



# OPEDA NEWSLETTER

Organization of Professional Employees  
of the US Department of Agriculture  
www.opeda.net

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## President's Message

I was proud to preside over our Unsung Hero Award Ceremony held on May 4, 2010. USDA is fortunate to have so many dedicated workers faithfully doing their regular daily tasks without fanfare while also performing special services above and beyond the call of duty.

We are looking forward to presenting our 2010-2011 Scholarships. USDA employees who are OPEDA members and their family members are eligible and encouraged to apply. We have included the application form in this newsletter. Please take advantage of this opportunity to apply.

## Unsung Hero Awards at the National Level

On May 4, 2010, in the patio of the Whitten Building, Washington, DC, OPEDA held its 2010 Unsung Hero Award Program. The winners for 2010 posed for the photo below;



National Unsung Hero Award winners with President Iacoletti. From left to right back row: Louis Iacoletti, B. Jeanne Eastham, Heidi Schwebel, Jay Fuhrer, Michelle Mayorga, Don Knowles, Janette Pagan-Sanchez. Front row: Linda Beeler and Patricia Vines, Family member representing George W. Geer, Annis M. Yates. Not shown: Vicki Bradley and Kevin Smith.



Secretary of Agriculture  
Tom Vilsack



Congressman Gerry Connolly

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack congratulated our Unsung Heroes and expressed his appreciation for the dedication of the winners that resulted in their being selected for the award. Special guest Congressman Gerry Connolly (VA-11<sup>th</sup> District) also addressed ceremony attendees. The Congressman praised the contributions of USDA employees to the welfare of all Americans. He told the group that he supports fair pay for federal workers, teleworking and fiscal responsibility in managing federal expenditures. After the presentation OPEDA presented Congressman Connolly with the 2010 Honor Award For Service on Behalf of the Federal Worker is recognition of his contributions to the needs of civil servants.

President Iacoletti then read the citations and presented certificates to the winners of the National Unsung Hero Awards as follows:

*George W. Geer*, Forest Service, California, (Posthumous) – George demonstrated passion, enthusiasm and dedication to the Fire Prevention message; he was a true leader among his peers. Year after year, families sought George out at Camp Smokey to listen to his fire prevention messages and immerse themselves in his passion for their safety that he held so dear to his heart. George was one of a kind and the loss of his energy, influence and devotion will be felt not

only at Camp Smokey but across his agency and all that knew and loved him.

*Barbara Jeanne Eastham*, National Resources Conservation Service, Tennessee - After many fire and hurricane assignments and much training Jeanne is now a Type 1 Public Information Officer on a Type 1 Incident Management Team. It is very difficult to attain this designation and many who try do not make it. Subsequently, Jeanne has been with her team on many major wild fires from Florida to California.

*Heidi Schewel*, Forest Service, Arizona - An employee of the Coronado National Forest, Heidi is known as the “media face” of Communications Staff. She handles every media issue with calm, clear, forthright information and is trusted by reporters who will call her to check out stories from various sources before rushing to print.

*Kevin Smith*, Rural Development, Oklahoma - Many of the economic development projects that have helped communities in Northeast Oklahoma to thrive can be traced back to Kevin’s expertise and continual commitment to serving rural Oklahoma. Kevin has helped over 1000 families purchase or build a home in rural Oklahoma.

*Annis Yates*, Office of the Inspector General, North Carolina - Special Agent Annis Yates continues to effectively manage a significant caseload bringing most of her cases to successful and high-profile conclusions. With her productive and longstanding historical success in a one-agent office, she is one of OIG’s most overlooked and dedicated “Unsung Heroes.”

*Jannette Pagan-Sanchez*, Food Safety and Inspection Service, California – While on assignment in American Samoa, Janette had two tragedies occur on September 29, 2009. Almost simultaneously an earthquake measuring 8.3 on the Richter scale struck and then the earthquake hurled massive tsunami waves leaving a high toll of death and destruction throughout many villages. Miss Jannette Pagan-Sanchez, the import inspector assigned to Pago Pago in American Samoa took action by volunteered her time and services providing assistance to injured at the Lyndon B. Johnson Tropical Medical Center in the village of Faga’alu.

