

Introducing the DAS Learning Center



"The Faculty:" Sue Pawloski-Burke, Dave Lynn, Martin Anderson, Patsy McLaughlin, Steve Soklow, Peggy Zabawar, Diane Mazar-Roberts, Andrea Keilty

By Donna Micklus

Peggy Zabawar is the DAS Learning Center's biggest cheerleader. It may not

have varsity sports, but its got *class*.

Make that *classes*.

Formerly the HR Learning Center which was geared toward human resources professionals in state service, the new Center will now host a much broader course offering for state employees at all levels who want to improve their career skills.

How did it morph from one to the other? Zabawar, who coordinates the DAS Learning Center, credits Strategic Services' Martin Anderson for having the vision.

"When the HR Certificate Program was created for all human resources professionals, it covered most of the courses that were offered in the HR Learning Center. So we had this great tool already in place that we could now fill with a broader array of training opportunities," Zabawar said.

"It was Martin's idea to rebrand the HR Learning Center, create a new logo, pursue new audiences, and offer more classes," she explained.

She said that the curriculum is already populated with classes from September 7 through December.

"We're continuing to offer courses in labor law and state-mandated courses like diversity, sexual harassment, and workplace violence prevention, but we're branching out to include areas like how to take a state exam, career

development, honing interview skills, workplace safety, and workforce planning. We're not only increasing the frequency of existing courses but we're adding new courses everyday," Zabawar said.

What new courses are in the hopper? Watch for a workers' compensation liaison class, a training certificate program, employee retention class for managers, communication skills course, and learning how to interview to select the best candidate.

The Learning Center continues to support the New Managers Orientation Program. The "online briefing" presentation can be found on the LC front page. DAS is also looking at delivering needed content and skills to veteran managers of the state through the Learning Center.

DAS employees make up a good portion of the Learning Center faculty. In addition to Zabawar are "professors" Diane Mazar-Roberts, Susan Pawloski-Burke, Steve Soklow, Patsy McLaughlin, Dave Lynn, Martin Anderson and Andrea Keilty. Trainers have also been recruited from the Department of Education, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and contracted consultants.

A well-known historian once said, "Education is learning what you didn't even know you didn't know." Check out the new DAS Learning Center online at http://www.das.state.ct.us/HR/LC/PLC_Home.htm and you'll see that is what it's all about!

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Governor Rell Encourages Towns to Explore Gas Savings Through DAS Contracts

In a July 19 news release, Governor M. Jodi Rell urged Connecticut municipalities to explore possible savings on gasoline by purchasing their fuel through state contracts. These contracts are in place for state and municipal vehicles.

“Gas prices in the state are at an all-time high, and we want to be sure cities and towns know that they can ease the pain a bit by buying their gasoline off of state contracts,” Governor Rell said. “Every little bit of savings helps take pressure off of local budgets and taxpayers.”

By combining the bulk buying power of state agencies, the State of Connecticut is able to negotiate better prices.

For example, the state is currently purchasing regular fuel at approximately \$2.55 a gallon and diesel fuel at \$2.32 a gallon. According to a recent AAA online fuel survey, Connecticut residents on average pay \$3.19 per gallon for unleaded gasoline.

The state’s contract is overseen and negotiated by the Department of Administrative Services on behalf of

all fuel-using state agencies. Connecticut towns, schools and some non-profits can buy off close to 1,000 state contracts for products and services at pre-negotiated prices.

Governor Rell said that DAS has purchased 575 alternative fuel and hybrid vehicles for its Fleet Operations, and some of the new vehicles get up to 60 miles to the gallon.

This week, Governor Rell said she would support a special session of the General Assembly to take action against escalating energy costs.

ERP Says “Get in the Game!”

By John McKay



The Employee Recognition Program’s (ERP) July kickoff featured a sports theme tied in with the ConnectiFIT program by encouraging physical activity and healthy eating. The committee hosted the event in the 5th Floor North Mechanical Room with a Nerf basketball shoot and hole-in-one competition, resulting in a health-themed gift basket.

“We’ve had a lot of new hires since our last ERP ceremony, so this is good way to reintroduce the program and get the word out about nominations,” said committee member Nancy Jones. For more information on the Employee Recognition Program, or to nominate someone for the award, visit DAS Central. Employees can be nominated for Team Excellence, Going the Extra Mile, Customer Service, and Remarkable Innovation.

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Visit our website at www.das.state.ct.us

The “Bus” in Business Office stands for BUSY!

Nina Ritson sits down for a Q&A with Jean Michael

Q: Did you have any idea what to expect when you took on the responsibility for 15 additional agencies?

