

Courier

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Someone(s) to Watch Over Us

A dangerous ice storm is forecast to hit Northern Virginia during the evening commute, a major accident may cause a section of the Beltway to close, or a plane flying into Dulles has declared an emergency.

Any of these events could have an impact on county residents and employees and no matter what day or time they may occur, the county has a watch officer monitoring incidents and keeping county officials apprised with up-to-the-minute information. Officials are then able to react quickly to make decisions about alerting residents, activating emergency operations and gathering information for the media.

The Office of Emergency Management's Watch Center has a staff of five watch officers monitoring local, state, regional, national and international incidents seven days a week, 24 hours a day, enabling the county to have an effective emergency communications system that



The watch officers include (left to right) Sulayman Brown, Lawrence Robey, Robert Turner, Senior Watch Officer Justin Witt and Ian Gregoire.

is the only one of its kind among the area's local governments. The Watch Center program was piloted in late 2005 and became fully operational this summer.

Watch Officers, see page 2

Retirement Administration Agency Enhances Customer Services

The Fairfax County Retirement Administration Agency (RAA) recently completed an 18-month software replacement project that combined 11 of its systems into one new retirement administration system. Called PensionGold, it is enabling the RAA to enhance its customer services to active employees, retirees and beneficiaries.

"The conversion to the new system makes us a lot more efficient and effective. PensionGold provides us with powerful tools that will benefit the county and our customers," explained **Phil Langham**, RAA deputy director.

PensionGold gives the RAA the ability to administer the county's three separate

Retirement, see page 3

Watch Officers, from page 1

Operations Chief **Mike Ryan** oversees the program with Senior Watch Officer **Justin Witt** and watch officers **Sulayman Brown, Ian Gregoire, Lawrence Robey** and **Robert Turner**. Among them, the watch officers have decades of experience in fire and rescue, communications, public safety and federal emergency operations. According to



Operations Chief
Mike Ryan

Ryan, this experience enables the officers to quickly analyze incidents as they are occurring and anticipate what will happen next.

"The Watch Center serves as the county's emergency warning point and is an integral part of our emergency communications system," noted **Doug Bass**, director of OEM.

"The work by the OEM officers is one of the many reasons why Fairfax County played a large part in the National Capital Region being one of six metro areas in the country that recently received the highest grade for communications interoperability from the Department of Homeland Security. [See Box] The Watch Center relays important emergency information to county personnel, our residents and supports other jurisdictions in the National Capital Region."

Located in a room in the Alternate Emergency Operations Center in the Government Center, the Watch Center has wall-to-wall high-tech communications systems and monitors. The technology enables the watch officers to monitor and communicate with state and federal emergency operations centers, the 9-1-1 Center (Fire and Rescue and Police communications), county government facilities, Fairfax County and other area school systems, public health facilities, area hospitals, the National Weather Service, and regional, state and federal transportation agencies, among several critical agencies and facilities.

The watch officers monitor and provide information to WebEOC, the Internet-based crisis incident

management system that provides local emergency operations centers with the ability to collaborate and share information quickly and efficiently. They also have the ability to activate the Reverse 911 system to send emergency alert phone calls to a targeted area, for example, last summer when residents needed to be evacuated during flooding in the Huntington area.

One of the Watch Center's most important responsibilities is to provide information to alert county employees and residents about traffic, weather or emergency incidents through the Emergency Alert Network (EAN)



Officer Brown on duty in the Watch Center.

for employees or the Community Emergency Alert Network (CEAN) for residents. EAN and CEAN enable the county to provide current, accurate information to cell phones, pagers, BlackBerrys, PDAs and/or e-mail accounts.

"The watch officers learn something from every incident," said Witt. "It is important to us to serve our residents and contribute to the high standards for public safety in the county." ■

The free EAN and CEAN services are available by signing up at <http://infoweb/emergency/ean> (for employees) and www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cean (for residents).

Region Gets High Marks for Emergency Communications

On Wednesday, Jan. 3, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that the National Capital Region (including Fairfax County among the 17 local governments, two states and the District of Columbia) was among six urban/metropolitan areas that received the highest score possible on a communications interoperability evaluation by DHS. The federal report reviewed emergency communications plans in 75 urban/metropolitan areas. Board of Supervisors Chairman **Gerald E. Connolly** attended the DHS press conference announcing the report findings and credited the cooperation between local and federal agencies for the high marks received by the region.

Retirement, from page 1

defined retirement systems benefit plans: Employees, Uniformed and Police Officers. It includes the different memberships and employee/employer contributions that fund these systems.

PensionGold can quickly and accurately provide a complete report for an employee contemplating retirement with pertinent information on benefits, contribution balance, sick leave accrual and much more that will assist them with decision making.

