what amounts to an emergency contact list will allow APHIS to respond more quickly when animal health threats arise and to provide better assistance to farmers and ranchers. With the 25 percent milestone accomplished, APHIS is looking toward USDA's next goal for premises registration: ensuring that a significant majority of producers are on board by the end of January 2009.

Leading by Example

As Dr. DeHaven has reminded agency employees, it's up to everyone in the APHIS community to lead by example in promoting the health of our Nation's animals. If you own livestock or poultry, please show your commitment to protecting animal health by registering your premises with NAIS—and encouraging your neighbors, family, and friends to do the same.

You can learn more about NAIS and the many benefits of the program by visiting the NAIS Web site at www.usda.gov/nais. ♦



'Diplomat' Credentials

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cultural adaptability, which also encompasses cultural knowledge, respect, and sensitivity. As for negotiation skills, he wants training participants to know the range of skills needed—from understanding subtle nuances to knowing how to handle raised voices and table-pounding.

The program also requires that students understand APHIS' strategies, plans, and goals. "At the Agency level, that means our safeguarding and safe-trade missions," Sheesley says. "At the individual level, it's highly important that employees understand how the issues they're negotiating could affect another program."

For example, a country might use U.S. beef imports as leverage when negotiating its citrus exports. Sheesley wants course graduates to recognize that foreign negotiators sometimes link issues together. "If we're ignorant of any linkages, we may not see the nuance and spend a week of frustrating and ultimately fruitless time," he says.

Putting Students to the Test

To make the learning practical, students in the training program apply their knowledge to real situations, such as an actual diplomatic reception that's part of the course. Before attending the pilot reception in December 2006, students learned the do's and don'ts of a formal diplomatic event and then practiced their skills on embassy attachés.

Participants also apply their knowledge through learning projects. Working in teams, students research a current APHIS-related international topic and present their findings. Sheesley attended the pilot class's presentations and heard recommendations for improving APHIS' international activities.

"I was impressed with their depth of research and level of interest in producing a real product," he says. In fact, International Services

may institute one team's recommendations almost immediately by expanding the services that the APHIS Visitors Center offers.

Alan Franklin: Before/After Case Study

Before attending the training program, Alan Franklin visited China with an admittedly thin knowledge of Chinese culture. Fortunately, the Wildlife Services project leader instinctively knew to act with caution. "I tried to watch what my hosts did and feel things out," Franklin says.

Through the AITP, Franklin learned to be more proactive and confident in his actions. When he visited China a second time and later hosted a Chinese official in Fort Collins, Colorado, he eagerly applied his new cultural understanding.

Based on his AITP coursework and China experiences, he understood the importance of personal interaction in Asian cultures. That paid off when he hosted his Chinese counterpart. "I decided to take him everywhere—lunch, dinner," he says. He and Bob Mclean, program manager for Wildlife Services' Wildlife Disease Program, invited others to come along.

"That's what I really learned in the course, that personal relationships are very important around the world," Franklin says. "That's different from our culture, where you have a lot of business relationships, but not necessarily personal ones."

At Last, Shaking the Geek Image

According to Sheesley, APHIS is the smallest and most technical of all the U.S. foreign service agencies. "Our reputation used to be as technical experts who wear horn-rimmed glasses and who aren't adept in this environment," he says. "We're working hard to upgrade that image. Essentially, the expectation is that our technical specialists are full-fledged diplomats."

AITP's goal is to help make that happen. ♦

APHIS' International Activities for Avian Influenza

APHIS and other USDA agencies are active around the globe to combat highly pathogenic avian influenza. For more on this topic and to see APHIS and other USDA employees in action, check out the article entitled, "We're Building Relationships—And Getting International Results—

As We Guard Against Pandemic Avian Influenza" running in the March/April issue of USDA's employee newsletter, "USDA NEWS." The issue, which will be posted electronically in early May, can be accessed at www.usda.gov/agnews_pubs.xml. ♦

Do You Know Ability One? Bet You Do

By Candace Paul

AbilityOne is the new name for the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program or what many of us know as JWOD for short. The name change, which became effective in November 2006, was made to better unite the program's name with the abilities of those who are employed through its efforts.

The AbilityOne program provides job opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities by employing them in the

and given preference as Federal agencies purchase certain products and services.

Who Benefits?

AbilityOne touches the lives of many individuals, including the blind and others with severe disabilities. In 2006, the program's efforts provided approximately 47,000 people with employment. These employment opportunities generated revenues totaling \$41.3 million.

As AbilityOne representatives point out, it's far more accurate to think of those who benefit from the program as "differently-abled" instead of disabled.

At the second annual JWOD/AbilityOne Celebration held in Riverdale in January 2007, this message was echoed by guest speaker Beth Scott. "I believe that the only limitations you have are the ones you decide to accept," said Scott.

Scott, who is visually impaired, is a gold-medalist swimmer who competed in the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia. As keynote speaker, she spoke about overcoming discrimination related to her disability and her battle with thyroid cancer.

"People with disabilities will surprise you... it's important to see the gifts and talents they have," said Scott.

What AbilityOne Means for You

According to AbilityOne representatives the nature of today's Federal acquisition environment is "decentralized," meaning that many Federal programs and offices operate independently in purchasing supplies and services. As a result, AbilityOne has to work hard to remind people of the Federal Government's commitment to the program's qualified vendors and of the products and services available through them.