A: Last August, when Commissioner Yelmini talked about assisting a few agencies by consolidating functions, I had no idea what we were about to get into! We went from eight agencies to 23 – and although it sounded good in theory, no one could have imagined what challenges were to follow.

By early January of this year, as I looked forward to the year-end closeout it was absolutely mind-boggling to think how this was going to happen.

Since this was the first year that we had so many agencies to deal with at the closing and due to the fact that the agencies are so very different, we anticipated far more man hours to meet deadlines. The staff really did it with very little overtime.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the consolidation itself and the restructuring?

A: To recap, the art of consolidating 23 agencies into a central Business Office was not as simple as just “pack and move.” It was a huge undertaking, and by October folks started moving into the Business Office from these agencies. Central Accounting and Delinquent Accounts moved into space on the ground floor to make room for the people moving in. In February 2006, the Business Office underwent a complete restructuring with the help of Property Management, MIS, and the Federal Donated Foods teams. When all was said and done, they encompassed the entire west end of the fifth floor, with Delinquent Accounts and Central Accounting on the ground floor and Property Management, Federal Donated Foods, Print, Mail and Courier at Trinity Street.

Q: Was there a learning curve in taking on new agencies?

A: Absolutely. Consolidating was not a simple matter of adding columns and crunching numbers. These 23 agencies are so diverse – to effectively assist in the fiscal functions of these businesses, you really have to KNOW the business of the agency. From aquaculture oyster beds and horse barns in Cheshire, to Healthcare Access and the hospitals they deal with, to agencies like Services for the Blind and Deaf and Hearing Impaired. ..you truly



must know the business they are in so that you can effectively manage budgets as well as the many other fiscal functions. We manage 125 federal and state grants and numerous state accounts - it's just huge.

Q: What was the experience like for the employees themselves?

A: The business office is like family, and when 19 new people joined the group everyone was a little apprehensive at first. But they meshed right in and our family simply grew.

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Q: Tell us about the craziness at the end of the fiscal year?

A: It's a real race to close. Bills have to be chased - this means calling vendors and making sure that every purchase order has an invoice, and the services had been provided or the commodity received and that the funds are available in the appropriate accounts. Sounds easy enough but in reality many of these agencies had not been operating this way – so the change was both good and bad for some. Much to the amazement of most people involved, DAS Business Office hit every deadline. For some agencies, the introduction of the P-card cut the number of purchase orders in half – this is a huge time saver when it is time to reconcile accounts. Each agency is used to doing things their own way so closing out the year - the DAS way - was an adjustment for everyone.

Q: Can we hear directly from some of the employees?

Mike Felix: Considering the numerous agencies that we now service, this is a tremendous responsibility. It is very satisfying to see the hard work and diligence of everyone in the Business Office culminated to a successful year-end closing. I'm not sure that everyone realizes yet how awesome this accomplishment is!

Paul Felix : This is my first year-end closing with the Business Office. WOW! This group is so dedicated toward achieving successful results.

Fran Dwyer, a DAS newcomer: It was truly impressive to see everyone pull together and work straight out in order to get the job done. I can't say enough about this group of consummate professionals.

Q; How would you sum up the past twelve months?

A: It has been a great learning experience – we are learning today and will be for years to come! I am still in awe that when all was done at the close of FY 06, we had paid all bills, collected every penny, and managed to lapse the money OPM required for the consolidation that went back into the General Fund. These folks did it -and saved the state over \$1 million this year alone!

Jean Michael is very proud of her team in the Business Office.

Michael, who regularly arrives at work well before 8 a.m. and admits to being a workaholic, is finally taking a break for a well-deserved two-week vacation in Myrtle Beach with her husband. She only regrets that this means for two weeks she will not be able to see her new granddaughter, Sarah Elizabeth, born last October. "You know, I am such a lucky person. I have great people that are so dedicated and work very, very hard, and thanks to them we did it!"



...our strength is in our differences

Happenings

The DAS Diversity Council will host a lecture presented by Dr. Michael Good of Durham, Connecticut in September. Dr. Good will share his parents' experience of surviving the Holocaust.

Please watch for details!!

Where Are They Now?

Jane Gore

By Nina Ritson

"I love being retired - there are just not enough hours in the day! I thought I would be bored, but I am so busy!" So says Jane Gore who retired from the Business Office in 2003, trading in calculators and year-end crunches for an even busier, but less stressful life.

"I just remodeled my house!" Gore went on to describe the new layout of her two-story home with lots of space for relaxation. "I combined the existing bathroom with a small bedroom to make a luxurious bathroom with lots of space and I turned another bedroom into a home office for my computer, so I can go online and email my friends."

