



#### ✉ In This Issue

- CEM: what it is, why it's important, how it guides our business
- CS reallocates resources to increase efficiency
- AST logo contest wrapped up on Pi day
- ORS visits MSU
- Loss of a friend and coworker
- Severe weather season ahead
- ORS's St. Patrick's Day events
- QCI - Dash masters
- Staff Training
- Business Briefs
- Comings and Goings
- Spotlight - Aaron Usher

#### ✉ Calendar

##### March

Public school board meeting 27

#### ✉ On The Horizon

- Tax Day - April 15
- Easter - April 20

## CEM: what it is, why it's important, how it guides our business

For years we've been participating in the annual benchmarking assessment with CEM Benchmarking and providing staff with updates on the results. In general, the results show that ORS is a low cost, high service organization.



What drives ORS to participate in this benchmarking every year?

First, it's important to know that CEM Benchmarking is a company that tracks the characteristics, features and costs of corporate and public pension plans world wide. Each year, they conduct an annual survey for defined benefit and defined contribution plans that requests information ranging from costs for specific items to the number of members in a retirement system. At ORS, this effort is led by the financial analysts in BPD and completed with great support from the rest of the processes and financial services.

After CEM analyzes the information, they provide each participating group a report which will compare their results to their peers (similarly sized retirement plans). According to **Andrew Silva**, financial analyst in BPD, At ORS we utilize the CEM survey to benchmark our pension plan and administrative efforts to our peers. It allows us to see how we are doing administering the pension compared to plans of a similar dollar amount and member size. We look at specific costs, member demographics, service levels, customer satisfaction and plan design.

Select staff from each process review the results to find our successes and challenges. Many ideas for improvement come from the CEM process. As we compare our plan to others, we can explore different ideas or services that have been successfully implemented by other systems. Sometimes these ideas are implemented into our business plans for the next year. For example, in the near future, you may see [pillar wraps](#) in each process. This project came directly out of the last CEM meeting.

Sometimes our results spark interest from other retirement systems and they contact ORS for details. At this year's annual meeting of CEM participants, **Ian Broughton** and **Laurie Mitchell** will be presenting to the group on two different subjects: Social Media and a Data-Driven Communications.

If you have questions regarding what the CEM results mean to your process, touch base with you BPO, BPL or process supervisor.

- Earth Day  
- April 22
- Administrative Professionals Day  
- April 23
- All Staff meeting  
- April 29

#### Quick Links

- [ORS Member Website](#)
- [ORS Employer Website](#)

#### Commonly Used Acronyms

AST	Application Support Team
BLA	Business Leadership Assembly (EPC, BPOs, and BPLs)
BPD	Benefit Plan Design
BPL	Business Process Leader
BPO	Business Process Owner
CE	Customer Education
CS	Customer Service
DB	Defined Benefit
DC	Defined Contribution
DTMB	Department of Technology, Management and Budget
EPC	Executive Process Council (Phil, Laurie H, Laurie M, Anthony, and Kerrie)
EPO	Executive Process Owner
ER	Employer Reporting
ORS	Office of Retirement Services
PRIM	Preretirement Information Meeting (public school employees)
PRO	Preretirement Orientation (state employees)
PS	Process Support
SME	Subject Matter Expert
UAT	User Acceptance

[back to top](#)

## CS reallocates resources to increase efficiency

*The best laid schemes of mice and men / Often go awry. – Robert Burns*

How nimbly can you switch your plans to adapt to unanticipated changes?

This year, CS had to quickly adjust its resourcing due to a high volume of phone calls stemming from insurance communications that were mailed in December and early January. During that period, almost 500,000 pieces of mail were sent to our various customers related to the health plans, pharmacy plans, vision and dental plans. CS had plans in place to manage the expected high volumes of phone calls and messages about 1099-Rs, tax withholding, and Public School insurance rates. However, the additional mailings created phone volumes that had them shifting staff to phones. They also planned to start the Public School retirement application season. But those plans would need to change.

The CS leaders (**Malachi Hooser, Andy Kolp**, supervisors, and the CS analyst team) worked together to create a new plan to handle our day-to-day needs and tackle the ever-increasing number of workflow tasks. Application Processing workflows were accumulating faster than they could be processed. Supervisors reviewed staff's skill sets, paying particular attention to aligning the resources with the new the work. Staff members were focused on the tasks where they could contribute the most to the process.

Application processors would be able to focus on set ups and close outs without having to worry about shifting gears in the middle to handle a customer call. Call agents could concentrate on handling the call volume and, whenever possible, direct the callers to use miAccount to access account information, apply for retirement, or handle other account maintenance activities.

Going one step further, one day a week, CS found a very creative use of the Virtual Hold Technology (VHT). On Friday, February 28 and March 7, and Thursday, March 13, Virtual Hold was used to queue up many phone calls in the morning – all of which were returned by the close of business. Callers' expectations of when they would receive a call back were set with an up-front message. This allowed CS to free up further resources for application processing and other critical tasks while ensuring that every person received a call.