For most APHIS employees, doing your part for AbilityOne is easy. It simply means being aware of the agency's commitment to consistently ordering common office supplies and products from the JWOD/AbilityOne designated sections of supply catalogs. The administrative staff in your office who orders supplies should be able to direct you to the appropriate sections and products.

According to Howard Price, MRP-Business Services' Administrative Services Director,



Trisha Somervell, Monica Montero, and Denita Hutchinson (left to right) watch closely for the results from a vendor's prize wheel at the JWOD/AbilityOne Celebration held in Riverdale. The second annual celebration event held in January featured numerous vendors and speakers to highlight the AbilityOne program.

manufacture and delivery of products and services to Federal agencies.

How it All Works

The AbilityOne program is administered by an independent Federal committee called the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled. The committee is responsible for making the rules and regulations to carry out the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act passed by Congress in 1938.

The committee has designated two key nonprofit agencies—the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH)—to provide assistance to qualified nonprofit agencies nationwide. These qualified nonprofit agencies in turn employ the blind or severely disabled in the manufacture and/or distribution of certain products and services. The committee maintains a procurement list, which is recognized by the Federal Government

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A Look Back: D.C. Cherry Trees' Troubled Start

By Christa Smith Anderson



USDA scientist inspect first shipment of Japanese cherry trees, January 7, 1910. (USDA photo)

Since 1912, Washington, D.C.'s Japanese cherry trees have defined the city's springtime landscape. But the events leading up to their planting were not nearly as graceful as the cherry blossoms that now appear each spring.

Like some APHIS issues today, the cherry trees' arrival and the events that followed generated quite a few headlines.

As a gift from Tokyo's Mayor Yukio Azaki to the United States, the cherry trees were highly anticipated. Unfortunately, the first shipment of trees in 1910 arrived heavily infested and had to be burned. The resulting diplomatic stir captured the public's attention and greatly increased public awareness of agricultural pests in the United States. The events also coincided with USDA's rapidly evolving pest-related authority.

A Budding Vision

Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s,

USDA's Bureau of Plant Industry dispatched plant explorers across the globe to identify and introduce plant species into the United States. One of USDA's explorers, David Fairchild, returned from his travels with a growing interest in ornamental trees. Fairchild, who was head of USDA's Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction, had imported 75 Japanese flowering trees for his

own estate in Chevy Chase, Maryland. In 1908, Fairchild found a friend in Eliza Scidmore. Scidmore, a newspaper correspondent, had traveled to Japan and seen cherry trees in full blossom.

Fairchild and Scidmore shared a vision for bringing the tree's beauty to the Nation's capital. For several years, Scidmore had been working without success to win the support of public officials and import trees for planting in the city. Fairchild joined her in these efforts. And, in 1909, their efforts caught the attention of First Lady Helen Taft.

When Tokyo Mayor Yukio Azaki learned of First Lady Taft's interest in flowering cherry trees, he sent a cablegram offering 1,000 trees as a gift. The gift later multiplied to 5,000 trees, and officials soon began making plans for the arrival and planting of the trees. National newspapers ran stories about the significance of the blossoms in Japan and reported on the gift's travel status.

In December 1909, the first 2,000 trees arrived aboard the steamship Kaga Maru in Seattle, Washington, where they underwent preliminary inspection and were loaded onto temperature-controlled railroad cars. The trees' journey went smoothly at first, but soon became complicated.

With a "Gnashing of Teeth"

When the train reached Washington, D.C., officials transported the trees to USDA's Garden Storehouse for inspection. Together, scientists from USDA's Bureau of Plant Industry and the Bureau of Entomology inspected the shipment. Unfortunately, the results were not what anyone had hoped for. Inspectors found numerous pests, and the trees were deemed unsuitable for release.

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Do You Know Ability One?

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APHIS' commitment to AbilityOne is strong and the agency has set a goal of increasing its annual purchases through the program every year by a half percent.

"I have worked with different AbilityOne locations and the people who work there. The one thing that I have learned about the program is that the people involved are passionate about their work," said Price.

"This is more than just meeting percentages or goals. In using the AbilityOne, we increase the ability to integrate people with disabilities into the workplace. It enables people who are blind or se-

verely disabled to have the opportunities to pursue their hopes, dreams and desires."

The list of products and services available through AbilityOne continues to grow. New technologies have added more service options, such as high-volume document scanning and archiving.

To learn more about the full scope of services and products available through AbilityOne vendors and how to increase your staff's participation, you can contact Estela Diaz, MRP-Business Services' designated AbilityOne/JWOD liaison. Her e-mail address is Estela.M.Diaz@usda.gov. ♦

Cherry Trees

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The pest findings included: *Diaspis pentagona* (now known as *Pseudaulacaspis pentagona*), San Jose scale, several species of black thrips, a Sesiid moth, undetermined larvae of moth, boring larvae, a living Pierid chrysalis, a chrysalis of Cochleiid, an undetermined weevil, a Forficulid, several nests of black ants, a large living egg mass of a canker worm, root gall, crown gall, *Pestalozzia*, and fungous mycelium.