The last couple of years have not been all frolic, however.

"My mom just passed away two years ago, and I've spent a lot of time just trying to deal with her things and downsize to make the best use of my home." She went on to describe a right of passage that many of us are quite familiar with. "You know, I have been trying to give things away - like my mother's things - but that is hard with all these memories."

"Even the pot she used to cook her sauce in, it's just an old pot, but my sister and I remember seeing her cooking and these are happy memories - it is hard to get rid of. My niece took my mother's china and it looks beautiful in her china cabinet - that made me happy!"

With her home renovations behind her, she now happily laments, "People are always stopping by my house!" But they have to get there pretty early to make sure she is home.

"I am out for my two-mile walk at 5 a.m. and then I shower and put a pot of coffee on. I am taking care of my mom's cats and mine who weighs 24-pounds!! When I am not here, I babysit for my nieces and nephews who are really good kids - they listen to me!"

As if that did not fill her days, Gore also volunteers a couple days a week at the Middletown Salvation Army.

"It's fun now - I spend lots of time with my sister and friends that I have had since first grade. We are always out at each others houses doing something!"

"A lot of us are retired now, and we love to do things together. We play Skipbo (a card game) at my house a few times a week, and we go out to the senior center in East Haddam."

Jane also was busy helping to prepare for her son Lawrence's (DAS Fleet Operations) wedding.

"He married Michele, and they had an elegant wedding at St. Clement's Estate in October of 2005. I am busy all the time and I do not miss working - not one bit!" Gore is a much happier person these days.

Here They Are Now!

Peggy Zabawar

By John McKay

Peggy Zabawar (pronounced Za-bower) has been with DAS' Strategic Resources Management Office since January.

"After 17 years at DSS, doing everything from case management to training, I wanted to take my skills to a place with a great reputation for service and excellence," she said. "I must say, everyone was so welcoming and friendly. It's great to work here, and I am impressed by the high quality work done in each division."

Her most recent project has been redesigning the DAS Learning Center (formerly the HR Learning Center).

"We're expanding it to incorporate a broader focus and including more topics like workforce planning, safety, and career development." Her favorite project has been research for the state's plan for the Bird Flu. Bird Flu? "I'm now very well-educated about it, and my friends look to me for information on the subject!"

A graduate of Central Connecticut State University, Zabawar is a self-proclaimed homebody. Living by the beach in West Haven is a good reason.

"I walk on the beach boardwalk every morning, and just love living in a shoreline town," she said. "I live near Jimmy's restaurant. Anyone familiar with the area will know where that is."

Not just a homebody, but a multiple home owner, Zabawar says that a lot of people laugh when she tells her story of becoming a property mini-mogul.

"I saw an infomercial featuring Carlton Sheets, got the information, and slowly began buying property." She's got two properties outside of her own home, and chose wisely, so that they don't need a lot of maintenance.

"But don't get me wrong, I'm a hands-on, fix-it kind of girl. Do it yourself, and save a little," she said.

Zabawar has had great support, and used good strategy in her ventures. Her best friend became a realtor, and her second property - a three-family house - is right around the corner from where she lives.

"I mow the lawn, snow blow the driveway, and do everything I can. The buildings are in great shape, so once you get the property up and running, there's very little repair work to do. And I love it!"

Zabawar sees these investments as part of her retirement future.

"With the right financing, good houses, and a great relationship with your tenants, you can build a secure future." Look out Donald Trump.



(A somewhat tongue-in-cheek) **Inside Story: The Jobs Video**



By Donna Micklus

It all started with a perfectly reasonable request to me from Commissioner Yelmini:

“Can you do something to make the ‘Jobs’ website easier to understand and navigate?”

Not being a web master, a techie, or a state employment guru, she might as well have asked me to put an end to global warming.

“No prob,” said I cavalierly, cleverly disguising my rising panic. I don’t think she suspected a thing.

So, I did what anyone with half a brain would do. I recruited smart people...people who knew the intricacies of state jobs and exams, had strong personnel backgrounds, had IT expertise and had a sense of what worked on a website and what didn’t.

With a committee of Martin Anderson, John McKay, Nina Ritson, Cindy Rusczyk, Shari Grzyb, Steve Caliendo, Sue Pawloski-Burke, Donna Camillone, and the late Bill Skyrme, we set out to fulfill the Commissioner’s request.

We wanted to do something different...we just didn’t know exactly what. Then Martin said he had seen some websites in the private sector that used the “talking head” approach. Bingo. It caught on right away.

