

Courier

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Communications Survey Results

A large number of county employees feel that internal communications at the county level have improved, while many would like to see communications improve within their agencies.

These are two important results from the internal communications survey that was completed in April by 2,979 employees, almost one-fourth of the county's active work force.

The survey results were presented to County Executive **Tony Griffin** and the deputy county executives in August.

"It is important to note that communications have improved in the county and the survey results will be useful in helping us pinpoint ways in which we can make communications better," explained Deputy County Executive **David Molchany**. "This study really shows us

what employees are thinking and will help us effectively tailor how we communicate at all levels in the county."

Designed and implemented by the Employee Communication Board, a multi-agency group of 23 employees, the results of the survey were tabulated by representatives from the Library. The report was summarized by the communication board, which also conducted an analysis of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities (SWO) based on the survey results.

The survey was a follow-up to a similar effort in 1998 to determine the effectiveness of the county's internal communication systems.

The executive summary of the survey and the complete report on the results are at <http://infoweb/opa/commboard.htm>.

Results, page 2

County Observes 9/11 Anniversary

County officials, employees and residents gathered at the 9/11 Memorial Grove located on the grounds of the Government Center on Monday, Sept. 11 for the fifth annual 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony. Board of Supervisors Chairman **Gerald E. Connolly**, Fire Chief **Michael Neuhard** and Police Chief **David Rohrer** gave remarks reflecting on the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The county's Public Safety Honor Guard and the Fairfax Jubil-Aires also participated in the ceremony. ■



The county's Public Safety Honor Guard, the Board of Supervisors and the county executive led the long procession from the Government Center to the 9/11 Memorial Grove for the ceremony.

Results, from page 1

"The board members and I are grateful to the employees who filled out the survey and provided us with this very valuable information," said **Merni Fitzgerald**, Office of Public Affairs director and Employee Communication Board chairman. She also noted that steps to improve internal communications will be discussed at an upcoming meeting of the senior management team including all agency directors. The survey was made available online and was included in the April 14 issue of Courier.

The following is a summary report of the SWO analysis by the Employee Communication Board with a short summary of findings.

Strengths:

- ◆The major finding was that communication has improved overall.
- ◆NewsLink and Courier received excellent feedback from employees.
- ◆All the survey takers had e-mail accessibility.
- ◆Communication from the county executive is perceived as good.
- ◆Electronic communication is perceived as good.
- ◆Staff appreciate multiple methods of communication.

Weaknesses:

- ◆Employees feel they are receiving county-wide information, but perceive a breakdown in communication at the agency level. Sharing of information among agency directors to their staff is uneven. Employees indicated that some directors share a lot of information, while others do not share any information.
- ◆Agency internal communications are frequently perceived as weak or informal at best.
- ◆Approximately 4 percent of comments were related to fears that communications are incomplete, edited, withheld, untimely or unreliable.
- ◆Some employees see their supervisor as a roadblock to communication. Some supervisors use Outlook as a method of supervising

employees.

◆Communications to field employees (employees who spend majority of workday outside/in the community, away from computers/office) are still a challenge.

◆Employees perceive a lack of availability of human resources-related information. Information is available, but not necessarily what they feel they need.

◆Forty-two percent of employees stated that they do not have access to the Fairfax County Training Network (FCTN). Currently you need to view FCTN on a television set. Some respondents felt that their supervisors perceive spending work time watching television as a negative.

◆Access to televisions is a problem at some work sites such as the Massey building and libraries. When conference rooms are booked, televisions are not available.

◆Navigating/searching the Infoweb is perceived as difficult and not intuitive. The Infoweb search engine does not work well.

◆Survey results yielded many negative comments on pay. (Note: survey was conducted during budget process.)

◆Some employees perceive a lack of communication from the deputy county executives.

◆Some existing communication tools are used/viewed by a low percentage of the respondents.

◆Many people referred to inadequate official county venues for employees to provide feedback. Communications should be two-way.

◆The county Web site looks outdated.

