



## In Celebration of Black Heritage Month

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By Nina Ritson

It was standing room only once again for the State Office Building's Black Heritage Month Celebration on Friday, February 23, in the North Mechanical Room.

Mistress of Ceremonies, Holly Hart of DPW, opened the event with a moment of silence for fallen soldiers in Iraq.

DPW Deputy Commissioner Jonathan Holmes offered a special tribute to forty-year old Sgt. Richard L. Ford, from East Hartford, who died Feb. 20 in Baghdad from injuries he suffered from small arms fire. Sgt. Ford's young son called his father his "greatest hero."

DAS Commissioner Anne D. Gnazzo also spoke of heroes, both past and present. "Today is not only a time of celebration; it is a time of reflection as well, as we honor so many African Americans, both past and present, who realized pioneering achievements in their fields. The halls of history are filled with local heroes like Sgt. Ford. We honor their lives and their contributions as we pay tribute to Black Heritage Month and the message of courage and perseverance it brings to all of us."

Department of Agriculture Commissioner Philip F. Prelli, Deputy Commissioner of Consumer Protection Jackie Mandyck and State Department of Education Bureau Chief

Charlene Russell-Tucker presented as well. Russell-Tucker offered an inspiring analogy about the scientific aerodynamics of the bumblebee, who by "simple physics should not be able to fly – but does! We, too, can defy the odds and fly!"

A portion of the day's ceremonies was dedicated to the memory of the great Ella Fitzgerald who was immortalized last month as the 30<sup>th</sup> honoree of the U.S. Postal Services Black Heritage series.

Known as "The First Lady of Song," her extraordinary pitch, rhythmic sense and flawless diction made her one of America's most distinctive singers of jazz and popular tunes.

DPW's deLinda Brown-Jagne hailed Fitzgerald in a poem entitled "I promise I will remember you."

Then it was time for the unveiling as U. S. Hartford Postmaster Deborah C. Essler and Deputy Commissioner Holmes displayed the Ella Fitzgerald Postage Stamp, "Melodies of Harmony."



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“Harmony” was the ideal segue as the audience of over 100 people then began to clap their hands and stomp their feet to the spellbinding performance by Nzinga’s Daughters, a traveling ensemble who has developed a theme around the Underground Railroad through poetry, stories and song. Through perfect harmony and percussive rhythm, these stories and songs revealed coded messages that were hidden in the Negro spirituals, messages that warned runaway slaves when to run and when to hide. According to Negro folklore, when slave owners realized that the drums were a form of communication, they took away their instruments. But they could not take away their spirit as slaves resourcefully changed their music to include sticks held upright beaten on wooden boards, and their messages continued.

A gifted and accomplished psalmist, keyboardist, writer and arranger, Reverend Wayne Robinson, Minister of Music of the First Cathedral in Bloomfield spoke about “Ella’s legacy to us despite all odds.” His philosophy is that each of us should live our lives to a M-A-R-C-H, an acronym for **Make A Real Contribution Here**. In closing, Reverend Robinson reflected on the final lines of the Negro National Anthem, “be true to our God, be true to our nation” - words all Americans, he said, regardless of race or color, should live by.

What better way to end a spiritual celebration than with a veritable feast? And, thanks to the Black Heritage Committee members, there was plenty to feast on - chicken and rice, fried plantains, macaroni and cheese, collard greens and cornbread, topped off with German chocolate cake, lemon cake or sweet



potato pie.

Again, special thanks to all the DAS Black Heritage Committee members for their hard work and creativity in making this a very special commemoration and celebration: Chair Natalie Shipman, Laura Guilmartin, Alicia Nunez, Nate Jenkins, Ray Bailey, Rosemary Woods ...and a special thanks to DPW’s Holly Hart for another stellar presentation!

Meanwhile, down in Room 161 vendors gathered to showcase their wares with a definite African theme. From exotic jewelry, clothing and neck ties, to oils and a few traditional snacks, the room took on a character all of its own. Vendors included: Bright ‘n Airey Designs, Jackie Bright Celestial Collection, Nan Kaira, Healthy and Divine Inspirations, Sheila Marshall, Neckties ‘n Things, Alfred Campbell, and Seeds of Africa, Cheryl Magna.

Keeping an eye on health, Hartford Hospital RN’s Comalita Ellito and Marlene Harris were on hand to address diabetes questions, administer hypertension screenings and answer other health related questions. Also on hand was Marsha Hilditch a representative from the National Kidney Foundation of Connecticut.