USDA officials recommended that the trees be burned. The Bureau of Entomology's Acting Chief, C. L. Marlatt, recognized the diplomatic implications. In a report compiled for Secretary James Wilson, Marlatt pointed out that, because of the degree of infestation and the trees' severely pruned roots, they likely would not live even if planted. He said that this probability "may lessen the feeling of regret at the necessity, which seems imperative, for the destruction of the entire shipment." With President Taft's consent, the trees were burned.

There was a clear sense of disappointment and public second-guessing about how the first major pest-related rejection of a diplomatic gift was handled. In the *New York Times* on January 31, 1910, one columnist suggested that, instead of burning the trees, U.S. officials should have had "some carefully arranged accident happen before the time came for setting (the trees) out—an accident of the obviously unavoidable sort," so as not to embarrass anyone with reports of an infested gift.

The February 6, 1910, edition of the *Washington Post* characterized public response as "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth" at least among the "esthetically inclined." At the same time, the article introduced many readers to the costs of pests such as the Hessian fly, San Jose scale, boll weevil, and codling moth.

A Gift Takes Root

In the end, Mayor Azaki persisted with his city's planned gift despite the early setback. Soon after the first shipment was destroyed, Japanese scientists set out to prepare the next shipment. The scientists fumigated and grafted scions selected from trees along the Arakawa River to specially-selected understock.

In March of 1912, a new shipment of 3,000 trees arrived in Washington, D.C. and passed inspection. Another shipment arrived soon after. On



Japanese visitors walk along the Tidal Basin among the cherry trees in 1938. This and the other photo appear in the USDA's National Arboretum publication, "The Japanese Flowering Cherry Trees of Washington, D.C." (issued December 1977).

March 27, 1912, First Lady Taft and Viscountess Iwa Chinda, wife of Japanese Ambassador Count Sutemi Chinda, planted the first two trees on the "Speedway" (now the corridor of Independence Avenue, SW., in West Potomac Park) with little fanfare and only a few people present.

By the end of that same decade, the Plant Quarantine Act had been passed, USDA's plant import regulations—now often referred to as the Quarantine 37 regulations—had been implemented, and the Japanese cherry trees were thriving in the Capital City, drawing more tourists with each passing year.

The trees given to the United States by Japan have far outlived—and in many cases more than doubled—their average 40-year life span. To sustain the legacy of Japan's gift, officials with USDA's U.S. Arboretum have propagated the original Yoshino trees planted in 1912. Today, a special tree crew with the Department of the Interior's National Park Service continues to maintain the Japanese cherry trees and nurture the vision of their graceful presence that first blossomed long ago. ♦

FOIA 101: All Hands Needed

By Jessica Milteer

Just hearing the words “freedom of information” can make some government employees nervous. For some, the phrase can conjure up unflattering images of files being pulled and of work e-mails being sifted through. Yet, despite the uneasiness the law can inspire, The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) plays an essential role in U.S. democracy and in our efforts to serve the public.

For the agency’s Freedom of Information and Privacy Act (FOIPA) staff every day is a peek into the inner workings of democracy and the flow of information from government to the public. Their work is exacting and meticulous and, at times, can range from highly routine to highly contentious.

“This work is very important, and it takes a lot of focus and a lot of skill,” said Beth Jones, who as Acting Deputy Administrator for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) oversees the FOIPA staff.

“FOIA requests are definitely an agency-wide priority. The Administrator’s Office has put timely responses among the very top issues in APHIS’ Operating Plan,” Jones said.

FOIPA Basics

Enacted in 1966, the FOIA law was passed to provide the public with access to records kept

by Federal agencies; to give the public insight into how agencies perform their statutory duties; and to increase government accountability. Under the FOIA, Federal agencies must provide the records they maintain to those who request them as long as the information is not protected from release by one of the FOIA’s nine exemptions. The Privacy Act of 1974 is a separate law that regulates the collection, use, and dissemination of information about individuals maintained by Federal agencies. The FOIPA staff is responsible for administering both laws within APHIS. By far, FOIA requests make up the bulk of the staff’s work.

FOIPA 101: Processing Requests

APHIS receives FOIPA requests from various sources: individuals, organizations, the news media, law firms, businesses and even agency employees. The requests, which must be submitted in writing, ask for documents, ranging from permits and licenses to investigative and personnel files, among other records.

When APHIS receives a request, it first goes to the FOIPA director’s office. There, the director reviews the request, and the case is assigned to a FOIPA specialist. The specialist contacts the agency’s programs to ask for the requested documents and set a deadline. After program officials provide the documents to FOIPA, the specialist begins to review the documents and redact, or remove, information that is restricted from disclosure. The

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KeWanda McCain, a new addition to the FOIPA staff, searches for a requested file.

Betsy Guardiola: Come On Down!

By John Scott

Betsy Guardiola, long-time APHIS trainer and Price Is Right! fan, finally got the chance to “Come on Down” and be the next contestant on the game show. Betsy celebrated her appearance again by watching the show’s airing with her Riverdale coworkers in November 2006. “It was just crazy!” said Guardiola about the experience.

Although she didn’t make it to the Showcase Showdown, Guardiola did win her bid for the opening prize and get as far as earning the chance to spin the big wheel. “I had a lot of fun. Bob Barker told me he might have to call Security because I got so excited,” said Guardiola. ♦



The Man with a Golden Egg and More

By John Scott



Andy Rhorer, APHIS' director of the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP), was recently honored with the Golden Egg Award presented to him by the Indiana State Poultry Association. The Association surprised Rhorer with the organization's equivalent of a lifetime achievement award at its annual meeting on February 21.