In addition, it can assist agency directors to prepare for succession planning [see page 6], with the ability to provide a snapshot of the number of employees in their agency that may be eligible to retire at any future point in time.

Active employees also will notice a big change in their annual retirement statement of benefits report that will be mailed to their home this summer. It will be more comprehensive than in past years.

More enhancements provided by the new system are anticipated later this year when

the RAA launches Web-based member services that will provide active employees and retirees with online access to up-to-date information, benefit statements and other resources.

The RAA, located at 10680 Main Street in Fairfax, has 23 staff members providing services to close to 25,000 employees, retirees and beneficiaries including certain employees at Fairfax County Public Schools. For more information on the county's retirement systems, go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov/retbrd/. ■



The RAA's retirement counselors include (left to right) John Prather, Susie Troup, Donna Haber, Larry Little and Chris Colandene, manager of membership services.

Compensation Team Begins Work

County Executive **Anthony H. Griffin** recently appointed an implementation team to assist in the roll out of the compensation study recommendations.

The team includes **Sue Woodruff**, **Susan Holsneck**, **Millie Mundy** and **Evelyn Grieve**, Department of Human Resources; **Joe Mondoro**, Department of Management and Budget; **Anita Baker**, Employees Advisory Council and **Sara Simmons**, Civil Service Commission.

He also invited members of the Compensation Task Force to continue with the project if they were available. At different points in the process, the implementation team will present recommendations and discuss issues with the Compensation Task Force that may have been overlooked during the study or that raise concerns, and discuss how the implementation will impact different areas of the county.

In addition, as noted in the last Courier article (the Jan. 5 issue is online at <http://infoweb/courier/>), the county conducted an informal

solicitation to select a consulting company to oversee and coordinate the process. Kennedy and Rand, the consultants who did the initial study, have been selected to provide assistance during the implementation phase.

The first two recommendations that the team is addressing are changes to the promotional policy and the market rate adjustment methodology. Look for more information on both of these issues, as well as the menu of other recommendations, in upcoming issues.

To help employees understand the changes to the compensation program, the implementation team anticipates preparing "briefing papers" for each recommendation from the initial report with the goal of making the information available and understandable to all employees. As they become available, these briefs will appear in the Courier, and the full reports will be placed on the Compensation Information Web page at <http://infoweb/cex/comptaskforce>. ■

*For weather delay
information call:
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703-246-7669
TTY 711*

DIT Reminder on Internet Use

There are thousands of Web sites that aren't necessary or appropriate for the work that most employees do for Fairfax County. While some employees may have legitimate work that might take them to Web sites like MySpace, YouTube and others, most of the county's workforce doesn't need access to these sites. However, Department of Information Technology (DIT) reports on county employees Internet activity show a number of staff accessing these and other Web sites that are inappropriate for the workplace.

Staff may not be aware that these sites pose a security risk to the county's network and information. For example, MySpace is loaded with malware (software with malicious intent and/or spyware) and executables (often undetected computer programs that could harm your computer). The more popular a Web site, the higher the probability there is that viruses and malware will be found on it.



Streaming media also puts a strain on the speed of the network, not only slowing down Internet access but other business transactions such as e-mail. For example, when the Sirius and XM Radio sites were added to the filtering software to reduce access to these sites, the available capacity in the county's network increased tremendously.

While the county uses filtering software for the Internet, this technology cannot be the only factor in whether a person accesses a site. It is difficult for software to be 100 percent effective at monitoring and filtering out inappropriate and/or unsafe sites for the workplace. While Fairfax County policy does allow for reasonable personal use, this use does not include putting the county's network and information at risk. ■

*by Jennifer Simpson, Information Security Awareness Program Manager
Department of Information Technology*

January Is Mentoring Month

The Board of Supervisors designated January as Mentoring Month in the county with a proclamation at its Jan. 8 meeting.

and improve self-discipline.

The Fairfax Mentoring Partnership works closely with 35 mentoring organizations in the county to educate the public about the benefits of mentoring, to build awareness of mentoring and to recruit mentors.

Mentoring programs in the county have waiting lists of young people seeking to be matched with a caring adult.

A highlight of the month's activities is the Sixth Annual Mentoring Partnerships Luncheon on Jan. 30. The event is an opportunity to build support and partnerships with local businesses, churches and civic organizations. There also will be individual mentor recognition and recruitment events and the partnership will distribute "Who Mentored You" bookmarks countywide.

