

ORM NEWS

**From the Office of the Deputy
Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs**



December 2002

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

It's that time of year again, when I have the opportunity to extend to each of you and your families my sincerest "Season's Greetings" and a "Happy and Prosperous New Year".



Sharing is caring. I believe we should all take this time to share with our loved ones and those less fortunate than ourselves the true meaning of this season.

I want to again, take this time to thank each of you for a successful year in 2002. We have many challenges ahead of us in the upcoming year and I know we will meet those challenges.

Our successes of the past provide me the bases to be confident about what we will accomplish next year and thereafter. I look forward to the new-year and to working with you as we move into the future by building upon our solid foundation. Again, from my family and myself "*Happy Holiday's and Season's Greetings.*"

James S. Jones



Highlights of Regulations and Programs

ORM Realignment

ORM is currently undertaking a “Service and Resource Alignment (SARA)” to better utilize our resources and improve the delivery of our services. Some of the benefits of SARA are:

- Uniform Quality of Service
- Improved Cost Effectiveness
- National ORM Perspective
- Seamless Service
- Maximize use of technology

SARA will enable ORM to make effective use of FTE while meeting established performance goals and will result in a more efficient operation and greater consistency of service.

When fully implemented during FY 2003, SARA will result in the merger of several field offices and the creation of three new program areas. The new program areas are Customer Service; Quality Assurance; and Enterprise activities. This merger will enable ORM to better utilize its resources to provide more efficient service to our customers.

ORM field offices will be located in: Lyons, NY; Washington, DC; Bay Pines, FL; Cleveland, OH; Little Rock, AR; Houston, TX; and Vancouver, WA.

With the merger of field offices we now have fifteen satellite offices located throughout the U.S. Satellite offices are located in Hines, IL; Leavenworth, KS; Palo Alto, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Long Beach, CA; Fayetteville, NC; Lake City, FL; Detroit, MI; Amarillo, TX; Denver, CO; St. Louis, MO; Murfreesboro, TN; New York, NY; Bedford, MA; Pittsburg, PA.

Additional information on the realignment process will be provided to you, as it becomes available.

Customer Service Program

During FY 2002, considerable effort was devoted to improving communication with our stakeholders. This resulted in the creation of the ORM "Customer Service Program". This program identifies our stakeholders and a variety of opportunities to obtain feedback from our customers. Routinely, ORM solicits feedback from individuals following their involvement in the complaint process. However, under the auspices of the customer service program, ORM took advantage of having direct access to approximately 700 attendees at the National Leaders' conference to conduct a customer satisfaction survey regarding the services provided by ORM. The results of this survey indicated 94% of the 160 responses were favorable towards ORM. Survey participants included representatives from each administration and Central Office staff offices.

ORM Stakeholders Council

Another significant initiative to improve communication with our customers was the creation of the ORM "Stakeholders Council". The Stakeholders Council consists of multiple representatives from each administration; representatives from General Counsel, Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA); Dispute Resolution; Human Resources; and Policy and Planning. The representatives from the administrations include central office as well as field operations. The council provides an excellent forum for ORM to find out what our customers want and need and also allows us to find out how well we provide services. The first council meeting was held in September 2002, and will meet quarterly in Washington, DC.

Quality Assurance Program

To ensure we maintain and improve our services, ORM has also established a "Quality Assurance Program" designed to evaluate the quality and timeliness of services. This ongoing internal assessment program will enable ORM to identify: out of line situations at any ORM office; inconsistencies in service; the need to reevaluate work processes; best practices; and training needs. Based on an established schedule, each ORM field office will be visited by a review team to conduct an internal audit regarding the quality and timeliness of complaint processing activities in that office.

FY 2002 Complaint Processing Update

We take great pride in having the best complaint processing time in federal government. ORM is referred to by EEOC as “the way to do it”. As an indication of our expertise in this area, ORM was asked by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to conduct EEO complaint processing training for EEOC judges. ORM has conducted 16 training sessions since FY 2001.

Since the inception of ORM in 1997, there has been a constant fluctuation in workload trends. During this time we have improved counseling processing time, successfully eliminated the initial backlog of investigations and provided extensive training for ORM employees.