*Jay Fuhrer*, National Resources Conservation Service, North Dakota. - Jay’s tireless devotion to teaching and demonstrating soil quality to producers through demonstrations, tours, workshops and presentations makes him a worthy candidate for the Unsung Hero Award.

*Michelle Mayorga*, Ms. Mayorga’s assisted in launching the Secretary on an important mission to Japan. In large part because of her efforts, OSEC repeatedly voiced its great appreciation for the preparations. Additionally, the Administrator called a special meeting of the Japan team—including Ms. Mayorga—to thank them for the terrific job.

*Don Knowles*, Agricultural Research Service, California. Dr. Knowles is known for his efforts to eradicate animal diseases by developing sensitive and specific assays for microorganisms, especially the submicroscopic entities responsible for scrapie in sheep and for mad cow disease, the organism causing piroplasmiasis in horses and the agents that infect both range and domestic animals. Use of the assays has or will enable eradication of these infectious animal diseases.

*Linda Beeler and Patricia Vines*, Economic Research Service, Washington, DC. - Linda frequently and willingly produces highly effective graphics for presentations of complex economic information in other critical venues, including the annual Ag Outlook Forum as well as briefings for high-level USDA officials. Pat is a key participant in ongoing work to generate both the annual estimates and periodic updates of the National and State farm income accounts produced by ERS, keeping the team on schedule to deliver its products to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, to NASS, and to the public.

*Vicki Bradley*, Agricultural Research Service, Washington, DC. In response to the need for drought tolerant plants to improve turf and forage production in semiarid areas of the Western United States, NPGS sponsored a plant collection trip to Kyrgyzstan in August 2006 and brought back 266 accessions of grasses and legumes. Ms. Bradley promptly documented the accessions and planted them in the field. Quality seeds were harvested and made available for distribution to plant breeders in the U.S. and foreign countries.

**Fallen Food Inspectors Honored.** A recent story in the Washington Post stated that Deputy Agricultural Secretary Kathleen Merrigan spoke recently in a ceremony honoring *Jean Hillery* and *Thomas Quadros*. These two food inspectors were fatally shot 10 years ago while examining a meat processing plant in California.

**Unsung Hero Award Program - Honorable Mention Certificates.** Certificates of Honorable Mention – Unsung Heroes Program - have been awarded to the following individuals:

Betty Jenkins, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Washington, DC  
Jack W. Carpenter, Forest Service (FS), Taos, NM  
John Stites, FS, Delta, CO  
Michael Driscoll, FS, Juneau, AK  
Barbara (Bobbi) Sams, FS, Juneau, AK  
Drenda J. Williams, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Columbia, MO  
Nashante Barnes, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Lombard, IL  
Carol Carr, FSIS, Washington, DC  
Mark Benedict, FSIS, Washington, DC  
Dr. Tomas Ayala-Silva, Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Miami, FL  
Melissa Erickson, ARS, Albany, CA  
Dr. Dike Ukuku, ARS, Wyndmoor, PA  
Niu Dong, ARS, Albany, CA  
Tracy Bowman, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Beltsville, MD  
Mitsy P. Lister, Rural Development (RD), Athens, GA

**Federal/USDA News.** In a recent column Washington Post reporter Joe Davidson reviewed the Senate hearing on pay-for-performance, briefly summarized the Cato Institute report on "Overpaid Federal Workers," and reported on the pushback on the Debt Reduction Commission from Social Security interests:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/08/AR2010060804980.html>

The Cato Report on "Overpaid Federal Workers" is at: <http://www.downsizinggovernment.org/overpaid-federal-workers>

Another article on the Debt Reduction Commission and pushback from Social Security interests is at:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/08/AR2010060805081.html>

## **MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED. OPEDA needs**

**YOU.** Some lawmakers in our national Congress have sought to freeze or cut federal pay. It is important to make sure that budget balancing efforts do not unbalance the federal worker. In the nineties many elected leaders believed that although federal salaries and benefits were often far below those for equivalent work in the private sector, citing budget constraints, officials stated that they were not justified in recommending pay parity. Today, these inequalities still exist. Recently recommendations were made that federal salaries be frozen or cut; these recommendations were not accepted by a majority of lawmakers. Leaders of organizations of federal workers suggest that such action would be tantamount to "imposing a special tax on just one group of people" (John Gage, President, AFGE).