Opportunities:

◆Conduct agency wide surveys on internal communications. Improve opportunities for bottom-up communication.

◆Improve access to all communication tools for field personnel.

◆Increase opportunities and/or ways of communicating to an increasingly diverse work force. Continue to offer literacy training.

◆Consider issuing a "state of the county" report to employees by the county executive.

The complete report on the survey results can be found at <http://infoweb/opa/commboard.htm>.

- ♦Improve distribution of e-mails to county leadership (senior management team). Copy important e-mails to an additional person in the agency to ensure more than one person receives it when the director is unavailable.
- ♦Consider an employee blog/live blog with the county executive.
- ♦Increase visibility of deputy county executives in agencies.
- ♦Publicize and increase awareness of FCTN. Encourage more staff to view FCTN; acknowledge it as time well spent.
- ♦Pilot testing of video streaming FCTN to desktop PCs in the Government Center and Massey building.
- ♦Promote best internal communication practices in agencies by placing information on the Infoweb.
- ♦Develop a customized landing page on the Infoweb (a portal) where the latest and/or most important news appears when an individual first logs on each day.
- ♦Consider a question-and-answer page where employees can ask a question and the county executive or other appropriate individual responds.

- ♦Do a "how to use the Infoweb" feature in the Courier.
- ♦Increase photographs on the Web site and redesign to look more up-to-date.
- ♦Consider establishing a weekly digest for NewsLink with top stories of the week.
- ♦Consider an agency blog; staff who will not speak up in public may express something electronically and the agency directors, the county executive and deputies could monitor the blogs.

Summary of Findings:

- ♦Communication has improved overall (emergence of e-mail can be credited).
- ♦Two-way communication needs to improve.
- ♦Agency communication needs to improve.
- ♦Access to official communication tools needs to be increased.
- ♦Maximize use of technology and take advantage of emerging technology (video streaming, blogging, etc.) at all levels of county government.
- ♦Increase communication and visibility of the county executive and executive team. ■

Millennium Forum on Sept. 27

“The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America’s Next Rendezvous With Destiny,” is the topic of the Millennium Forum scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 27. The presentation by William Strauss takes place from 10:30 a.m. to noon in the Government Center Board Auditorium.

A writer/historian with a separate career in theater, Strauss is a leading authority on American generations and a noted playwright, theater director, performer, consultant and speaker.

He is the co-author with Neil Howe of the 1991 book “Generations” which explains American history as the ebb and flow of generational types. The pair has continued the theme with other top sellers such as “13th Gen” and “The Fourth Turning,” which forecast a major mood change in America

shortly after the new millennium. Strauss is a co-founder and director of the Capitol Steps, a professional satirical troupe that has performed more than 7,000 shows and released 25 recordings. In 1999, he co-founded the Cappies, a high school critics and awards program, to encourage student involvement in the arts



William Strauss

The Millennium Forum is free to all employees as part of the employee development series that is supported by the county executive.

For more information, go to <http://infoweb/mfs>. ■

Virginia 2007

SACC Celebrates Communities

More than 600 teachers for the county's School Age Child Care (SACC) program stepped back in time to the year 1607 during the annual SACC orientation held Aug. 28 at the Dulles Expo and Conference Center in Chantilly. SACC is participating in the county's Virginia 2007 commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown as part of its "Community Connections" theme for the 2006-2007 school year.

The teachers were greeted by the colonial "citizens" of Jamestown, including settlers and Indians as they walked through a 50-foot replica of the Godspeed, a ship that



Hunter Mill District Supervisor Catherine M. Hudgins welcomed the teachers to the orientation. Behind her is the Godspeed replica created by SACC staff.

brought the English settlers to America. There also were interactive displays of a Powhatan Indian village and colonial settlement, all built by SACC staff.

"This gives us a great focus for the school year and an overview on how to teach the lessons," commented **Jamie Bresley**, SACC teacher based at Lees Corner Elementary School in Fairfax .