For more information, or to volunteer as a mentor go to www.fairfaxyouth.org or www.mentorfairfax.org. ■



The board presented the Mentoring Month proclamation to (front, left to right) Mark Searle, chair, Fairfax Mentoring Partnership Task Force; Lt. Col. Suzanne G. Devlin, deputy chief of police investigations and operations support; (Chairman Gerald E. Connolly); Kieran Sharpe, president of the Fairfax Partnership for Youth; Elise Neil Bengtson, executive director; Margaret Kollay, task force member; Susan Lydick, program coordinator and Ellie Barnes, Fairfax Partnership for Youth board member.

The Fairfax Mentoring Partnership is promoting Mentoring Month to raise awareness of mentoring and recruit volunteers.

Research indicates that 46 percent of mentored teens are less likely to use drugs and 59 percent improve academic performance. Mentored children are more likely to develop better relationships with adults

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors held its first board meeting of 2007 on Jan. 8.

Gerald E. Connolly is the chairman of the Board of Supervisors. Braddock District Supervisor **Sharon Bulova** is vice chairman.

Here are the names, districts and contacts for the county's 10 elected members of the board. ■



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From Human Resources



**HR Central
has benefit
information.
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Succession Planning FAQ, Part 1

What is succession planning?

Succession planning (SP) provides managers and supervisors with a process for effective human resource planning and employee development. The county will begin implementing SP this spring in response to two trends in the workplace. First, there will be an increased number of vacancies as baby boomers prepare to leave the work force. Second, labor market experts predict a continued shortage of skilled managers and technical experts for the next three to five years. SP will help the county prepare workers to meet these challenges as well as others including continued population growth, increased demand for services and changing technology. SP will enable the county to continue to provide consistent, quality services to residents while retaining and developing valued employees.

Is SP considered “best practice”?

Yes. In the private sector, SP is widely used by employers to identify potential employees as candidates for future leadership positions. In government organizations, such as Fairfax County, an open recruitment process is used to fill vacancies because we have a competitive merit system. The county has designed an SP process that will work within our public service environment.

A recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management indicates 79 percent of firms surveyed either have or are planning to implement SP. As the baby boomers begin to exit the work force, many government organizations, including the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the state of Georgia, the county of Los Angeles and the city of Virginia Beach have developed and implemented SP strategies. Fairfax County has evaluated these strategies and developed a process that will work best in its own merit system.

Where can I find more information on the county’s SP program?

Watch for additional articles in the Courier. You can also read articles published in the Sept. 1, 2006 edition of HR News and Views,

available at <http://infoweb/hr/hrnews.pdf> and the Dec. 8, 2006 Courier, available at <http://infoweb/Courier>. The Department of Human Resources (DHR) is planning to publish a Succession Planning Guide that will be on the DHR Infoweb site at <http://infoweb/hr> as a resource for SP implementation.

How will SP help employees?

When SP is fully implemented, employees can participate fully in career development and planning. Through the county’s SP software, employees will have access to information on job descriptions and their related competencies. The software also will link to information on related training courses. All of this will help employees research and review the competencies required in positions of interest to them, develop well-defined training and development goals and link directly to the county’s Training Resource Catalogue for Employee Development and Learning.

How will SP help managers?

SP will enable managers and supervisors to identify positions for which SP is required. They can take action to develop the work force to ensure that necessary competencies and capabilities are available to meet future needs. By doing this, management can link human resource needs with organizational goals and objectives. Managers will be able to plan for potential vacancies as a result of increasing retirements and turnover, and identify potential losses in competencies and skills. In turn, managers can help employees implement development plans that will prepare them to meet future career goals. ■

Look for
Succession Planning FAQ, Part 2,
in the next issue of Courier on Feb. 2.

Briefs

Employee Fitness Tips in Next Courier

Due to the great response to the request for employees' fitness tips, Courier needs more space! Look for the fitness tips in the Feb. 2 issue.

If you have a healthy, relatively easy way to fit more activity into your busy schedule at work or home it's not too late to send in your tip. Send it by e-mail to courier@fairfaxcounty.gov by 9 a.m. on Jan. 24. Please include your name, department and phone number.

Don Smith Awardees to Be Honored on Jan. 22

The Board of Supervisors will honor the 2006 Don Smith Award winners at its meeting on Monday, Jan. 22.

The Employees Advisory Council (EAC) selected two winners and three honorable mentions from among 20 nominations for the award. The winners, **Ted Kavich**, Library, and Lt. **Susan Lamar**, Police Department, will each receive an engraved plaque and a check from the EAC for \$1,000.

The honorable mention award winners are **Stephen J. Jozsa**, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services; Pfc. **Stephen S. Lawson**, Police Department and **Chuck Wright**, Park Authority.

For more information about the award, go to www.fceac.org.

