

ORM NEWS

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



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From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Season's Greetings and a Happy and Prosperous New Year



Another year has come and gone and the holiday season is upon us again. Please take time to share the true meaning of the season with loved ones and those less fortunate than us. One way to help those in need is by participating in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) whose theme this year was "You've Got the Power to Help." I hope each of us considered participating in this very worthwhile effort.

Have a happy, healthy, and rewarding 2004.

James S. Jones

In this month's edition:

Cleveland Field Office Exceeds Performance Goals.....	Page 2
Root Cause Report and Newsletter.....	Page 3
QA Corner –What's QA?.....	Page 3
Task Force on the Employment and Advancement Of Women in VA.....	Page 5
Ten Worst Mistakes Federal Employees Make When Considering Retirement.....	Page 9

Program Highlights

Congratulations!

Cleveland Field Office Exceeds Performance Goals



The Cleveland Field Office (Great Lakes Operations), headed by [Twanna Halstead](#), is to be congratulated for meeting several of our primary performance goals during fiscal year 2003. Employees of the Cleveland Office exceeded performance standards in the following categories:

- ❑ Informal counseling (without ADR) 27.4 days (EEOC Standard is 30).
- ❑ Informal counseling (with ADR) 68.7 days (EEOC Standard is 90).
- ❑ Days to investigate complaints 156.2 days (EEOC standard is 180).

Cleveland's accomplishments in achieving these goals are noteworthy and clearly show that we can meet and exceed our performance standards with team- work and by focusing on the tasks at hand. They have been recognized for their accomplishments with a group award. Again, Congratulations.

James S. Jones
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management



Root Cause Analysis Report and the Root Cause Newsletter

The *Root Cause Analysis Report* for the 1st and 2nd quarters of fiscal year 2003 and the new *Root Cause Newsletter* can now be viewed on-line at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/WhatsNew.htm>. Here are examples of the information found in these publications:

- During the 1st and 2nd quarters of FY 2003, 2,100 individuals contacted an EEO counselor. In 41 percent of these contacts, the root cause category selected as the main reason for initiation of the complaint was *Employer versus Employee Value Systems: Conflicting Work Ethics*.
- *Personal Problems that Extend into the Working Environment and Inconsistent Application of Rules and Regulations* round out the top three causes of complaints.

To find out more about the *Root Cause Analysis Report* and the *Root Cause Newsletter*, contact the Office of Policy and Compliance at (202) 501-2680.

QA CORNER

WHAT IS QA?

Quality Assurance (QA) is an objective and systematic examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an independent assessment of the performance of a government organization, program, activity or function. Quality assurance assessments provide information to improve quality, timeliness and identify best practices to help facilitate decision-making by ORM leadership.



The Quality Assurance review team has completed two on-site reviews at Bay Pines and Lyons. Plans are being made to conduct on-site visits at remaining ORM offices over the course of the current fiscal year. In addition to the on-site quality assurance reviews, we are also working on enhancements to the Web Based Tracking System. The Quality Assurance Program, headed by Peggy Joyner, has a number of other initiatives underway, **SO STAY TUNED!**



ADR Awareness/Introduction to ADR Training Slides

Want to know more about Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)? VA's Office of Alternate Dispute Resolution and Mediation, as part of its ADR training initiative, offers a slide presentation entitled *ADR Awareness - Introduction to ADR Training Slides* at www.va.gov/adr. Click on *ADR Training* to view this presentation that provides a step-by-step overview of the mediation process. This presentation is recommended to anyone interested in the mediation process and how it works. ■

Passwords

Passwords are important tools for getting your job done. They ensure you have access to the information you need. Keep your password secret to protect yourself and your work. If you have several passwords, it is permissible to record and store them in a safe place. Passwords should be constructed of at least eight characters, using three of the following four kinds of characters; upper case letters, lower-case letters, numbers, and "special characters", such as #, &, *, or @. They should be changed every 90 days. For more information about passwords, ask your Information Security Officer (ISO).

"Best Places to Work in the Government"

An article in the November 17, 2003, Federal Times featured "Best Places to Work" in the federal government. VA was ranked 17th out of the 28 agencies assessed in the Office of Personnel Management's 2002 *Federal Human Capital Survey*. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was the top ranked agency overall. Agencies were ranked on overall employee satisfaction, as well as in ten work environment categories including effective leadership, performance-based rewards and advancement, family-friendly culture, and benefits.

VA tied NASA for the number one spot in the category "Matching employee skills and missions." VA employees feel their skills and talents are used effectively. They get satisfaction from their work and understand how their jobs are relevant to VA's organizational mission.