SACC provides before- and after-school child care at 134 public elementary schools throughout the county, as well as Key and Kilmer centers which serve children with disabilities, ages 5 to 21. For more information on the SACC program visit

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc/Sacc.htm>. ■



First-year SACC teachers dressed in colonial garb for a keepsake photo during the orientation.

Commuter News

The Board of Supervisors recently approved an increase in the transportation benefit provided to employees who use transit or vanpools to get to work. The existing subsidy of up to \$60 per month has been raised to \$105, which is the maximum tax-free amount allowed by the federal government.

Employees listed in PRISM who use bus or rail or vanpool to get to work at least two days a week are eligible for up to \$105 in the form of SmarTrip cards, Metrocheks, and other regional fare media produced by the Wash-



Commuter, page 5

Compensation Review Update

The Compensation Study Task Force is continuing its work on several aspects of the review process in order to make the project completion date of Nov. 15. The emphasis of the review is the current pay for performance system, as well as other aspects of the county's compensation system – such as how the methodology for the market rate adjustment is done. The task force is working with the consulting company Kennedy & Rand to provide a report to County Executive **Tony Griffin** for consideration prior to meetings with the Board of Supervisors on the FY 2008 budget.

The compensation review covers the approximately 8,000 general employees included in the S, L and E scales.

Information about the compensation review, which began in June, can be found online at <http://infoweb/cex/comptaskforce>. The Infoweb page includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which are updated regularly based on employee feedback. Several comprehensive articles have also appeared in Courier, including the July 21, Aug. 4 and Sept. 1 issues, found online at <http://infoweb/courier>. Employees are strongly encouraged to provide feedback as part of the review process. There are several ways to participate:

- ◆ Attend a focus group meeting. The task force and consultant have scheduled several meetings at county facilities to receive feedback from employees. If you are among the



employees randomly selected to attend a focus group, please make the time to have your voice heard.

- ◆ Send an e-mail to: CompensationTaskForce@fairfaxcounty.gov.

- ◆ Leave a voicemail message at 703-324-1000.

- ◆ Send written comments c/o Compensation Task Force, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 258, Fairfax, VA 22035.

Due to the volume of comments, the task force will not be able to respond individually to all e-mails, voicemails or letters received. However, recurring questions and concerns will be addressed in upcoming Courier articles and through the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Infoweb. ■

Commuter, from page 4

ington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA/Metro), VRE and other transit systems. The Department of Transportation is in the process of updating procedures and forms and expects to have new application and enrollment forms available this month. Employees who are currently enrolled in the Transportation Benefits Program must complete the new forms.

For more information, visit <http://infoweb/fcdot/transbenefit.htm> or call 703-324-1461, TTY 703-324-1102.

For reasonable ADA accommodations, call **Beth Francis**, DOT, at 703-324-1153, TTY 703-324-1102.

NuRide is a Fairfax County-based company that helps commuters find riders or drivers to locations near where they work and live. Fairfax County Government is a member of this free service which provides ride sharers with incentives such as gift certificates and discounts.

For more information, including how to register go online to www.nuride.com. ■

Focus on Human Resources



**Questions?
Call
HR Central
703-324-4900,
TTY 703-222-7314.**

Open Enrollment Begins Oct. 16

County employees will have an opportunity to make changes to their pre-tax health, dental and life insurance benefits during the 2007 open enrollment period, Oct. 16 through Nov. 17. All benefit elections made during the open enrollment period will take effect Jan. 1.

Unless there is a qualifying change in status during the 2007 plan year, the following benefit changes can only be made during the annual open enrollment:

- ◆ Enroll in a health and/or dental plan.
- ◆ Add a spouse and/or eligible dependent to their health and/or dental coverage.
- ◆ Remove a spouse and/or eligible dependent from health and/or dental coverage.
- ◆ Change your health plan election.
- ◆ Enroll in the medical spending account and/or dependent care assistance program. Employees who are participating in 2006 must re-enroll to continue participation in 2007.
- ◆ Request optional life insurance coverage for yourself or dependent life coverage for dependents (subject to medical evidence of insurability).
- ◆ Cancel current health, dental, optional life or dependent life insurance coverage.