"It was a kind of shocker. I wasn't expecting it at all. They announced it, and then up on stage they brought out my family. My kids and grandkids were all there to be a part of it," said Rhorer.

The Golden Egg follows another recent surprise award presented to Rhorer. In January, the North American Gamebird Association

honored Rhorer with its prestigious Exceptional Leadership Award at its annual convention in Orlando, Florida.

Rhorer credits the high value of the NPIP to industry and his extensive networking in the poultry and gamebird community for the recent spate of attention. "I've been around poultry for more than 38 years now, and I've been exposed to every type of feather," Rhorer said.

Rhorer has been senior coordinator for NPIP since 1991. NPIP is a cooperative industry-State-Federal program that establishes standards for the evaluation and certification of poultry breeding stock and hatchery products to ensure freedom from egg-transmitted and hatchery-disseminated diseases. ♦

FOIA 101:

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review is line by line and can be arduous as specialists routinely pour over thousands of pages of documents to ensure exempted information is not released.

Turning the Tide

Like many other Federal agencies, APHIS is facing a backlog of incoming requests. Clearing the backlog is no easy task, but the FOIPA staff is turning the tide.

Each year, the number of incoming FOIPA requests grow. To keep pace, the FOIPA staff has worked hard to increase its productivity. The staff has 13 specialists and 2 administrative support persons. At any given time, each specialist has approximately 80 pending requests to process.

In fiscal year (FY) 2006, the FOIPA staff received 1,111 requests. They processed 1,197 requests; that's 62 more than were processed in FY 2005 and an impressive 666 more than were processed in FY 2004.

All Hands Needed

Beth Jones attributes much of the staff's progress to the greater emphasis placed on the FOIPA by the agency and to the hard work of the FOIPA staff. The staff's continued success is also firmly linked to the agency's other programs and to how well they understand the

FOIA and respond to document requests.

"To consistently meet the agency's FOIA goals, it's going to consistently take an 'all hands' approach," said Kevin Shea, APHIS Associate Administrator.

"Responding to FOIA requests is an all-APHIS priority. As one of the top goals in the agency's Operating Plan, it belongs to all of us in the agency. We each need to be prepared do our part," said Shea.

Agency programs need to make sure that records are handled according to agency guidelines. Also, it is important to remember that when information is requested by the FOIPA staff, the agency's programs should provide all responsive documents. Withholding documents can later result in lawsuits and/or challenges that obligate the agency to redo the search for records.

Because the relationships between the agency's programs and the FOIPA staff are so important, the FOIPA staff routinely conducts training and is available to answer questions from program staff. For more information about a specific issue or to schedule training, the FOIPA staff can be reached by telephone at 734-8296. ♦

APHIS Manager Profile



Robert Huttenlocker
 Director, Investigative and Enforcement Services

What is your background?

I have a B.S. degree in finance and an M.B.A., both from George Mason University. I have spent my entire professional career with the U.S. Government, starting in 1989 with the Department of Treasury. In 1990, I moved to a program analyst/compliance officer position with the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). As my first supervisory position, I was hired to head the Program Support Section for AMS' Fresh Products Branch (FPB) and was later promoted to Assistant Chief of FPB. In 2002, I became director of what is now the Foreign Agricultural Service's Compliance, Security, and Emergency Planning Division. Finally, I joined APHIS as Director of Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES) in November 2006.

How long have you been with APHIS?

I've been with APHIS for about 5 months now, and every day has been a "great day to work for APHIS!"

Most memorable APHIS experiences?

This is actually an easy one. On January 18, I was in Raleigh-Durham Airport, my cell phone rang, and it was Dr. Andy Morgan and Under Secretary Knight calling. They needed to speak with an IES investigator about a "hot issue." It was nearly impossible to hear them. Fortunately, I was able to facilitate the connection, and everything worked out. That certainly is not how I would have envisioned my first interaction with the Under Secretary, but it sure is memorable.

Priorities for the coming months?

I want to learn as much as possible about IES, my staff, and our work in support of APHIS' programs. In terms of specific goals, I would put getting a handle on IES' budget at the top of the list. IES' workload has grown significantly, and we need to be able to increase staffing to respond to the demand for our services. However, we need to make decisions that will allow us to operate within our means over the long term. My second priority is to realign/restructure IES' regional offices so that

they operate as similarly as possible while reducing our employee-to-supervisor ratios. I also want to improve IES' handling of administrative management-related issues through enhanced expertise and coordination. Finally, I hope to improve communications among IES employees at all levels.

Accomplishment most proud of?

Being appointed into the Senior Executive Service is my proudest personal accomplishment professionally. From a general perspective, I'd also say that it's very satisfying to have left each of my past organizations in better shape than I found them. I am also very proud of my past accomplishments in improving diversity, particularly at the senior specialist and management levels.

Last book read?

The last book I read was *True Speed: My Racing Life* by NASCAR champion Tony Stewart. I am currently reading *Crossing the Line* by IndyCar phenomenon Danica Patrick.

Guilty pleasure?

Only one? I'd say a three scoop sundae at the local Baskin-Robbins or Hershey's. While I can't commit to all three flavors, Rocky Road is always involved.

