Welcome and Overview

This newsletter contains recent information regarding a lot of exciting planned events and information for our existing OPEDA members, our prospective new members, and other stakeholders. As a part of our ongoing efforts to enhance and improve communications I invite you to visit the OPEDA Office and/or provide feedback, suggestions or send any comments and questions you may have on the articles contained herein.

Legislative Activities Update - Fed/Postal Coalition

Congressional committees in the Senate and the House are expected to consider legislation affecting federal employees and retirees during the upcoming 114th session of Congress. Members of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee (Senate), the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (House) and the committees dealing with appropriations and with agriculture are just being appointed. Legislation enacted by these committees can affect OPEDA members. Many members of Congress are taking careful looks at budget items that detail spending on federal programs, the federal work force and federal retirees.

OPEDA continues to participate in the Federal/Postal Coalition. This coalition, representing thousands of federal and postal workers, communicates with our Congressional members regarding legislation that affects pay and benefits of all federal workers. During the last legislative session, some of the members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform expressed interest in the long-term budgetary effects of substantial changes to the federal retirement system(s). There has also been interest in possible implementation of the chained Consumer Price Index (chained –CPI). This index, computed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is derived from a time series measure of price levels of consumer goods and services and provides an alternative Consumer Price Index. It is based on the idea that in an inflationary environment, consumers will choose less expensive substitutes. Apparently, although we are not experiencing major inflation at this time, those who derive the CPI figure may still choose to use cheap substitutes when computing the chained-CPI. This would obviously lead to possible underestimation of the cost-of living increases that federal employees and retirees seek.

If you want to express your views on legislation and related matters to OPEDA, please use your personal computer and make contacts on your own time. Communications can be sent to hallingby@aol.com (an E-mail not associated with internets associated with USDA or other federal facilities).

Request for Volunteers

OPEDA continues to encourage its members to contact their Senators and Representatives in the U.S. Congress. The Legislative Committee is looking for volunteers, both in the local D. C. region and across the United States. Please let your OPEDA Council Member and the OPEDA office (opeda@dm.usda.gov) know of your interest.

Holiday Party/CFC Donation

OPEDA is greatful that so many of our friends and colleagues joined together to celebrate the accomplishments of OPEDA and the USDA at our annual holiday party. We welcomed Jim Heald who performed live as guests enjoyed holiday fare and festivities. In the tradition of giving, OPEDA contributed to the USDA’s Combined Federal Campaign (CFC); Tom Hannah, the 2014 USDA CFC Campaign Manager accepted the donation. We were happy to have Deputy Campaign Manager, Philip Stetson and USDA’s Dr. Gregory
Parham, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Administration to join in the celebration.

USDA honors employees at Cultural Transformers Award Ceremony

OPEDA was honored to support the USDA’s Cultural Transformers Award held December 5th in the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington DC. The Cultural Transformers Awards were created to recognize noteworthy accomplishments in changing the culture of USDA over the past 5 years. The Secretary, Thomas Vilsack honored USDA employees from around the country with Certificates of Appreciation.

MLK Day of Service Award Ceremony

On January 8, 2015 the USDA recognized and celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday with a National Day of Service Award Ceremony. On this day and throughout the year, USDA employees, across the country and around the world, are encouraged to perform volunteer service in their communities. For all Americans to give of their time in service to others is an important way to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy. The USDA Drum Major for Service Award was given to eleven individuals and one group for their volunteer service. This year the program was opened with welcome remarks by Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden who said for Dr. King’s vision to work its more than listening to his speeches but it amounts to how we treat and care for each other.

USDA 2015 MLK National Service Day “Drum Major for Service Awardees”

AMS - Washington D.C. Keisha “Ama” Nelson
AMS - Washington D.C. Reedema Rock
ERS - Washington D.C. Cliola Peterson
FS - Milwaukee, WI Gary L. Eichhorst
FS - Clarksville, AR Gregory Taylor
FS - USA Federally Employed Job Corps Alumni (FEJCA)
FSIS - New York City, NY Abel Alagbe
FSIS - Monett, MI Randy L. Kristek
NRCS - Salem, AR Aaron Shelton
OIG - Washington D.C. Janet L. White
RD - Hillsboro, OH Rae Jean Maddox

Guest Speaker Panel

Alfred V. Almanza
Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety
Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy
Director, National Institute of Food and Agriculture
Leslie Wheelock
Director, Office of Tribal Relations

To watch the observance video visit: On Demand Web link: www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.htm

Upcoming Events

February 11th- Black History Month Program - Jefferson Auditorium 10:00 am

February 19-20th- Agricultural Outlook Forum, Smart Agriculture in the 21st Century at the Crystal Marriott Hotel, Arlington Virginia
OPEDA Election

The last newsletter reported that it is time for the members of the Organization of Professional Employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (OPEDA) to elect a new national President as well as an individual in your region to represent you on the OPEDA Council. Our current OPEDA President, Mr. Louis Iacoletti, has appointed a nominating committee comprised of at least three OPEDA members in good standing.

Please contact the OPEDA office before February 28, 2015 if you are interested in serving yourself or if you would like to suggest a candidate. If you suggest someone other than yourself, please be sure that this person has indicated that he/she is willing to run and that he/she lives in the Washington, DC area.