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# Agencies Hold Pandemic Flu COOP Simulation

By Nina Ritson

*Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt your normal work day to bring you a special bulletin from Emergency Operations: At 10:00 a.m. eastern standard time, breaking news came in from Reuters wire and the World Health Organization: The Mayor's Office, New York City reported today that the Mayor is critically ill. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene confirmed that the Mayor's illness is due to the H5N1 virus. The Mayor had been in London for an economic summit. The Mayor apparently came in contact with one or more persons who were carrying the H5N1 virus. And from Washington, DC: The Secretary of State reports that both the President and Vice President have been infected by H5N1. The Vice President, survivor of several heart attacks, is in critical condition and in intensive care at Walter Reed.....*

Is this true? No, Nancy Pelosi is not running the country. This is only a sample of the simulated incident emails sent out on Tuesday, February 27.

After months of preparation by the Continuity of Operations Program (COOP), this simulated exercise put to the test agency plans to determine if the State of Connecticut is ready in the event of a worldwide flu pandemic.

Beginning in 2006, key agency personnel across the state have been meeting, drafting plans and preparing to keep the State of Connecticut operational should the flu pandemic strike. To answer this call,

DAS point persons and/or their deputies spent most of the day, bunkered in DAS' Emergency Operations



**Simulation leaders Deputy Commissioner Brenda Sisco and Steve Soklow were ably assisted by Doug Rinaldi, Carol Wilson, Carlos Velez, John McKay, Erin Choquette, Devin Marquez, Kathy Bruni and Rick Miarecki**

Center (EOC), the office of Incident Commander, Deputy Commissioner Brenda Sisco. Their key objectives?

- Report staff absenteeism
- Determine and report operational status and functional priority
- Request assistance as needed
- Respond to an evolving situation
- Identify corrective measures based on exercise results

At 10:00 a.m. evidence of a global pandemic surfaced and the "Governor" issued an order for all agency EOCs to activate. Planning Section Chief Steve Soklow quickly responded to the EOC command center



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with updated reports on staff out sick and agency functions throughout the day.

“This is FEMA 101,” said Deputy Incident Commander Doug Rinaldi. “DAS will do well because we have a dynamo for an agency facilitator, Commissioner Sisco!”

How true this was, as emails came firing in, one after another, for the five-hour ordeal, Sisco conferred with the her Incident Management team of Steve Soklow, Devin Marquez, Erin Choquette, Doug Rinaldi, John McKay, Rick Miarecki, Kathy Bruni, and Carol Wilson. She called in assistance from Steve Caliendo, Pam Libby, Paul Greco and Cindy Shea on an as-needed basis to deal with the immediate crisis.

Designated the official Observer, Carlos Velez didn’t miss a thing recording all actions, all questions, and all instructions issued by the COOP team over at the Armory.

“In this practice we are clarifying the chain of authority, testing the communication structure and identifying gaps in the process,” reported Choquette, Operations Section Team Deputy and

Deputy Legal Counsel. “We are also trying to provide Incident Management Team members a chance to test their responses, too.”

By 11:32 a.m., the EOC went into full Action Mode as the “Governor” announced a civil preparedness emergency.

The flu pandemic fast-forwarded to Level 6 of the World Health Organization rating system and emails alerted the team that we were now in a public health emergency and that the state was reporting 750,000 people had become infected, with 37,500 mortalities.

At this point, the order came for no non-essential use of state highways. The public was urged to go to the grocery store only once a week; hospitals were now in lockdown mode with alternate care facilities and makeshift morgues being set up.

“We must practice social distancing,” a term Libby emphasized, adding “that also means DAS will suspend exams, and classes.”

Throughout the day as the situation “worsened,” DAS reported 20-25% absenteeism in its ranks, assessing interruptions in functionality based on levels of priority and absentee percentages.

“Functionality can be affected by something other than absenteeism – like a sudden call to send all able bodies to another agency,” said Choquette.

Then tragedy struck just before 1:00 p.m. The sad news – DAS EOC reported three “fatalities”, one of them the most prominent voice throughout the day, Incident Commander Deputy Rinaldi was now on ice. Rinaldi took his demise well and somehow even continued to operate from the great beyond.