Once we got the Commissioner’s blessing on the concept and budget, it was a go. So, we needed a script, a person to read the script and a production studio to make our presentation as professional as possible...but not expensive.

DAS already had established a good working relationship with the University of Connecticut Health Center’s (UCHC) video production peeps, so the last piece in our project fell smoothly into place.

The PowerPoint presentation was a piece of cake. The script wasn’t. I discovered that nothing is easy when trying to explain state jobs, recruitment and exams. You always have to be on the lookout for those pesky “exceptions.”

Martin, who must have been born a facilitator, organized a “story board” meeting. We wrote on post-its what we thought needed to be included in the script and stuck them on the wall in some semblance of order, like a flow chart... except that it never stopped flowing. It would have been about 427 pages.

Anyway, fast forward a bit. McKay and I, along with Shari and her colleagues, worked on the script. We communications types wanted simplicity with sizzle. HR wanted statutes and regs...and no lawsuits. How could they worry about those details when we were writing electrifying, Pulitzer Prize potential prose? We finally came to a friendly compromise. But it took awhile. And, yes, we are still speaking.

We had decided from the get-go that Diane Mazar-Roberts was the person to go on camera. Overcoming her protestations that she

was too “mature” for the part was the only real hurdle. The rest was pretty smooth.

Thanks to Donna C’s expertise, we did a few “beta” tests in-house (you learn these cool terms) with Diane, and then it was just a question of getting on UCHC’s schedule...that took some time, but it was well worth the wait.

Finally it was showtime. Diane even had her makeup done that morning by the Clinique ladies at Filenes and was good to go. UCHC’s studio was the real thing, and we were ON THE SET. Big lights, big screens, big stuff.

Diane was so good, it was over in under two hours. Another few weeks for UCHC to produce the final video, McKay the magician puts it on our website, and voila!

As Martin said upon watching the video, “I haven’t visited all the other state/commonwealth recruitment sites for a while, (who else but Martin would think of commonwealths?) but I’m pretty sure we’re first to deploy online video to help job seekers in this way. And if we’re not the first, I’ll bet we’re the best.”

Amen to that!

Get your ticket today!
DAS Picnic
Friday, August 11
Noon ‘til 5 p.m.

Mountainside
 A SPECIAL EVENT FACILITY

Connecti Fit . . . The Sequel

By Nina Ritson

“One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” Okay, maybe that’s a little dramatic. But the ConnectiFIT walkers do have a pretty good story to tell.

Now that they have completed their first 10-week pedometer/walking segment, plans are already set for starting the next program in September. With the anticipation of more participants in this ten-week program, DAS ordered an additional 25 pedometers!

DAS celebrated the collective steps of its 105 participants at a special event held on July 26 in Room 161. People weighed in and had their blood pressure read by Debbie Rosen from DPH.

They also heard testimonials by Ann Simeone, an established regular walker and Peggy Zabawar on the positive changes in their lives walking has made.

Zabawar had this to say, “I’m on the ConnectiFIT Committee, and when we started the walking program, the big joke was that I wouldn’t log any miles except to walk from here to the McDonald’s up the street. But after strapping on the pedometer and really paying attention, I made big changes. I now walk for a half hour before work everyday, and whenever I can on breaks.” She went on to describe how she has lost 10 pounds, 4% body fat and has gone down a whole dress size on the program.

Those who participated in the first ten-week program filled out a post-participation survey.

Dr. Martin Anderson, chairperson of the ConnectiFIT Committee tallied the numbers and came up with some



amazing totals. The Committee’s original goal was to walk to Disneyworld and back...and in fact they did this four times – over 8500 miles or 17 million steps!

“Walking helped me to maintain my weight even through this incredibly rainy spring when I lost bike time...but the renovation of the bathrooms has added to my increased steps, too! I averaged between 6,000 and 7,000 steps per day with an occasional splurge when I walk across the river to DOIT,” Anderson said.

A raffle, drawn from returned pedometer numbers, awarded T-shirts, animal trinkets and gift certifi-

cates to Dick’s Sporting Goods to lucky winners!

Even though the program began at DPH, other agencies have become interested in starting their own ConnectiFIT once they learned that DAS was involved. Folks from the Comptroller’s Office joined the event to gather ideas for their own ConnectiFIT program.

So don’t put your sneakers in the closet yet ...the next ten-week program kicks off on August 21 with September 4 as a start date.

This program will be a little different in that it will include *all* your steps 24/7 – not just during the workday. Twenty-five additional pedometers are waiting to be strapped onto belts, so get ready to enjoy the autumn splendor– on foot!