Favorite meal?

If I had to pick one meal, it would be a big steak with melted bleu cheese, a side of grilled shrimp, lump crab meat, or crab imperial, a loaded baked potato, steamed asparagus, and a martini (or two).

Favorite movies?

I'd probably put *Top Gun*, *Gone in Sixty Seconds*, *Batman Begins*, *Eight Below*, and *Walk the Line* near the top of my list, as I tend to watch those movies again and again.

Hobbies?

I like to bowl, play basketball, and lift weights. I also collect football and auto racing memorabilia, and I like to attend/watch sporting events. ♦

Healthier-Feds Physical Activity Challenge 2007

By Ginger E. Dorsey

APHIS employees jumped in with both feet this year to take part in the 2007 HealthierFeds Physical Activity Challenge. Across the agency, more than 150 employees participated in the challenge co-hosted by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

While some employees were encouraged by the lure of awards from OPM and the President's Council, others signed up simply for the sense of personal accomplishment. In the end, the participants benefited simply by feeling healthier and more active.

The Challenge ran from January 18 until April 1 and featured two programs: one for individuals just starting to exercise and become more active, and another for individuals already active and wanting to reach higher levels of physical activity. All Federal employees and their families, as well as Federal retirees and contractors, were encouraged to get involved in the program.

Participants had a lengthy list of activities from which to choose, including walking, running, aerobics, basketball, cycling, and more. Everyone kept track of their activities by completing online activity logs.

For credit under the Challenge, participants provided copies of their activity logs at week four



APHIS employees again stepped up for fitness, taking part in the HealthierFeds Challenge, which ended April 1. Pictured are agency employees in Raleigh, North Carolina, during last October's "Focus on Fitness Day." Adrienne McKie (PPQ) finishes the fitness run/walk. (Photo provided by Work Life Wellness)

and week eight of the Challenge to their respective Work Life Wellness program coordinator.

In Their Own Words

Each APHIS program had employees enrolled in the Challenge. Some employees got organized and participated as a group. At the Center for Plant Health Science and Technology in Raleigh, North Carolina, employees formed a group calling itself the "Less-At-Risk" to encourage and support one another.

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Quick Tips:

Requesting Leave For Summer Vacation

By Nella Roberts

With summer's kickoff holiday—Memorial Day—only about 6 weeks away, many of us are starting to think about vacation plans. To help, here are some tips from the MRP Human Resources staff about requesting leave:

- Request leave well in advance. Don't wait until the week before your vacation.
- Put your request in writing or use email. It's a good idea to use OPM Form 71, which is available online at www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/forms/opm/opm71.pdf
- Clearly outline the date(s) and specific hour(s) you are requesting.
- Don't make travel reservations or book accommodations until your leave is approved. Remember, your supervisor may need you in the office during the time you want off. If a leave request is disapproved, the agency is not permitted to reimburse you for money

lost on travel deposits or non-refundable ticket purchases.

- Remember that you may use a combination of various earned leave to cover your absence. This means you may combine and/or use accrued annual leave and/or earned credit hours; compensatory time off in lieu of over time (OT) pay; or compensatory time off for travel (CTOT).
- It's recommended that you use leave in the following order: use/lose annual leave, earned compensatory time off in lieu of OT pay, and then either earned annual leave, credit hours or CTOT.

If you have additional questions, consult with your supervisor, resource management staff, or servicing Leave and Compensation Team Specialist. Contact information for your team specialist can be found at www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/employee_directory/hro_mpls.pdf. ♦

DigiTop: An Info Toolbox for Your Desk

By Mandi Frederick

When David Campbell, a chemist in the agency's Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program, tells people that he's working on synthesizing the sex pheromones of Siberian and rosy Russian moths, some people pause and ask blankly, "Why would you want to do that?" But for Campbell and others, this work is serious pest control business, and it requires the aid of a serious and agile research tool.

Fortunately for him and the rest of APHIS, all agency employees have access to DigiTop, a digital desktop library managed and run by USDA's National Agricultural Library.

What is DigiTop?

Financially supported by APHIS and other USDA agencies, DigiTop contains thousands of



journals and searchable databases. As an information resource, DigiTop is designed to meet the needs of USDA employees who are seeking information from a wide range of publications—ranging from technical scientific journals to popular publications, newspapers, and general reference

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Physical Activity Challenge

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Other agency participants joined the Challenge individually, and some took advantage of being able to have family members participate with them. Bob Stiles, an investigator with the agency's Investigative and Enforcement Services staff, ran and logged activities with his 18-year old son. "I really enjoyed it...keeping a log helps me stay motivated," said Stiles.

Stiles, who also has a pair of 14-year old twin boys, admits that his house gets very busy, especially during soccer and basketball season. "We're all pretty active...Saturdays are real busy around here," said Stiles.

Denise Davis, an office automation assistant with MRP-Business Services in Raleigh, North Carolina said, "Before the HealthierFeds Challenge, I wasn't doing much fitness-wise.

But, I was about to start a weight loss program." Using the Challenge to help with the weight program, Davis reached the Challenge's Active Lifestyle award level. "Since the Challenge, I have more energy, I feel better, and the weight is coming off," Davis said.

Mike MaGrone, a computer specialist with Wildlife Services in Olympia, Washington, credits his coworker Diotha West for getting him to participate in the Challenge.