Please note that employees who are enrolled in health coverage will automatically be covered by the new vision plan. No action will be required for these employees to obtain vision coverage. The Board of Supervisors recently approved adding these enhanced vision benefits to the county's benefit programs. (Details can be found in the Sept. 1 issue of Courier. Go to <http://infoweb/courier>.)

Although employees can enroll in the county's long-term disability and long-term care plans at any time during the year, open enrollment may be a good time for employees to evaluate these programs. Current employees who are not within their first 60 days of county employment must submit medical evidence of insurability to enroll in either program.

Employees will again use Benelogic, the county's online benefit enrollment system, to make their 2007 benefit elections.

More information on online enrollment and the county's 2007 benefit plans will be provided through home mailings, open enrollment benefit fairs and upcoming issues of Courier. You can also call HR Central at 703-324-4900, TTY 703-222-7314. ■

Retirement Benefit Statements Mailed

Annual retirement benefit statements were mailed earlier this month to all active members of the Fairfax County employees, police officers and uniformed retirement systems. Benefit statements contain estimates from information in the retirement system records as of June 30. The statements are based on current salary and years of service and do not take into account payroll adjustments, promotions or other changes after June 30.

Statements for full-time employees provide detailed information including total contributions to date, interest earned and estimates of when the employee is eligible to retire. Statements also include estimates of benefits payable to retiring employees at various ages and include beneficiary information. Benefit estimates do not include any leave without

pay periods or sick leave balances, nor do they include adjustments to salary for those whose merit increments were deferred in FY 1992 and FY 1993. Carefully review this data for accuracy.

Statements for part-time employees include beneficiary information, contributions and interest.

Changes to beneficiary information must be made in writing to the Retirement Administration Agency. Visit the agency's Web page at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/retbrd/ to request a "Beneficiary Update" card if necessary. Employees who do not receive a benefit statement by Sept. 27 should call the Retirement Administration Agency at 703-279-8200, TTY 711. ■

**Retirement
administration
questions? Call
the Retirement
Administration
Agency at
703-279-8200,
TTY 711.**

Briefs

Volunteer Tutors Needed

Volunteers are needed for day and evening hours to work one-to-one with adult learners in public libraries. The Volunteer Learning Program (VLP) is a joint community project of the Fairfax County Public Schools (Adult and Community Education), Fairfax County's Juvenile Court and the Fairfax County Public Library. For more information and training dates and locations, please call 703-246-2139, TTY 711 or e-mail VLP@fcps.edu.

Government Center Emergency Response Open House

Employees are invited to attend the Emergency Response Open House on Wednesday, Sept. 20, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Government Center's north atrium outside the cafeteria. There will be exhibits with valuable information on personal safety and other topics and opportunities to win prizes. For more information, call Cheryl McLean, FMD, at 703-324-2839, TTY 711, or e-mail cheryl.mclean@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Free Classifieds!

Sell and buy great deals with the free classifieds service available on the Infoweb. Just fill out the information at <https://infoweb/classifieds>. It's a great way to sell your car or get a good deal on a resort vacation.

Fall Trips and Tours

The Park Authority's fall tours include a fall foliage driving tour, NASCAR at Dover, the Christmas Spectacular in New York and more. For details visit the Parktakes Web page at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes.htm and search under "find

a tour." Call 703-222-4664, TTY 711, to register or 703-324-5220, TTY 711, for more specific tour information. For reasonable ADA accommodations, contact **Gary Logue** at 703-324-8727, TTY 703-803-3354.

Ernesto Causes Concern

The county partially activated its Alternate Emergency Operations Center at the Government Center from 8 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 1, to 7:30 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 2, in preparation for the potential impact of Tropical Storm Ernesto. The county also opened a shelter as a precautionary measure at Edison High School in Alexandria in case evacuations became necessary.

