

NASCOE Now

Your News Bulletin

February 8, 2006

Restructuring Reviews - Earlier this week President Dan Root sent a letter to each of the State Presidents advising them of the Agency directive to all SEDs to conduct an independent local-level review of the efficiency and effectiveness of FSA offices in the state. SEDs and State Committees have been instructed to form a review committee to identify what the optimum network of FSA facilities, staffing, training and technology should be for the state within existing budgetary resources and staffing ceilings. Should an SED recommend closures or consolidations FSA will issue public notice, schedule and hold a public hearing. This is in accordance with the process provided for FSA office closures in Pub. L. 109-97, Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006. USDA has agreed with Congress that office closings and relocations should occur based on rigorous analysis to ensure actions are cost-effective and will better serve the public.

The Administrator has indicated that they want this process to be open and transparent and that all stakeholders will be included. SEDs have been encouraged to share all information of such plans as much as possible. NASCOE is here to work with all of you, and we are here to help. NASCOE encourages all State Presidents to contact their SED and be involved in this process to the point they feel comfortable. State Presidents have been asked to contact NASCOE if issues arise and they feel the state is being treated unfairly or they question the recommendation that has been submitted to DAFO. NASCOE will work with the State Associations to help resolve any differences. Dan and I both feel there are very good intentions within FSA to meet the many challenges ahead, but we also believe this action is being done out of budgetary necessity, not just some plan to re-invent FSA. If office restructure is inevitable our hope is that all plans will be developed with input from all interested stakeholders, acted upon with common sense, will be friendly to our employees and at the end of the day, they will provide better service to our customers, not just meet the needs of our budget. If the State Association feels there is a problem with the recommendation for the state, it is very important to address the problem right away, don't wait until after it is approved and then try to address it. State Associations will want to be on the forefront and be aware of issues as they arise, not wait until it is too late.

Staff Ceilings - As many of you know the 2006 Staff Ceilings have been received in STO's. Reliable sources indicate that nationally CO Staff Ceilings were reduced by 370, GS Staff Ceilings by 103, and Temporary Ceilings reduced to 650. Again, our hope is that State Associations have received the 2006 Staff Ceilings for the state. 2006 Budget played a big part in funded Staff Ceilings. 2006 Budget will play a big part in the

Restructuring Review Recommendations. Our understanding is that this will not be resolved by RIF's or furloughs; nor have we heard any mention of additional buyouts.

2006 Budget - Latest word is that Budget Allocations will be distributed by way of a BU Notice and should be received by the end of this week.

Upcoming Visit to WDC - President Dan and I will be in WDC February 14&15 making visits to various FSA management offices. We have enjoyed open communication with our folks in Washington, and the purpose of this trip is to continue to build a positive, productive working relationship. We have a long list of questions and concerns for discussion with the Administrator and DAFO that the Exec Committee has developed. A report will be prepared and included in the next NASCOE Now.

NASCOE Involvement - Now is the time to get involved and provide your input on issues/concerns to your State President who will submit them to the Area Exec. Every NASCOE member's input and concerns are important and should be heard. We encourage everyone to follow the proper protocol but Dan and I both subscribe to the "open door" policy. Anytime a NASCOE member wishes to speak directly to one of us we are more than happy to hear from you!

NEW FSA RESTRUCTURING? Wondering what's going on? What's the plan? Visit the NASCOE website for answers to this and other questions. President Dan Root addresses this issue on http://www.nascoe.org/presidents_page.htm. Also find the Administrator's letter to SED's at http://www.nascoe.org/pdf/MEMO_SED_State_Guidance.pdf.

NASCOE NOW MEMBERSHIP NOTES

Frank Bender – National
Membership Chair

It is that time of year again. Time that I start thinking about training for 06 Triathlon season. Last year I completed 3 Triathlon's, all the short variety, while I completed all three Tri's I didn't place very high because I can not swim. I not only can't swim but I can not float, I can not drift, and I can not do the dog paddle, but I can do a heck of a cannonball.

So this year I decided to "practice" swimming. What a great idea, practice something I am terrible at. Next thing you know I will be using handbooks and stopping to ask for directions. Now my wife is my biggest supporter, I really think she is having fun at my expense. For my birthday (which is this month – and I really am getting old) she signed me up for swimming lessons at the "Y" and bought me a Speedo. Now this is the sick part. In the swim class you are put into groups based on swim skill. So my group is generally 10 year olds and we play Marco Polo. My wife just sits there and laughs at this old man playing Marco Polo in a Speedo. She says it is the best money she ever spent. Next week she is inviting some friends to the pool for drinks and laughs. However, the last laugh will be on her as I speed through the water like a fish.