Liz Hawkins

Office of Policy and Compliance

Task Force on the Employment And Advancement of Women in the VA

The Secretary's Task Force on the Employment and Advancement of Women was formed at the direction of Secretary Principi in 2002 after he met with 28 women at the GS-14 and above grade levels to discuss concerns regarding the employment, training, and advancement of women in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).



After gathering and analyzing data and best practices used by organizations recognized for excellence in the employment and advancement of women, the Task Force developed three strategic goals:

Goal 1: Increase Internal and External Recruitment and Retention Programs Designed to Attract and Promote Women.

Goal 2: Develop and Enhance Education and Training Programs Designed to Advance Women.

Goal 3: Foster a Corporate Culture that Proactively Integrates Women into GS-13, GS-14, GS15, and Senior Executive Service Positions.

The Task Forces' 2003 Report to the Secretary closes with the following:

“Creating an organizational climate that respects and values women is not only the right thing to do, it is a business imperative crucial to VA’s success in meeting its strategic goal to deliver and provide world-class service, as well as support the President’s Management Agenda for Human Capital. The bottom line is we must not only “talk the talk but walk the walk.” VA’s core values, particularly respect, teamwork, and integrity, are closely tied to VA’s future vision for an organization that values diversity and uses it as a catalyst for teamwork and innovation in achieving its mission.

Additionally, some of the benefits we expect to derive by improving opportunities for women are: ability to attract the best candidates and increased job satisfaction, which translates into lower absenteeism and turnover and higher levels of creativity and performance.

To strengthen VA’s commitment to diversity, the Task Force developed enabling goals and specific strategies for success that incorporate management practices necessary to support our beliefs and values regarding the inclusion of women in the senior executive ranks. These

strategies will provide the basis for establishing a framework of effective processes and will enable VA to become a workplace of excellence.

Finally, the Department's success or failure in fulfilling its mission will depend on the willingness of each supervisor, manager, and executive to lead with integrity and demonstrate a commitment to an environment that truly recognizes, trains, and promotes women. Only when new levels of responsibility and accountability are achieved will VA move from our current position - last among all of the cabinet level agencies for women above grade GS-13 – to a position of leadership in diversity excellence.” ■

Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) Maximum Contribution Increased and FSA Open Season Extended



The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has just informed Federal agencies about recent changes to the FSA program and open season. The maximum contribution that employees can elect under the health care FSA (HCFSA) has increased to \$4,000. The decision to raise the limit was prompted by the recent IRS announcement that over-the-counter medicines may be reimbursed under a HCFSA. In addition, to allow employees more time to consider how much to elect, OPM extended the FSA open season one week.

FSA Open Season Now Ends December 15th

Office Notes



Judging by the responses we've received, last month's edition of ORM News was a rousing success. Thanks to everyone who submitted military profiles and to those who responded so positively to our special Veterans Day edition recognizing ORM employees who are veterans and those serving on active duty.

Terry Washington
Office of the DAS

Office of Policy and Compliance

The following message was sent to the Earnestine Richardson, Office of Policy and Compliance, from Vernet Fraser who's serving in Kuwait.

*"Hello Wonderful Co-workers and Friends:
Thank You!! Thank You!! Thank You!!
Thank you for the box of goodies, tapes,
cards, and other things. I really appreciate
everything you folks do for me on a daily
basis. My comrades here in Baghdad put it
best by saying, "I think you are well liked
by everyone in your office and they really
support you" and for that I am very
grateful. I have been sharing the goodies
with everyone here. I am doing well. I try
to do my best by being here and not
to worry too much about things that I have
no or little control over. Thanks for your
prayers and to RM for featuring veterans in
the special issue.
So long and thanks again for your
kindness and support." Vernet*



Vernet, 2nd from the left, and other members of his unit.

What's New at Great Lakes Operations

[Denene Burnette](#), Cleveland Office, gave birth to a 7 pound, beautiful, baby girl on November 11, 2003. Mother and daughter, [Christie Taylor Burnette](#), are doing fine. [Congratulations](#) to Denene and her family.

Washington Field Office (Mid-Atlantic Operations)

The Washington Field Office welcomes **Warren Bolden**, and **Salvador (Sal) Lopez** as EEO Investigators. Warren, an Army veteran, previously worked for VA and comes to ORM from the Department of Commerce where he served as an EEO Investigator/Specialist. Sal, who retired from the Army after 20 years of service, worked as an EEO Specialist at the Norfolk Virginia Naval Station and as a Hispanic Employment Program Manager with the Internal Revenue Service. **Congratulations** to **Charlotte Barr** and **Renee King** for their promotions from EEO Counselor to EEO Investigators. Charlotte joins the Washington Field Office from our Little Rock Field Office.