“DAS can successfully weather a pandemic situation only if employees

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adopt the attitude that this is a call to help. This is when their current job skills may take a back seat to background skills. What is critical here is the ability of employees to willingly pick up the slack of fellow workers sickened by the flu," he said.

Sisco began to address employee absenteeism. One issue that has to be addressed is the immediate need for attendance policies to avoid confusion and draw a clear line between exercising caution and practicing insubordination.



As the afternoon wore on, emails alerted the team that employees were refusing to report to work and that DAS must purchase an emergency supply of masks, gloves and waterless sanitizing gel.

Who do you call? To the rescue, came Cindy Shea and Paul Greco who immediately resourced the contracts already in place for these purchases and reported that a special 'emergency P-card' is already available.

Over at the Armory, the center of operations, Dr. Martin Anderson, Peggy Zabawar, and a few IBM folks spent the day as subject matter experts for the Emergency Opera-

tions Command post. Anderson reported,

"Overall, it went pretty well. There were problems – but we wanted this to happen now and not later. That's why we did this stuff to find out what may go wrong and what needs to be tweaked," Anderson said.

Although this was only the state's version of "War of the Worlds," the possibility is very real that the H5N1 virus could reach pandemic proportions in the not-so-distant future. Although by the close of the exercise the numbers were grim statewide – 1,000,000 people infected with 51,000 mortalities - DAS was able to report that it did



not reach the absentee numbers that would trigger suspension of operations, and was able to continue to function with limited personnel.

No one knows when or *if* this will actually occur – but if it does – DAS is ready!

## Mega Kudos for Soklow

Deputy Commissioner Brenda Sisco applauded Steve for his work with the Pandemic Simulation. "You put a lot of hard work into putting our plan together and keeping us on task and focused – not that any of us were skeptical of the whole thing! You did a great job!"

Doug Rinaldi also commended Steve noting, "I concur with Brenda, well done to Steve for being able to navigate the process in facilitating the creation of our plan and for being able to fill out those forms yesterday...well done...I am glad Steve is on our side..."

John McKay really summed it up: "If it weren't for Steve Soklow, the flu would have gotten all of us!"

# State "P Card" Produces Rebate

By John McKay

**D**AS Deputy Commissioner Brenda Sisco and State Comptroller Nancy Wyman accepted a rebate check of \$157,324 from JPMorgan Chase, stemming from the state's use of a purchasing card (P-Card) issued by the bank.

Use of the charge card by state agencies reduces the time and paperwork associated with purchase orders, invoices and checks for less than \$1,000. This payment method offers an alternative to a variety of other processes including petty cash, low-dollar purchase orders and travel reimbursement.

"Each year we find new and innovative ways of saving money for the state, and in turn, Connecticut

taxpayers," said Kerry DiMatteo who runs the program.

Sisco added, "I think the most important thing to note is that the P-Card is a payment tool for state purchasing. State agencies could easily have spent the same amount of money via purchase orders, checks or petty cash, but we wouldn't have seen any of that money come back to us in the form of a rebate."

The check will be deposited in the state's General Fund.

"This program is hard evidence that innovation and efficiency can save significant tax dollars," Wyman said,



**DAS Deputy Commissioner Brenda Sisco and Comptroller Nancy Wyman are joined by Kerry DiMatteo, Carlos Velez, Carol Wilson, representatives from JPMorgan Chase Bank and members of the Comptroller's staff for the check presentation.**

"My hope is that we can expand this type of program to more areas of state government."

# Yetishefsky to Sit on MDC Outreach Committee

**T**he Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) has formed a panel to facilitate outreach to the

region's small, women- and minority-owned businesses, as well as individuals,

to award opportunities available in the \$1.6 billion Clean Water Project (CWP) to upgrade the region's sewage system.

The District's panel—to be known as the "Strategic Advisory Committee"—is made up of business, government and construction industry professionals, as well as MDC Commissioners. Their role is to assist MDC staff to maximize the

small, women's and minority-owned businesses' involvement in the CWP.

A representative of the public sector serving on the panel is Meg Yetishefsky, Manager of the Supplier Diversity Program of the Department of Administrative Services.

"The MDC's Clean Water Project represents a unique opportunity for many segments of the region's contractors and labor pool to become involved in the largest project in MDC history," said Charles P. Sheehan, MDC Chief Executive Officer. "As a public agency, we are always mindful of our role in helping to open doors and to remove obstacles from those who live and work in the Region," he said.