"I'm doing more activity each day, like walking for an additional 30 minutes. I feel better now. I even found myself swimming during my recent vacation," MaGrone said.

As MaGrone and others experienced, even small increases in daily physical activity can make a difference and may encourage individuals to look for other ways to be more active. Participating in a little bit of activity each day—including doing things such as gardening or playing with your kids that may not typically be thought of as exercise—can add up to improved physical health. It is nice to know that getting more active does not always mean going to the gym and lifting weights. Every little bit of physical activity counts.

Not Too Late for Your Own Challenge

Although the HealthierFeds Challenge ended April 1, employees can still log their activities and keep physically active all year long. Even if you didn't participate in the Challenge, you can start a new activity log by visiting and registering at the HealthierFeds Web site. The address is <http://healthierfeds.presidentschallenge.org>. For more information about HealthierFeds and general fitness tips, you can also visit www.healthierfeds.gov.

Keeping an activity log for your own personal challenge can have very real benefits. As one Challenge participant said, "keeping the activity log has been good...I can see my daily progress and consistency. The log motivates me to keep active." ♦



APHIS' Dana Broussard (VS), Lori Stewart (AC), and Rhochanda McAdams (PPQ) find their stride during the fitness run/walk held last October in Raleigh. (Photo provided by Work Life Wellness)

DigiTop Info Toolbox

Continued from page 10

materials. APHIS users can access its resources from anywhere as long as they're within a USDA network.

For the research savvy, DigiTop can be thought of as USDA's version of EBSCOhost, with its focus on scholarly, peer-reviewed literature that has international scope and historical depth.

But, what makes DigiTop different, of course, is that it's primarily centered around agricultural journals and issues—a feature that makes it very popular with APHIS' entomologists, veterinarians, and other technical staff.

Again, PPQ chemist David Campbell can attest to DigiTop's value. Working in the program's Analytical and Natural Products Laboratory in Gulfport, Mississippi, Campbell carries out research for synthesizing pheromones that is often both complex and time consuming. He frequently finds himself searching for journal articles that are 50 or 60 years old or that are not written in English. With the University of Southern Mississippi's library more than 75 miles away from his Gulfport office, his research is made all the more challenging. Using DigiTop saves Campbell valuable time that he can spend carrying out his synthesis.

More than Science

In addition to agricultural science journals, DigiTop subscribes to a wide array of sources covering topics including, among others, general history, the social sciences, health and nutrition, and recent news stories. DigiTop is a valuable resource for any USDA employee trying to keep abreast of current events.

Jerome Patterson, a management analyst with the Facilities and Conference Services Branch staff, uses DigiTop weekly.

"I see DigiTop as a useful tool that allows me to find information that is not so readily available within my division," says Patterson.

And it's not just USDA employees that find DigiTop useful, as Lucy Reid, technical information specialist with PPQ's Plant Epidemiol-

ogy and Risk Analysis Laboratory (PERAL), has found.

Scientists from other agencies and countries frequently visit PERAL in Raleigh, North Carolina, for pest risk assessment training and call on Reid to assist with the basics of using DigiTop.

"They send people to us from other countries that are interested in doing pest risk assessments for fruit and vegetable commodities they want to export to the United States," says Reid.

"I train them in the first week that they're here, and they have the remainder of their visit to get the citations they need. They find it very useful."

Rising to the Challenge

What happens when you can't find what you're looking for? Fortunately, DigiTop has a support staff that can help you. That was the case when Campbell was trying to locate a technical article in a Chinese journal. Not only was it not available on DigiTop, it wasn't even available in English yet. Campbell called Eileen Welch, an information resource manager and DigiTop liaison, who was able to locate the article and have it translated and sent to Campbell.

Lucy Reid found herself in a similar situation when PPQ laboratory staff began asking how they could get access to a database called "Web of Science."

She in turn approached DigiTop managers about adding the database to their collection. In response, she was steered to a similar citation tool called Scopus that was already available through DigiTop. When Reid compared the two, she found that the Scopus tool within DigiTop is easier to use and that it produces more results.

"I directed many of the PERAL scientists to it, and everyone seems to be very happy with it," says Reid. ♦

DigiTop, NAL's digital desktop library, is a valuable resource for APHIS employees. It's available for all employees using the APHIS computer network. You can access DigiTop at <http://digitop.nal.usda.gov/>.

Update: APHIS Web Migration

By Donna M. Hodge
Wheatherby

On February 3, 2007, APHIS launched its newly redesigned Web site. Much more than just a surface makeover, the new site was reworked to match the look and feel of USDA's Web site and to re-organize content in ways that improve public access to agency information.

"Our hope is that both employees and stakeholders will benefit from the new site and the improved content management," said Ed Curlett, APHIS' director of Public Affairs.

APHIS' Web site is one of the agency's most important tools for communicating with the public. The new design and its launch took months of planning and hard work by staff in several programs, including Legislative and Public Affairs, Information Technology Division, and the agency's program web managers.

What's Been Done?

The new site structures information around the Agency's various functions, rather than by sorting and separating information strictly along program lines. As a result, the Web site's top-level pages have undergone a big transformation in both content and organization.