OPEDA opposes freezing or cutting federal pay and will work hard to help to maintain our pay and benefits. Federal workers do not receive the substantial bonuses that many in the private sector receive as a matter of course. Hard work is expected of federal workers as a matter of course – and this hard work is often not appropriately recognized.

OPEDA is not a union, but it can speak for you in this matter – and OPEDA recognizes YOUR hard work!

### **The Role of Contractors in Government.**

Some lawmakers are taking a look at the use of private contractors. Christopher Shays and Michael Thibault are co-chairing a Commission on wartime contracting. The commission is attempting to answer the question, "What is 'inherently government work?'" Although the Commission is examining contracting primarily in the Department of Defense, its findings may influence contracting procedures and policies across the government.

**Teleworking.** Let us know how you feel about teleworking. OPEDA has actively and vigorously supported teleworking as needed across the USDA. E-mail us at [opeda@usda.gov](mailto:opeda@usda.gov) or call us at 202-720-4898/.

## **Announcing the OPEDA Scholarship Program for 2010 – 2011**

The announcement (below) and application (next page) for the OPEDA Scholarship Program are provided for your information and consideration. If you or a family member is interested, please take this opportunity to apply for a scholarship. The deadline for submitting applications for the 2010 OPEDA Scholarship Program is August 2, 2010.

### **SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT 2010-2011 School Year**

In 1989, the Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture (OPEDA) established the John W. Peterson Scholarship in recognition of Mr. Peterson's dedicated service as the 24th President of OPEDA. Beginning in 2009, OPEDA also started the Steven "Tom" Stefani Scholarship to honor Mr. Stefani's heroic service and ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan. Tom Stefani, a Forest Service Range Conservationist was serving on a voluntary assignment in Afghanistan when he was killed in an explosion that impacted his convoy.

During the past few years, OPEDA has awarded several scholarships of \$500 each to students from all parts of the country. OPEDA places a high premium on education and believes that its scholarships will have a valuable give-back in the future. **To reward our members for their continuing support of OPEDA, starting in 2010, scholarships will be available only to OPEDA Members in good standing and their family members. Additionally, only fully completed applications will be considered. If you plan to apply for a scholarship, please ensure that you submit all documents requested in the announcement.**

#### **Requirements:**

The application should include the following:

1. A completed Scholarship Application Form (attached).
2. A typed, double spaced essay, not to exceed two pages, on the topic: "Public Service is a Unique Challenge with Many Rewards."
3. One character reference. This should be a letter (no more than 2 paragraphs contained on one page) from a non-related adult e.g., teacher, coach...etc, describing how the writer has come to know the applicant and what the strengths of the applicant are.
4. A copy of a transcript showing a cumulative GPA of 2.8 or higher.
5. A list and brief description on a separate page of awards and extracurricular and community service activities.

OPEDA Scholarship Application Form  
2010-2011 School Year

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Complete Home  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number – Home \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsoring OPEDA Member's name \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor's Relationship to applicant \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor's Work Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Grade Point Average \_\_\_\_\_ (Must be higher than  
2.8 on a 4.0 scale).

College/University that applicant attends or plans to  
attend \_\_\_\_\_

Class status as of Fall term 2010 (must be at least a college Freshman by Fall  
term 2010)

Submit to the following address by August 2, 2010:  
Organization of Professional Employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture  
P.O. Box 23762, Washington, DC 20026-3762  
For further information contact OPEDA at the above address or call  
(202)-720-4898.



Thank you for reading the OPEDA Newsletter. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Please write to us at OPEDA, P.O. Box 23762, Washington, D.C. 20026-3762, Phone (202) 720-4898. Fax (202) 720-6692. E-mail: [opeda@usda.gov](mailto:opeda@usda.gov) Web: [www.opeda.net](http://www.opeda.net)