National Membership Chair – Frank "Speedo" Bender

Time to do some bragging:

Alabama is now at 100%. I never got a 100% on anything. Great job. That is a lot of Auburn supporters. So the Alabama state association joins the CT/RI state association with 100%.

States working hard to get to 100% are:

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| * Maryland/Delaware | 93% |
| * Louisiana | 93% |
| * Tennessee | 93% |
| * North Dakota | 95% |
| * South Dakota | 95% |
| * Oklahoma | 93% |
| * Utah | 93% |

I really do appreciate all of your hard work. I have two requests:

#1. All NASCOE members take a few minutes and thank your state officers and membership chairs for all their hard work. A simple email will do the trick.

#2. Non-Members – take a few minutes and visit our webpage www.NASCOE.org and see the number of issues NASCOE is involved in. And if you have any questions about joining your state association, you can contact your state membership chair or drop me an email.

40-Year Membership and Honorary Lifetime Membership Awards

Please take a few minutes and submit the names of members that are eligible for either the 40-Year Membership Award or the Honorary Lifetime Membership Award.

40-Year Membership Award: can be an individual or an office that has 40 years of consecutive NASCOE membership. An award is presented at the national convention.

Honorary Lifetime Membership Award: The basic rule of thumb is: if you have been a member of NASCOE since you started with the agency, retired and collecting or eligible to collect an annuity.

Your state must submit the required forms to me.

Benefits Cell Phone Discounts!

Becky Zirpel

I would like to extend my apologies for all the confusion on the Cell Phone Discounts.

My job as NASCOE National Benefits Chairperson is to provide information to NASCOE members about any benefits that may be available to them. That was the intent of my article in "NASCOE Now" on Cell Phone Discounts. I have been overwhelmed with calls and e-mails on the subject. Each cell phone company and each company location seems to have a different policy. At this point, my advice to anyone seeking this discount would be to simply contact your cell phone company in your area to verify the company policy and request the discount if it is available. I apologize that I do not have more information, but feel it would be impractical for me to try to address every situation with every cell phone company in every location.

Again, I apologize for any confusion caused by my attempt to assist NASCOE members and wish you luck in obtaining this discount from your local cell phone provider."

Tragedy Hits FSA in West Virginia --

By Dann Stuart, Public Affairs Specialist, Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Regions

Patrick Wayne Richardson, the county executive director (CED) for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Nicholas and Webster counties and acting CED for Greenbrier County, W.Va., died Friday, Jan. 27, 2006, in an automobile accident in Summersville, W.Va.

"Pat was not just my boss, he was my friend," said Melodie Bailey, the program tech in Summersville.

Richardson began working for FSA in June 2003. After completing his county office trainee (COT) training in July 2004, he interviewed and was selected to head the Nicholas/Webster office. Entire story:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/PAS/FSACourier/0206/wva.htm>

DSA AWARDS Just a reminder to folks and State Chairs that are submitting DSA nominations -- February 20, 2006 is the final date to submit nominations to the Area Chair for Area judging! Please don't let this date slip past you!

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS March 1, 2006 is final date to submit Scholarship applications for 2006 judging to the Area Chairs. Applications must be complete when you submit them to the Area Chair, review them and don't leave anything out.

EXTRA MILE NOMINATIONS Our numbers of nominations for the Extra Mile Award have fallen off this year. I know that there are a lot of folks in your state that are deserving of this NASCOE award. Take just a few minutes and submit a nomination to your State Chair for that member that has gone the Extra Mile.

SPECIAL MILITARY EXTRA MILE NOMINATIONS We would remind you that NASCOE members may submit any relative that is serving in the military in the war effort. We will honor those during the National Convention.

OTHER NASCOE AWARD PROGRAMS I would take this time to remind you that the following "other" awards are available to our NASCOE members: Professional Improvement Awards & Sick Leave

INFORMATION ON THE NASCOE AWARDS PROGRAM IS AVAILABLE ON THE NASCOE WEB SITE. WE WOULD INVITE YOU TO GO THERE FOR INFORMATION CONCERNING OUR AWARDS PROGRAMS.

For more information on articles in NASCOE Now, please contact your Area Executive, the appropriate Committee Chairperson or the NASCOE Now Editor.