So far, the agency has updated and converted about 85 percent or approximately 8,000 pages of the APHIS Web site to the new design. Work will continue in phases until the remaining pages have been revamped. During the ongoing conversion, agency staff are also reviewing the site's content, and they are removing or updating information that is repetitive or outdated.

What Does the Reader Gain?

From the perspective of visitors to the Web site, the changes are good news. For employees and stakeholders alike, the redesign project is making information about the agency's mission, activities, and services more accessible.

When visiting the Web site, you may first notice that the design and navigational features mimic USDA's site. As required by the Department, the new design helps present a more clear and consistent USDA image to our stakeholders.

With the new design, information is now presented in a way that organizes content more intuitively around the fundamental questions of

what does the reader want to do and/or what does the reader want to know? For example, the new structure recognizes that a new visitor to the Web site may want an animal health permit but not know that he or she needs to contact the agency's Veterinary Services program's National Center for Import and Export.

The result is a Web site that makes it faster and easier for customers to find what they're looking for, even if it's their first visit to the site.

"The layout's different, but finding information on the new site has been easy," said Stacie Johnston who works in MRP-Business Services.

What's Coming? Content Management

Like all other USDA agencies, APHIS is now required to make its web content available in a seamless pass-through to USDA's Web site. The goal is to create for web users an electronically transparent flow of information from the agencies up to the Department's site. This means, for example, that when a user is browsing USDA's site for information on an issue that—unknownst to them—is an APHIS issue, the user isn't visibly referred or linked downward to the agency's site; instead, the information is pulled seamlessly upward to the user who is accessing the Department's site. The net effect is that the emphasis on governmental bureaucratic layering is greatly diminished. What emerges in its place is an emphasis on connecting the user to accurate information as quickly and consistently as possible.

This approach to integrating information requires the use of a web content management system to ensure navigational ease and that content is accurate, consistent and not duplicative. With these objectives in mind, APHIS will move all web content to Stellent, the web content management system that will be used throughout all of USDA. Stellent will be used to manage and approve content prior to posting it on the agency's web site. While Stellent is completely transparent to Web site users, it will help keep APHIS on track with the Department's goals for integrating information on the web. ♦

Bug Busters: PPQ Collaborates with Indiana State Police

By Gary Roush

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Facts

EAB is a destructive, wood-boring beetle from Asia that infests ash trees and has already resulted in the destruction of more than 20 million U.S. trees. EAB was first detected in southeast Michigan and an adjacent area in Canada in July 2002. The pest was discovered to have spread to Ohio in 2003, to Indiana in 2004, and to Illinois in 2006.

In December 2006, the entire States of Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio were placed under quarantine by a Federal Order, joining the lower peninsula of Michigan. EAB was also detected in 2003 in isolated infestations in nursery stock in Fairfax County, Virginia, and in Prince Georges County, Maryland. EAB larvae were re-discovered in 2006 in ash trees in southern Prince Georges County.

What would you do if you were one of only two regulatory officers assigned to safeguard more than 36,000 square miles of a State quarantined for two very aggressive invasive forest pests? Well, if you're Rick McKay—a plant health safeguarding specialist in the Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program—you would get creative pretty fast and look for ways to build helpful partnerships.

As a 10-year veteran in PPQ, McKay began a new position in Indiana in 2006 to focus primarily on regulatory enforcement efforts for the emerald ash borer (EAB) and gypsy moth quarantines. Faced with the formidable task of regulating the movement of unprocessed wood products such as logs, firewood, and pallets throughout Indiana, McKay decided to seek help from the Motor Carrier Enforcement (MCE) division of the Indiana State Police. MCE officers staff weigh stations and conduct spot checks of commercial vehicles 24 hours a day, to ensure that truckers comply with weight limits and mechanical safety requirements.

Help Wanted

Sensing a potential partner for APHIS' quarantine activities, McKay broached the idea of a collaborative inspection effort with MCE's commander, Major Ed Reuter. After explaining PPQ's limited resources to enforce its quarantine regulations out on America's roads, McKay showed Reuter a tracking sheet he designed to document the movement of regulated articles on Indiana's roadways. Quickly warming to the idea, Reuter sent copies of the tracking sheet to all of the State's MCE posts to incorporate into their inspection activities. Reuter then invited McKay and PPQ officers from neighboring regions to participate in MCE's annual meeting with counterparts from adjoining States. Moreover, MCE designated PPQ's regulated articles as the primary inspection targets during four cooperative multi-State MCE exercises. PPQ officials participated in all of these two-day exercises, which were held in each corner of the State.

Partnership Brings Results

As a result of McKay and Reuter's efforts, PPQ officers in Indiana—now a larger staff—often work alongside MCE inspectors at weigh stations and ride along with them on Indiana's roadways. During one of McKay's ride-alongs with an MCE



PPQ officers, including Gary Moughler (pictured above), regularly work alongside MCE inspectors at State weigh stations and on the road. During the day of this photo, the joint activities nabbed a truck transporting logs in violation of Federal gypsy moth quarantines. (Photo by R. McKesy)

officer, they stopped a truck for inspection and found it to be carrying a full load of ash logs from Michigan showing symptoms of EAB infestation. After issuing an Emergency Action Notification, McKay and the MCE officer escorted the truck back to the Michigan State line.

Because of the enhanced regulatory enforcement, McKay believes that industry's awareness of the quarantine is growing and that compliance has significantly increased in Indiana. This has happened in large part due to the outstanding interagency cooperative spirit of the State Police/MCE inspectors throughout Indiana.