These efforts resulted in improved quality and processing times:

- ❑ The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) standard for completing counseling is 30 days for EEO counseling. Our average counseling time during FY 2002 was 26 days.
- ❑ We processed 4,772 counseling events in FY 2002, compared to 5,307 in FY 2001. Of these 4, 772 contacts, 95% were counseled within 30 days. ORM is committed to assisting the Department in maintaining and improving this outstanding rate.
- ❑ In FY 2002, 2,258 formal complaints were filed with ORM. This is a 5% increase over FY 2001 when 2,129 formal complaints were filed. During FY 2002, 2,514 complaints were resolved in the informal stage. After contact with our counselors, 52% of the complainants who initiated informal contact did not file a formal complaint.
- ❑ Our overall processing time for investigations in FY 2002 was 202 days. The EEOC standard of 180 days was reached for several different months during the fiscal year. EEOC reports that VA had the 2nd best processing time compared to other cabinet level agencies.
- ❑ We conducted 1,518 investigations in FY 2002, compared to 1,921 investigations in FY 2001.
- ❑ We completed 88% of the pending investigations within 180 days during FY 2002. The other 12 percent were completed in 181 to 361 days. The EEO standard for completing investigations is 180 days.
Our goal for FY 2003 is to average 180 days per investigation.
- ❑ We conducted 2,270 procedural reviews in FY 2002. Our average processing time for procedural reviews was 54 days in FY 2002 compared to 73.3 days in FY 2001.
- ❑ As of September 30, 2002, there were 2,137 complaints pending in ORM, compared to 1,474 complaints pending on September 30, 2001. This increase in the number of pending complaints is tied to the increase in the number of complaints filed during FY 2002.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Update



ORM is committed to the resolution of disputes at the lowest level.

ORM has devoted an enormous amount of time and resources towards promoting the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in VA. All aggrieved individuals contacting ORM are provided information regarding ADR. However, there is a critical need to promote the value of ADR to VA management as well as employees not involved in the EEO complaint process.

Whenever opportunities arise, ORM communicates the impact early resolution can have on the workplace so that ultimately employees can focus on providing quality service to veterans. During FY 2002, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for ORM made numerous presentations reinforcing the need to address workplace disputes as early as possible to such groups as the 2001 and 2002 Leadership VA classes and the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) National Leadership Board.

As a result of meetings held with the Deputy Secretary, agency guidance was issued on May 24, 2002, requiring managers to provide justification if they decline to participate in mediation and for each administration to establish an ADR coordinator position. Executive mediation training for all GS 15's and Senior Executives assigned to VA Central Office is planned for January 2003.

ORM's ADR plan is being converted into an agency management directive to ensure VA's compliance with the EEOC requirement to incorporate ADR into the complaint process. Meetings have been held with the Under Secretary for Health and the Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits to discuss the need to assess existing ADR programs and develop strategies for expanding the use of ADR.

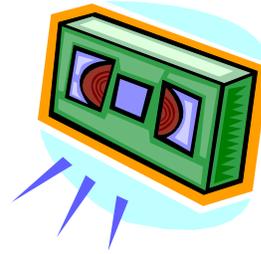
ORM has also developed an ADR/Mediation Web based tracking system to record and monitor ADR/Mediation cases VA wide. VA facility ADR coordinators will use this system to track these cases.

ORM, in conjunction with the VA Office of Alternate Dispute Resolution and Mediation, prepared a workplace conflict guide. This handbook entitled "Workplace Conflict Guide" is available on-line at the VA's ADR Web site <http://www.va.gov/adr/index.htm>.

Mediation Training Videos

We revised our **“The Mediation Zone”** videotape, which is now used throughout the Department for mediation awareness programs. Copies of this video are available at ORM Field offices and copies will be made available to facility ADR coordinators during FY2003. Facility ADR Coordinators are encouraged

to use the video as a marketing tool for their network/facility ADR programs. ORM will also provide them with brochures and posters to help publicize ADR. Another video, **“Coaching the Student Mediator”**, focuses on developmental coaching of new mediators. These videos were developed by our Learning Resource Center.



Important Information on Conference Contracts

All contracts must meet federal contracting laws, regulations and organizational procedures. The Contract Administrator for ORM, Armenda Daye, should be contacted immediately whenever there is a requirement for a conference contract or any contracts with a hotel. All proposed conference contracts, expected to exceed \$25, 0000 require legal and technical reviews prior to signature by a contracting officer. Only a warranted contracting officer has the legal authority to obligate the Government; this includes technical changes to signed contracts. Unauthorized commitments violate the Anti-Deficiency Act.

Reminder: Protecting Confidential Information

How safe is that confidential information being sent by fax? Do you know? Do you lock your office, your files or your desk to make sure confidential information in your possession does not end up in the wrong hands? What about confidential information being sent by fax? What happens on the other end? Could it fall into the wrong hands? It's the responsibility of the sender and the receiver to ensure this doesn't happen. Call ahead, make sure the receiving party is there to get this information. Pick it up right away if you are the receiver. Confidential information must be protected no matter how it is transmitted. Let's do our part to ensure that confidential information remains confidential.



Office Notes

Bay Pines Field Office

Again this year, employees in the Bay Pines Field Office have participated in Samaritan's Purse project "Operation Christmas Child."