Bay Pines Field Office (Southeastern Operations)

Florine McCall, EEO Counselor, has been selected for the position of EEO Manager (GS-12) at the Dallas VA Medical Center. Her last day with us will be December 26th. We wish her well in her new position.

Pinellas Trail Walk

Two dedicated Bay Pines employees, **Mary Ann Leloia**, EEO Investigator, and **Florine McCall**, EEO Counselor, took on a major fitness challenge when they decided to walk the entire Pinellas County Trail from downtown St. Petersburg to Tarpon Springs, Fl. The Pinellas Trail; a 34 mile long paved trail designed for walking, jogging, rollerblading, or bike riding; provides a safe haven for hikers, joggers and others in a busy, highly urbanized environment. The Trail, complete with ancient live oaks, Spanish moss, quiet waterways, and tidal streams, links some of Pinellas County's most picturesque parks, scenic coastal areas, and residential neighborhoods. Mary Ann and Florine began their journey at 6 am every Saturday and together walked between 8 to 12 miles each day. They recently reached their goal of walking the entire 68 round trip miles from one end to the other. Mary Ann and Florine both agreed that the Trail was by far the best way to stay healthy, safe and fit. So, be careful whenever any one of them challenges you to "walk a mile in my shoes"... it might take you farther than you ever wanted go!

VA Cemetery Inventory Project

When the Bay Pines National VA Cemetery asked for volunteers to assist with the nationwide Memorials Inventory Project, one of our employees, **Alycia Tirado**, PhD, Intake Specialist, immediately volunteered along with her daughter **Tatianna**. Tatianna, a junior at the University of South Florida, has been fascinated by military history since the 8th grade, when she helped inventory monuments at Yorktown National Park in VA. Together, with the assistance of the Cemetery staff, they researched the history of the cemetery and photographed monuments there. Their efforts, along with those of the other volunteers, will help ensure the long-term preservation of hundreds of sacred and beautiful monuments and memorials so that they may be appreciated by future generations.

Did You Know?



Top 10 Worst Mistakes Federal Employees Make when Considering Retirement

The National Association for Retired Federal Employees (NARFE) listed the top 10 worst mistakes federal employees and retirees make when considering retirement:

- 1. Failing to elect a survivor benefit for a spouse who has his/her own income or retirement.** “Predeceasing your spouse does not necessarily mean that all your expenses die with you,” according to NARFE. “The expenses for the automobile, house and other items which you shared continue.”
- 2. Heading for a warmer climate after picking up the first retirement check.** Retirees should do some “serious soul searching” and consider the financial, emotional, cultural, medical and other realities of moving.
- 3. Failing to consider a spouse’s routine when retiring.**
- 4. Failing to realistically review life insurance needs at retirement.**
- 5. Expecting to receive a full Social Security Retirement based on total Social Security earnings.** The Windfall Elimination Provision can reduce the earned Social Security benefits of federal employees by as much as 60 percent. Retirees need to find out exactly what they are entitled to receive.
- 6. Not electing a survivor benefit for a spouse either at retirement or upon marriage after a retirement.**
- 7. Failing to meet the requirement to have Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHB) coverage for at least five years before retiring in order to maintain coverage after retirement.**
- 8. Electing a self-only FEHB enrollment when a spouse has other, non-federal coverage.** In order for a spouse to be able to retain FEHB coverage upon the death of the annuitant, retirees must have family enrollment in effect at the time of death.
- 9. Enrolling in the high option of a fee-for-service plan when the low or standard option provides good benefits at a substantially lower premium.**
- 10. Two federal retirees electing two self-only fee-for-service enrollments instead of one family enrollment.** Two self-only enrollees must meet separate deductibles, co-payments, coinsurance and catastrophic protection benefits. ■

Holding Your Own in Meetings, but Working As a Team

Call a Meeting Only for the Right Reasons!

When you call a meeting, make it significant and be prepared! In a client situation, you may have been working on a deal for months that will either thrive or nosedive on a single meeting. The higher you go in your own organization, the more expectations others have for your abilities to conduct yourself in a meeting—either as a participant or leader. Take things seriously.



Skip the meeting if you have nothing special to discuss, if you don't need others' input, if you have already made up your mind about what you plan to do, or if getting others involved would only complicate your plan.

Do call a meeting if you need to present information to a lot of people quickly and you don't want to write it, if you want input from others on your idea, if you want to gain "buy in" from the team, or if you want to motivate and energize the team about the idea.

So how about the wrong reasons? Meeting as a substitute for work. Rubber-stamping a decision. Complaining. Demonstrating power to make everybody show up. Because joy and misery love company, sorting out true motivations may require some soul-searching.

Source is *"Communicate with Confidence"* by Dianna Booher of Booher Consultants, Inc. Submitted by Vanessa Vaughn, ITS



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<http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>