MCE officers throughout the State now fax information to PPQ on as many as 15 incidents each week detailing the movement of regulated articles. Armed with data documenting the commodity, point of departure, and destination, PPQ officers to date have detected four quarantine violations that have resulted in the issuance of administrative stipulations.

To recognize the State's efforts, McKay recently attended the Indiana State Police's annual awards ceremony on April 24 to honor Commander Reuter (now retired) and seven MCE inspectors for their outstanding cooperative service.

Building upon the collaborative relationship, MCE has requested that PPQ design training modules to incorporate into their annual in-service training. Training sessions under development for 2007 will focus on regulatory program procedures; documentation of the movement of regulated wood products; and the background, lifestages, and environmental impact of EAB and gypsy moth. ♦

Spreading Weeds Awareness

By John Scott

With the help of environmental celebrities Woody Owl and Woody Weed, organizers of National Invasive Weed Awareness Week are working to spread the word about harmful invasive weeds in the United States. National “Weeds Week” opened this year with a family oriented program hosted by the Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition in cooperation with the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C.

Now in its eighth year, “Weeds Week” brings together representatives from industry associations, professional societies, non-governmental organizations and State and Federal agencies around the common goals of controlling invasive weeds and providing information about them.

This year about 150 attendees, including APHIS and other USDA officials, participated in the full week of events—many of which focused on sharing information, raising weeds awareness, and showcasing successful control strategies from across the country.



“It’s always a great opportunity for State and local weed authorities to connect all at the same time with Federal agencies and leaders. The events also help bring public focus to the invasive weeds problem,” said Al Tasker, APHIS National Noxious Weed Program Manager. ♦

Spring Cleaning at Your Desk

By John Scott

Spring cleaning may bring to mind images of mops, buckets, and brooms, but you may also want to think about your cubicle’s phone, keyboard, mouse, and desktop.

A team of University of Arizona researchers have released several studies since 2002 focused on their sampling of germs and bacteria in office environments. Their latest study, funded by the Clorox Company, ranked the germiest workplace surfaces. Telephones ranked number one on the list, followed by the keyboard, mouse, and desktop.

The group’s earlier 2002 study found some telephones with more than 25,000 germs per square inch and desktops with nearly 21,000 germs per square inch. The group’s studies have repeatedly shown that personal work areas often have higher bacteria levels than common areas at work.

Many people eat lunch or snack at their desk and never think about cleaning it. As lead researcher Dr. Charles Gerba told CNN, “Nobody ever cleans a desktop until they start sticking to it, from what we’ve found.” Add to this the fact that most office cleaning staffs don’t disturb personal work areas to wipe them down, and you have a pretty good recipe for regular contact with germs and bacteria.

Wiping Down and Washing Up

Like your kitchen countertop at home, you may want to regularly wipe down your desktop and clean other potentially germey areas in your cube—especially if you’re among those of us who eat lunch or snack at our computers.

The things we touch frequently throughout the day act as transfer points for moving germs and bacteria around by hand. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), germs can live for 2 hours or more on work surfaces like tables and desks. Periodically wiping work surfaces with disinfectant wipes or, if appropriate, warm soapy water will help reduce the amount of germs and bacteria within the reach of your hands.

The other part of the cleanliness equation is to take care of the germs and bacteria that reach your hands before they get any further. This means good old-fashioned handwashing.

The CDC’s advice is to wash hands frequently with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds. As a timer, they suggest washing while you imagine singing “Happy Birthday” twice to a friend.

If washing with soap and water isn’t convenient, CDC recommends using alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers and following the instructions on the product labels. ♦

APHIS Calendar

April

Western Plant Board 2007 Annual Meeting, April 30 through May 3 in Sun River, Oregon.

Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI)-VMO training, April 30 through May 11 in Riverdale, Maryland. All AQI-VMOs will participate.

May

National Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Check e-mail for upcoming events.

Containment Facility Inspection Training, May 14 in Riverdale, Maryland. Many PPQ field employees will participate.

Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) National Leadership Training Conference, May 29 through June 1, in Arlington, Virginia.

June

All APHIS: Cybersecurity Awareness Training to be completed by June 30, 2007; curriculum for the 2007 IT Security/Privacy Training is available on <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>.

APHIS Work Life Wellness Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony, June 18-22 in Dallas, Texas.

Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) Annual Conference, June 25-29 in Tucson, Arizona.

July

Federally Employed Women (FEW) National Training Conference, July 16-20 in Washington, D.C.

National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Managers Annual Meeting, July 16-17 in Savannah, Georgia.

Also, visit the APHIS Work Life Wellness Web site (<http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/wlw>) for additional upcoming area activities.

Wanted: Your Feedback

The best way we can make Inside APHIS a newsletter that serves you is to hear from you. So, take a minute and send us an e-mail. Let us know your thoughts about what you see here. Fill us in on your likes, dislikes, or pass along your suggestions and ideas for stories.

Feel free to brag about a coworker. Give us a work tip. Tell us what others may need to know to help build a better APHIS. Or, simply share a story about a rewarding experience or a meaningful thank-you received from the public we serve. Call John Scott, *Inside APHIS* editor, or send your e-mails to: inside.aphis@aphis.usda.gov ♦