Delivering Effective Presentations

The Organizational Development and Training (OD&T) Department is presenting a class on delivering

effective presentations on Feb. 22 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Conference Rooms 2/3 in the Government Center at 12000 Government Center Parkway in Fairfax. The training will prepare participants to speak in public with confidence.

You'll learn how to define your audience, determine your key objective, structure the content, create a strong beginning and end, maintain your focus and use visual aids. Participants should come with an idea and related information to use in developing and delivering a 10-minute presentation.

All OD&T classes are available for self-registration at <http://s701ms01/stc/ffxmls>. For assistance or more information contact your agency training coordinator.

Harris Appointed to National Task Force

Jackie C. Harris, Fairfax County general registrar, has been appointed to a task force on education and training, sponsored by the Election Center of the National Association of Election Officials in Houston. The center helps election administrators in the areas of staff and poll worker training, as well as voter and news media education.

The task force will meet into early 2008. Its mission is "striving to pioneer and explore innovative and creative learning techniques for the men and women who serve or are associated with the elections business."

Association Honors Starbird and Biedler

The Lee District Association of Civic Organizations presented the

2006 Les Dorson Awards to two county employees at its annual holiday banquet last month. The award is named in memory of the former vice chairman of the association.

Grace Starbird, director of the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, received the Distinguished Public Service Leadership Award. She was honored for her leadership and role in Lee District's ability to maintain and improve the quality of life for the community's aging population.

Roy Biedler, senior zoning inspector, Department of Planning and Zoning, received the Distinguished Public Service Professional Award. He was honored for his commitment to maintain the integrity of the Mount Vernon and Lee districts.



Harris appointed to national election task force.

Millennium Forum on Jan. 24

Lee Rainey is the featured speaker for the Millennium Forum "The New Digital Citizen: How the Internet and Other Technologies Are Changing the Way People Interact With Government." The presentation is Jan. 24 from 10:30 a.m. to noon in the Government Center Board Auditorium. The free event is open to all employees. For more information go to <http://infoweb/mfs>.

Cold Weather Safety (Brrrr)

Exposure to freezing or cold temperatures can cause injuries and serious illnesses, such as frostbite or hypothermia. The likelihood of injury/illness depends on many factors, such as temperature, physical activity, clothing, age, etc. Here are tips to help you stay safe when it's cold outside.

Before going outside: Dress appropriately before going outdoors. Select clothing based on your activities and the predicted air temperature/wind speed. Clothing should be loosely fitting and dry. Wear layers of clothing instead of one heavy garment. Wear waterproof, insulated boots to keep your feet warm and dry and to maintain your footing in ice and snow.

While outside in the cold: Rec-

ognize the early warning signs and symptoms of cold injury, especially to areas exposed to the cold, such as the cheeks, nose, ears, fingers and toes. Most body heat is lost through the head so wear a hat, preferably one that covers your ears. Mittens provide more warmth to your hands than gloves. Check every 10 minutes or so to be sure there is no loss of feeling in toes, feet, fingers, hands, ears or nose, especially if you have been sitting or resting. Take a break indoors or seek shelter from winds at regular intervals. Do not drink alcohol in an attempt to stay warm!

Return inside: Remove boots, socks, gloves and other clothing and place in a warm and dry area. Immediately remove all wet clothing, as wet clothes draw heat from the

body. Check fingers and toes to be sure they are dry and can re-warm.

Seek medical attention: Always check to see if you have any symptoms of frostbite or hypothermia. Frostbite is characterized by white, waxy skin that feels numb and hard, while hypothermia may be characterized by uncontrolled shivering, slurred speech, clumsy movements, fatigue and confused behavior. Both require immediate emergency medical attention.

If you have questions about cold weather or other safety issues, contact **Robert Johnson**, safety analyst, Department of Finance, Risk Management Division, at 703-324-3040, TTY 771, or to robert.johnson@fairfaxcounty.gov. ■

Sheriff's Department Vets Visit Walter Reed Soldiers



Four Sheriff's Department deputies, all veterans of military service, visited wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 2. The group was escorted by U.S. Army Sgt. Michael Sellah (center) and included (left to right) Pvt. David Barr, Pfc. Talmadge Sims, Pvt. Mario Pereyra-Torres and Pfc. David Anderson.

"We visited the most recently injured, some having arrived only two weeks before [from Iraq and Afghanistan]," explained Sims. "All of the veterans that we met are recipients of the distinguished Purple Heart Medal, which is given to members of our military wounded in combat. The veterans each had a different story to tell. The individuals that we met that day were in very high spirits. We found them to be very upbeat about the various situations that they now face. In most cases there was laughter and they exchanged stories with us."

Photo provided by Sheriff's Department

Courier is published most payday Fridays. The deadline for articles and information is two weeks before publication.



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