Bill Low, Kelly Bonser, Florine McCall, Mary Ann Leloia, Diana Ford, Winston Johnson, Alycicia Tirado, Rosalind Smith, Patty Draucker, Ricky Rowe, Charlene Jones and Karen Greene filled shoeboxes with toys, candy, school supplies, hygiene items, and other gifts. These boxes will be part of the gifts being delivered by Operation Christmas Child to more than 6 million children in over 100 impoverished countries. In addition to Operation Christmas Child, Samaritan's Purse is an organization with many ministries, and works in partnership with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in relief projects, at home and overseas.

Office of the COO

On November 6, 2002, VA Central Office hosted a celebration in commemoration of Native American Heritage Month. This year's event included American Indian ceremonial dancing demonstrated by Mark Tayac from the Piscataway Nation and his fellow dancers. **Linda Heard**, Office of the COO, served on the 2002 Native American Heritage Committee. Ms. Heard, who is of American Indian decent,

recited poems written by the Micmac and Mohawk Nations. Indian Soup and other refreshments were available for everyone after the event. Deputy Secretary Mackay was in attendance and spoke from the heart as he enlightened the audience on the many contributions of Native American Indians to our Nation.

Vancouver Field Office

The Vancouver Office is proud to announce the addition to our staff of Ms. **D'hena Albert**, a senior, from Fort Vancouver High School. The office was asked to participate in VA's Career Focus Program where the VAMC Portland adopted a high school or high schools and we were one of the fortunate offices to get one of the 40-seniors participating in the program. Please join us in welcoming D'hena to the ORM family.

Robert Talley would like to pass along his personal thanks to everyone in the ORM family who sent emails, letters, cards and notes to him and his family on the recent death of his mother.

The Vancouver ORM Field Office would like to extend to one and all, within and outside the ORM Family, our wishes for a very safe and blessed holiday season. **Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!**
From your ORM friends and family in Vancouver.

Washington Field Office

Farewell and congratulations to **Lorraine Blount**, Administrative Officer, retired November 30, 2002, after 35 years of federal service. We wish her well and will miss her very much!

On November 26th, employees of the Washington Field Office sponsored a brown bag lunch to feed the homeless. Twenty brown-bag lunches were given to the homeless at various locations within the DC area. The Office also sponsored a food drive on November 27th by donating a food basket, complete with a turkey, to "Martha's Table" which is a non-profit service organization dedicated to assisting needy people. Special thanks to **Waltrunette Gardner** for her donation of a turkey and to all of the employees who contributed to this effort.

Coordinators for these events included **Cheryl Campbell**, **Fred Smith**, and **Ronnica Snowden**. Kudos for their successful efforts.

Cheryl Campbell, EEO Counselor, walked in the 15th Annual "Help the Homeless" 5K Walkathon on Saturday, November 23, 2002, on the National Mall.

DAS Staff

Anthony "Tony" Hawkins, Special Assistant to the DAS, and **Alice Bell**, Co-Team Leader of our environmental assessment program (OCAP), are both retiring at the end of December after many years of combined government service. Both are long time VA employees and will be missed by their many VA friends and co-workers.

Bedford Field Office

Shirley Pfleider, C-1 EEO Investigator, who is leaving us soon for retirement, wanted to share the following:

"For all those I have met along the way during my 27 years, I wish you continued success along life's journey. I have met wonderful people, shared many joys and some sorrows along the way, and I look forward to hearing of your successes in the future! Best of luck with future endeavors in ORM and our one VA family!"

Lyons ORM Field Office

On Tuesday November 5, 2002, the Lyons Field Office held its' 4th Annual All-Employee Staff Conference/Awards Ceremony. At this event annual awards were given out to employees of the Lyons Field Office who have displayed exceptional performance of their duties during the course of the Fiscal Year.

Jeannine Burton, Intake Specialist/Counselor Team Leader, was presented the award for the Lyons ORM Employee of the Year. During the year, in addition to her exceptional job as an Intake Specialist, Jeannine has guided the Lyons counselors in the performance of their duties and has assured that the counseling process at the Lyons Office is effective as well as efficient.

Cecelia Stark and **Carol Williams**, Program Assistants, were presented the award for the Lyons ORM Team of the Year. During the course of the year, they worked together to ensure a seamless flow of work into and out of the office. They exemplify the true meaning of teamwork through their ability to assist each other, complete all tasks and always make sure that they are available to assist the other staff members of the Lyons Office.

In addition to the Employee of the Year and Team of the Year, awards were also given out to those employees who excelled in specific aspects of their position. They were recognized for their professionalism, fact-finding skills, and their willingness to follow through on all avenues of resolution to help complainants resolve their issues. These employees are:

Milagros Andino, EEO Counselor, was recognized for having the highest percentage of her counseling events withdrawn prior to filing of a formal complaint during this fiscal year.