Throughout the storm, county staff monitored water levels in the Huntington, Belle View and New Alexandria areas, which have been flooded in the past. There were a number of communications to residents in those areas including activation of a 24-hour emergency information hotline, door-to-door distribution of fliers, as well as Community Emergency Alert Network (CEAN) and RiverWatch messages. The storm weakened before hitting the county and no flooding emergencies were reported.

Fall Fun for Families

The 14th annual Fall for Fairfax festival will be held on Saturday, Sept. 30, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on the El-

lipse of the Government Center at 12000 Government Center Parkway.

The event includes scarecrow making, pony rides, pumpkin painting, the incredible KidZone, two stages of family-friendly entertainment, exhibit areas, a food court and more.

For more information, go to www.fallforfairfax.com.



Office of Public Affairs Director Merni Fitzgerald is interviewed by an NBC4 television reporter outside the Government Center during Tropical Storm Ernesto.

Disaster Loan Center Opened in South County

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) opened a disaster loan assistance center last month in the South County Government Center, located at 8350 Richmond Highway in Alexandria.

Residents and businesses in the Huntington area and other county locations affected by flooding in June are now able to apply for low-interest loans to help repair or rebuild buildings. The SBA offers loans up to \$40,000 for repairs for renters and homeowners or up to \$200,000 for homeowners to repair their primary homes. Loans for businesses are available up to \$1.5 million. The application deadline for the loans is Oct. 16.

Information and forms can also be found at www.sba.gov/disaster.



School Bus Safety Reminders

Summer vacations are over, children are back to school and school buses are again on the roads, all adding up to an increased volume of traffic.

Fairfax County Public School buses carry more than 101,000 students each day and are on the road before 6 a.m. Many of these buses may be operating late into the evening due to field trips and sporting events.

Unfortunately, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports an average of 26 students are killed and 9,000 are injured in incidents in the United States each year involving school buses. Many of these incidents are the result of

other vehicles. Here is some information you need to know to keep children safe:

- ◆ Allow more time to commute.
- ◆ Expect children walking to and from school, crossing streets and waiting for the bus.
- ◆ Stop for school buses.
- ◆ Virginia law requires that all motorists must stop for a school bus when the bus is stopped for the purpose of loading/unloading children. Blinking yellow lights indicate the bus is about to stop, while red lights indicate loading/unloading.
- ◆ All motorists must stop and remain stopped at undivided streets or highways until all children are

clear of the highway and the bus is moving again.

◆ Motorists traveling in the lanes going in the same direction as the school bus must stop on a divided roadway. Motorists on the other side of the physical barrier or unpaved area are not required to stop.

◆ There are legal penalties for not stopping, such as a reckless driving charge, jail time and/or a large fine.

Contact **Robert Johnson**, safety analyst, Department of Finance, Risk Management Division, at 703-324-3043, TTY 711 or e-mail robert.johnson@fairfaxcounty.gov, if you have any questions. ■

Diversity Conference: Registration Deadline is Oct. 2

In rapidly changing Fairfax County, it can be a challenge to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community. Employees also need to collaborate effectively with co-workers from a broad range of backgrounds and be able to bridge perceived divides of differences.

The annual Diversity Conference, on Friday, Nov. 3, is an opportunity to increase understanding, broaden appreciation and learn tools and techniques for spanning gaps that differences can sometimes create.

Have you ever questioned whether you should offer assistance to customers with physical disabilities? Do you puzzle over the correct pronunciation of foreign names, not knowing if it's better to try it or instead ask the person for guidance?

Do you worry about how to interact with a co-worker who is battling depression? Have you struggled with correctly conveying a message to someone from another culture and understanding their response?



*Keynote speaker
 Jhoon Rhee*

These important questions and other issues will be addressed by the workshop presenters at this year's conference, "Diversity: Everyone's a Winner." To accommodate more participants, morning and afternoon workshop sessions are being offered. There will be an overlap for the mid-day portion which features keynote speaker Jhoon Rhee, a world renowned martial arts expert, plus entertainment and lunch.

Information and registration forms are available online at <http://infoweb/OEP/homepage.htm>. ■

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