So far the new plan has been working well, and we've discovered again that we can be flexible and adapt when new challenges come our way. Kudos to the staff members who continue to step up!

[back to top](#)



## AST logo contest wrapped up on Pi day



## Testing

**ORS Strategic Intents**

- Forge Operational Excellence
- Instill Customer Confidence
- Engage Hearts and Minds



AST managers challenged developers and staff to come up with a new AST logo that represents what they do and who they are. Initial entries were due by February 28. From the original pool of more than two dozen submissions, AST managers picked the top three for final voting by AST staff.

The winning logo was the three cogs logo, created by: **Vaishnavi Chakravartula, Mark Sands, Kulvir Singh, Mahesh Shanmugasundaram, and Sundar Thevar.**

Congratulations! The new logo will go on the AST SharePoint page, and may also pop up in other places.

[back to top](#)

## ORS visits MSU



**Letitia Levi, Ryan Marr, and Tim McCormick** traveled to MSU on March 18 to speak with the MSU students who are analyzing ORS call center data. They taught them about ORS's normal business, service center tools, and business organization.

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[back to top](#)

## Loss of a friend and co-worker

On March 18 we lost a dear friend and coworker in **Becky Davis**, who passed away unexpectedly due to a medical condition.

During her time at ORS, Becky worked on various projects at ORS that allowed many of us to get to know her. More recently she was a key player in Employer Reporting serving the employers and assisting them to reconcile their accounts.

Her knowledge and personality will be dearly missed by all of us.




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[back to top](#)

## Severe weather season ahead

We've made it through (hopefully) the worst part of the winter, and spring is just around the corner. To many of us, spring is a fresh start, synonymous with new beginnings and growth, full of prosperous hope and energy for the upcoming months. This energy is also in the air, and while pure and beautiful, breathing life into our earth and all of its creatures, it also can also manifest into the most awesome and powerful destructive forces known. Mother Nature orchestrates this annual change of seasons with a balance of chaos and order, opposing forces that constantly create, destroy, and alter our environment. We are at the mercy of these changes, for better or worse, and while we approach the coming spring with hopes of warm, sunny days, we need to be prepared for the severe weather that comes with it.



Here are some quick tips for keeping yourself and your loved ones safe this spring:

Lightning Safety	Tornado Safety	Flood Safety
The 30-30 rule: if you hear thunder less than 30 seconds after seeing lightning, seek shelter. Do not resume activities until the thunder stops for at least 30 minutes.	Create a plan for your home and make sure all family members know what to do. Go to your basement or an interior room of your house when a storm or tornado warning is issued.	Learn the safest route to high, safe ground from your home and work, in case you have to leave in a hurry.



If you are outdoors when you see lightning, find shelter IMMEDIATELY.	If you are in a rural area with no shelter in sight, pull over and get into a ditch or low lying area as a last resort. Do not go to a highway overpass.	Stock up on emergency supplies like canned food, medicine, first aid supplies, and drinking water.
If you are indoors, avoid water, doorways, windows, and using corded devices.	Keep a supply kit in your safe room, complete with a flashlight & extra batteries.	Sign up for <a href="#">flood alerts</a> to stay ahead of the threat.

When do tornadoes generally occur?

Most tornadoes occur during the months of May, June, July, and August primarily in the late afternoon and evening hours. However, tornadoes can occur anytime of the day or night in almost any month during the year.

Some of the information provided courtesy of the Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness (MCSWA). For more weather tips, myths, and facts, visit the [MCSWA website](#).

[back to top](#)

## ORS's St. Patrick's Day event



[See the slideshow of the day's activities.](#)

[back to top](#)



## Dash masters

A short little line—that's what we're talking about. But these little lines aren't an all-in-one tool; they come in different flavors, and serve different masters.

The lines you find between words that are connected, like all-in-one, are called **hyphens**. Hyphens can either join words that have a combined meaning, or show that words are linked to the grammar of a sentence. Here's an example:

- The actress who accepted the award was well known. (*Well known* follows the noun, so no hyphen.)
- The well-known actress accepted the award. (*Well* and *known* form one idea in front of the noun, so they're hyphenated.)

The lines you find between two sections of a sentence are called **dashes**. They can set off a phrase in your sentence—like you're interrupting yourself—or emphasize something important. In Microsoft Word, when you type two dashes together between words (with no spaces), they automatically become an em dash. An em dash is exactly what it sounds like: a dash that's the same width as the capital letter M.

Want to know more about hyphens and dashes? Check out the [ORS Style Guide](#). For an interesting use of dashes, try Emily Dickinson's poem [I heard a Fly buzz \(465\)](#).

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back to top



## Crucial Conversations

On March 12 and 13 **Jennifer Dunavant** and **Malachi Hooser** attended the Civil Service training *Crucial Conversations*. **Cherie Vaughn** attended the same training on March 19 and 20. This program helps the participants learn to master their crucial conversations to improve their organization, strengthen their relationships, and improve their overall health.