Gregory Jones, EEO Counselor, was recognized for the receiving the most "Kudo" awards (which are small, on-the-spot recognition awards given to staff at the Lyons office during the course of the year) during this fiscal year.

Amelia McCottry, Intake Specialist, was recognized for completing the most procedural decisions of any of the Intake Specialists at the Lyons Office. Amelia completed 106 procedural decisions during FY02, which were 34 procedural decisions above the annual performance standard.

Marjorie McNutt, EEO Investigator, was recognized for completing all of her assigned investigations within established time frames, assuring that none of her cases went over 180 days.

Edwin Muller, EEO Counselor, was recognized for having the highest percentage of counseling events enter into ADR during this fiscal year.

Jacqueline Velez, EEO Counselor, was recognized for having the highest percentage of settled counseling events during the fiscal year.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Leavenworth Field Office

The Leavenworth Field Office, Denver Satellite Office and St. Louis Satellite Office got together the week of November 18 to discuss "best practices" for each discipline. We also took this opportunity to celebrated Thanksgiving with a delicious potluck meal. The staff participated in a "White Elephant" gift exchange with lots of laughs for all. The week ended with a baby photo contest. Staff examined baby photos of other staff members and tried to connect them to the appropriate person. **Sue Thorson** had the most correct guesses.

Charlotte Jones, Field Manager, was invited to attend the VISN 23 Program Managers meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, on November 19, 2002. She provided information on ORM, workload, and WBTS reports. **Jack Frost**, C2, has been out of the Leavenworth Field Office due to an extended illness. We ask the ORM family to keep Jack and his family in your thoughts and prayers.

Did You Know?

HR NEWS

The “Fourth R” - The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) recently added a new incentive designed to attract and retain highly qualified employees. Dubbed “the fourth R,” the repayment of student loan policy joins the retention allowance, the recruitment and relocation bonus policies as a recruitment and retention tool. Employees may be considered for student loan repayment assistance up to \$6,000 per calendar year, with a \$40,000 lifetime maximum for any individual. Loan repayments may be applied to an outstanding federally insured student loan or loans previously taken out by a highly qualified candidate to whom an offer of employment has been made or to current VA employees, when necessary to recruit or retain these personnel. Most full and part-time Title 5 (GS and GW) and Title 38 hybrid employees are eligible for loan repayments under this program. VA published this policy, October 9, in VA Handbook 5007/2. The handbook is available on the OHRM Web site. For more information on this policy, contact Deborah Allen on (202) 273-9700.

New Recruitment and Job Opportunity Web Site

OHRM launched a new recruitment Web site at <http://www.va.gov/jobs/> to create a one stop, user friendly, and visually appealing site to prospective employees. This site will be updated to include information on upcoming job fairs where VA will be in attendance, and links specifically aimed at graduating college students and recently discharged military personnel. This Web site is a first step in enhancing VA’s focus on recruitment and marketing, and attracting the next generation of employees into the VA’s workforce.

“FOR YOUR SAFETY” A Few Security Tips



With the Holiday season rapidly approaching, many of us are looking forward to time away from the office to spend with our families. Those who commit office thefts are also looking forward to the Holiday season when many people are much more relaxed and firms are short staffed. The Holiday season is a busy time of the year for all and is also the time of year when office thefts reach its peak. The following tips are reminders on how we can reduce the occurrences of office thefts and increase personal safety.

- ❑ **Never leave your reception area unattended.**
- ❑ **Report all suspicious persons to the proper authorities.**
- ❑ **Do not allow delivery persons to wander around the office unattended.**
- ❑ **Keep valuables (cash, wallets, and laptops) in a safe place. Avoid putting purses under your desk or in a lower desk drawer or leaving your wallet in your jacket hanging behind your office door.**
- ❑ **Never leave your desk with valuables in sight.**
- ❑ **Do not send repairman to an empty office to use the telephone. Instead offer to dial the number for them or escort them to a phone and stay with them while they make their call.**
- ❑ **Do not allow workman free access to your space. Management will inform you when we plan to perform maintenance in your space. Call to verify.**
- ❑ **Above all, be alert and question strangers. Ask for a business card or a badge. Ask with whom they have an appointment and escort them to that person's office. Office creepers will take the path of least resistance, if you question them, they will likely leave.**
- ❑ **Call for assistance before confronting someone, who cannot satisfactorily demonstrate their identity or their purpose in your office.**

ORM NEWS is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Please E-mail Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst, or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program Manager, to submit your recommendations, suggestions, or comments on the information presented in this newsletter. We can be reached at (202) 501-2800. Back copies of the newsletter can be found on our Web site at <http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>.