Yetishefsky explained that over the next 15 years, the MDC's Clean Water Project will create more than

\$100 million in opportunities for area disadvantaged, minority and women-owned firms.

She said those opportunities will be in the fields of engineering, construction and related consultant services.

As the project moves from the present concepts to formalized engineering plans to construction, the Strategic Advisory Committee will be a valued resource.

The MDC is a nonprofit municipal corporation chartered by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1929. The MDC provides water, sewer and household hazardous waste collection services to its member municipalities in the Greater Hartford area.

*(Excerpts from MDC news release)*



# Lunch and Learn: some lean lessons

By Nina Ritson

**W**e are getting fat! And our kids are getting even fatter!  
Fact.

This point was really driven home on Friday, February 16, at the ConnectiFit Lunch and Learn session in the North Mechanical Room when guest speaker Jodi Petrozak laid out some shocking statistics in color maps for the several dozen “lunchers” present.

A graduate of East Stroudsburg University, Petrozak worked at the Greater Hartford YMCA for the last 14 years, most recently as the Director of Operations and Associate Executive Director. She left the YMCA to pursue a second bachelor’s degree in Health and Physical Education as well as a Masters Degree in Allied Health at Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut.

“It was really interesting – and quite eye-opening! Especially her charts that showed national trends in overweight children and in body mass or BMI in general!” said Susie Carlson of DAS’ SMART unit. “One thing she could not emphasize enough was to drink water, water and more water - and walk, walk, walk! Start small – the littlest change makes a huge difference in the long run.”

Carolyn Underwood, another SMART staff member, piped in, “She gave us ten examples of small changes that really make a long-term difference – like if you usually drink a coffee in the morning and three sodas throughout the day – have a coffee and one or two sodas then water!”

Petrozak also said, “Change is not unachievable – you can get started at

any age to be healthier. It really isn’t about age– as in the older we get the less active we get – but quite the opposite. Studies are revealing that our parents were of a generation that walked or rode their bikes everywhere as children, and their leisure time was spent doing an activity, not watching TV. These people are now seniors who are living a more active life than most people much younger, born into the electronic age.”

“The best thing is to be nutritionally sound – this is fundamental!” said Petrozak who admits leaning toward Weight Watchers as a dietary guide. “There are hundreds of diets out there, but you know what – if any of them really were the answer, there would be only one diet out there.”

Petrozak’s maps charted statistics of inactivity in people nationally over the last ten years.

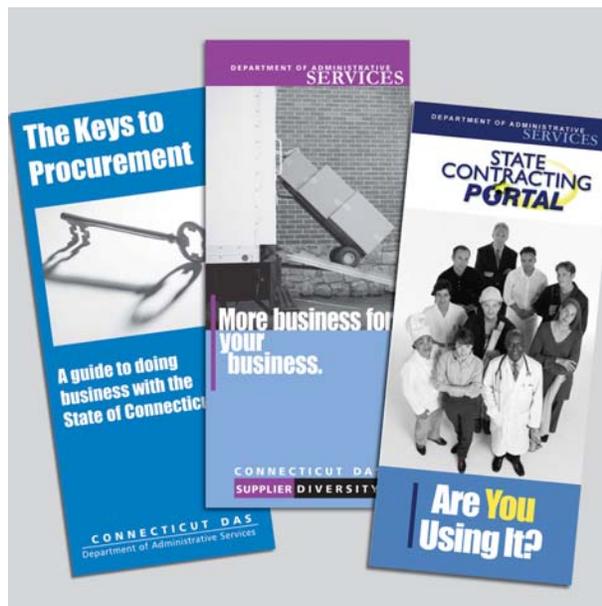
“There is no one section of the country that is less active – the numbers are showing poorly all over – especially in Connecticut!”



She also noted that children are growing more obese because of the changes in society, too. Both parents usually work now, so children tend to be housebound after school. This contrasts greatly with life only a quarter century ago when mom was at home and kids came off the school bus, then back outside to play.

She says parents can combat child obesity by doing activities *with* them like after school or weekend sports. Yes, times have changed, but people need to change with the times – be active – be healthy!

## New Look for Procurement



**Procurement Services is sporting a new look these days with brochures designed by DAS Communications. The brochures highlight the State Contracting Portal, Supplier Diversity Program and how to do business with the State.**