The election for National President of OPEDA will be by mail ballot in May/June, 2015. OPEDA encourages nominations of members who live in the greater Metro Washington, DC area for this office. The National President is responsible for the organization nationally and for the operation of the National OPEDA Office. The President serves as a spokesperson for OPEDA and has important interactions, with our USDA Administration, with Congressional offices and with employee and other community organizations.

The OPEDA bylaws describe the method of electing the President in Article III, Section 3.2. “By February 1 of the year in which the President’s term expires, the President shall appoint a nomination committee comprised of at least three (3) OPEDA members in good standing. The nominating committee shall present to the Council by March 2 as slate of one or more willing candidates for the Presidency from the Washington, D.C. area. Other nominations may be made by the Council Members or by petition signed by at least twenty (2) members in good standing by March 2. A President shall be elected by the entire membership in a national election every third year. The candidate receiving the most votes shall be elected. The elections shall be held between May 1 and June 15. The President may not serve more than two consecutive terms of office.”…

The OPEDA bylaws also describe the method of electing national council members in Article II, Section 2.1. “A National Council shall be elected by OPEDA members and shall serve as the governing body of OPEDA. It shall establish priorities, policies and programs which are consistent with the purposes, objectives and principles of OPEDA as set forth in the Constitution. Council Members represent their constituents and interpret and convey to the chapters and to the membership the policies of the Council and information from the National Office. They also keep the National Office informed of activities in their regions and the needs and wishes of local members. The National Council may remove any Council Member by a two-thirds vote of its membership and provide for selection or election of a successor.”….Council member elections are usually accomplished concurrently with the Presidential election and placed on the same ballot.

Please contact OPEDA if you have suggestions or for any additional information. OPEDA@dm.usda.gov
Unsung Hero Award Nominations

OPEDA partnering with the USDA has established a tradition of hosting a special celebration, The Unsung Hero Awards Ceremony to honor and recognize the many and varied public service contributions of our USDA employees.

USDA employees (managers, supervisors, or peers) are requested to submit nominations no later than Monday, March 24, 2014, for individuals who have demonstrated a high level of service to the public directly related to the employee’s duties. These nominations are reviewed by an independent committee established by OPEDA and USDA and final selections are made. All USDA mission areas and agencies have been active partners in this annual award program in the past, and we invite you to do the same this year.

For more information or to submit completed nominations please e-mail Opeda.UnsungHero@dm.usda.gov

Completed nominations may also be hand-delivered to Room 1212, USDA South Building or mailed to OPEDA, P.O. Box 23762, Washington, D.C. 20026-3762, to reach the OPEDA Office no later than Tuesday, March 31, 2015. (202) 720-4898

If you would like to become an OPEDA member, please complete the following Membership Application with your submission or sign up at Opeda.UnsungHero@dm.usda.gov

Full Name:

USDA Agency Employed By:

Mailing Address:

Telephone Number:

e-mail Address:

Payroll Manager contact info:

[ ] Employee Member - $ 52.00
[ ] Payroll Deduction - $ 2.00 (per pay period)
[ ] Retired Member - $ 25.00
[ ] Retired Life Membership - $200.00

Please mail your check or money order (payable to OPEDA) or a copy completed payroll deduction form AD-1054 6/89 (available at www.OPEDA.org) to OPEDA, P.O. Box 23762, Washington, D.C., 20026

Teresa Pickett Wade, Vice-President of Membership-OPEDA@dm.usda.gov
Unsung Hero Nomination Contact Information

This document must be completed in its entirety for the nomination to be acknowledged as complete.

Nominator Contact Information

Full Name:
Agency:
Organization:
Physical Work Location:
Email Address:
Telephone Number:
Mailing address:

Nominee Contact Information

Full Name:
Agency:
Organization:
Physical Work Location:
Email Address:
Telephone Number:
Mailing address:

Additional contact information:
Unsung Hero Award Nomination Form

I ___________________________ do hereby nominate the following USDA employee:

____________________________ for the 2015 Unsung Hero Award. The nomination should be in recognition of demonstrated high level of service to the public and the service should normally be directly related to the USDA employee’s job duties.

Please provide a statement in the space below identifying the work performed by the employee (any USDA federal employee at any level of the Agency or Department) that you believe deserves special recognition.

For an application to be considered for review the Unsung Hero Nomination Contact Information must be completed in its entirety and submitted in conjunction with the Award Nomination Form.

Please E-mail completed nominations to Opeda.UnsungHero@dm.usda.gov (preferred). Completed nominations may also be mailed to OPEDA, P.O. Box 23762, Washington, D.C. 20026-3762, or hand-delivered to Room 1212, USDA South Building to reach the OPEDA Office no later than Tuesday, March 31, 2015. (202) 720-4898
Thank you for reading the OPEDA Newsletter. Your comments and contributions are welcome.

Please write to us at OPEDA, Organization of Professional Employees of the US Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 23762 Washington, D.C. 20026-3762 Phone (202) 720-4898; Fax (202) 720-6692.

(E-Mail) opeda@dm.usda.gov (Web) www.opeda.org