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back to top



## Submit your questions for the All-Staff Town Hall

If you have questions you'd like leadership to answer at the Spring All-Staff, submit them by Thursday, March 27. There are pencils, paper, and cans located next to each printer in A and B wings.

## ORS wins award for Facebook launch from CMPRSA

The Central Michigan chapter of the Public Relations Society of America awarded ORS a Pinnacle Award for a public relations tactic, for excellence in a social medium. Customer Education staff submitted the ORS Facebook launch for this competition, sharing details of the planning, implementation and measurement of our page. The PACE awards are mid-Michigan's highest honor of public relations activities and are awarded annually to those who have successfully addressed a contemporary issue with exemplary professional skill, creativity and resourcefulness.

Entries are judged by a peer group in another state and awards are distributed at their awards ceremony in April, which **Amy Price** and **Ian Broughton** plan to attend.

### Emails through GovDelivery aim to lessen calls

Summer is the time of year for Public School retirement application processing. GovDelivery, our mass email tool, is being used to notify members who have applied for a June 1 or July 1 retirement effective date when their application will be processed. The email details the stages their application will proceed through, and reminds members to submit the necessary proofs. The ultimate goal of this email is to let members know what to expect and to help reduce calls from members following up on an application.

### ORS shares social media successes

Kate Hyer, public information officer at the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana, recently reached out to us about our Facebook page. "You are obviously doing a wonderful job with your social media presence," she wrote, and asked to discuss our successful strategies over the phone. **Lyndsay Aldrich**, **Ian Broughton**, and **Amy Price** talked with Kate about the planning, strategy and implementation of our Facebook page. Though our systems are different in size, ORS staff recommended leveraging member emails to increase page likes, posting daily, showing personality and keeping the tone conversational.

[back to top](#)



### Comings:



AST welcomed **Kalyani Gutta** on March 10. Kalyani is on the IPR java development team and recently moved to the Okemos area from Tampa, Florida. She enjoys travelling with her husband and is also a fan of Indian films.

### Goings:

AST wished the best to **Spandana Rayabharapu** on March 13.

### On The Move:

CS welcomed back **Krystal Strachan** on March 17, after she completed 12 months as a WOC analyst in CE.

On March 10, **Andrew O'Keefe** began his training as a WOC supervisor in CS. Congrats Andrew! He begins his new position on March 24.

[back to top](#)



### Aaron Usher, Rally Navigator

If you've ever watched a rally competition on TV, it may look like a





form of auto racing. In rallies, though, the emphasis is not always on outright speed but on accurate timekeeping and navigation and on vehicle reliability, often on difficult roads and over long distances. The unique challenges of rally competitions attracted Aaron Usher and his younger brother Nathan to this motorsport about six years ago.

The Usher brothers compete in Rally America performance rallies and Sports Car Club of America Time-Speed-Distance (TSD) rallies. TSD rallies test the teams' ability to stay on track and on time, with penalties for being either late or early. Although speeds are not high—between 19 and 50 mph—rallies are exciting because of the unexpected or tricky road conditions, twists, turns and hills. Performance rallies are longer, and the object is to cover segments on public, rural (and temporarily closed) roads as fast as possible, with penalty points added to a team's time for various factors.



Each team consists of a driver and a co-driver or navigator. Nathan Usher is the driver, and as the car's owner (currently a Subaru) he takes care of the mechanics. Aaron is the navigator and puts in many hours of preparation work, studying the course and making notes before the event. During the rally, Aaron follows the route books and maps, and calls out to the driver what to expect and how to approach each challenge.

**ORS Purpose:**  
We are an innovative  
retirement  
organization driven to  
empower our  
customers for a  
successful today and  
a secure tomorrow.

The LookOut is  
published by the  
Office of Retirement  
Services,

While rallies provide lots of thrills, not every memorable moment has been pleasant. Aaron remembers using a graphic calculator application he built. Something about viewing it as they drove made him nauseous. "No matter how helpful a navigation app is, it's no fun to use something that makes you feel sick!" said Aaron. Even worse was the time their car crashed on the second corner of a rally. "When a long rally ends for you less than a minute after it began, it's a pretty big let-down." He notes that they weren't hurt. Crashes are not uncommon, but rally cars have crash cages and racing seats and team members are required to wear helmets, a fireproof racing suit and a HANS device to prevent head and neck injuries.

Aaron encourages people who are interested in rally competitions to begin by watching a few, either in person or on TV. NBC Sports is scheduled to show Aaron's most recent performance rally on April 5 at 2pm. Check it out!



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Director:  
Phil Stoddard  
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Thanks for reading!!



[back to top](#)

This week's header of frozen Lake Michigan was taken by **Thasin Sardar** in early March.

**Note:** Because some of the links in this newsletter point to network resources, some of the links may not work if you are reading this outside of the organization.