



# Look Out

December 12, 2003

Volume 7, Issue 25

## ORS Mission:

We deliver pensions, related benefits and services to promote the future financial security of our customers.

## ORS Vision:

Fast, easy access to complete and accurate information and exceptional service.

## ORS Calendar

### December

Holiday Party ..... 16th  
 State Employees  
 Board Meeting ..... 18th  
 Christmas Holiday ... 24-26th  
 Blood Drive ..... 30th  
 New Year's  
 Eve Holiday ..... 31st

### January

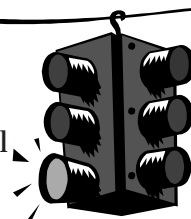
New Year's  
 Holiday ..... 1st-2nd  
 Public School Employees  
 Board Meeting ..... 8th  
 Martin Luther King  
 Holiday ..... 19th

## Construction Update—Back up to Speed

Green -green -green! That's the color of the lights over the Road to Fast and Easy Access.

- Your Road Crew is 100% caught up on Change of Information requests. This means that those new Member Statements of Account will get mailed to the right address, which means fewer requests for second copies of the statements. Go Team!
- Your Road Crew is 100% caught up on UBI requests for MPSERS members. Each team member works every day until the work list is at zero, sometimes completing more than 2,000 requests/week.
- Kudos to the Project Team for developing and deploying an

automated tool that will create Universal Buy-In bills. With this in place, the Crew will no longer need to process standard requests one at a time.



- More progress has been made on service credit transfers (28% complete) and on reconciling retiree pensions against retiree wages (60% complete). Because these items take extra research and sometimes contact with a school districts, the Crew will be trained in new tasks while continuing to process these.

See Update on page 3

## Celebrating a Year of Successes

Sometimes in the daily effort of meeting customers' needs and designing new systems, we forget the many amazing things we accomplish just by being here and taking care of business. From IDPs to Vision program changes, every task makes a difference. In honor of everyone who continues to make it happen for ORS customers, here's the short list of our 2002-2003 successes.

- We retired 14,644 members, an increase of 27.5% that raises our monthly payroll to 188,348

retirees. This included providing excellent service to the largest early out program in state government history.

- Surveys show that we met or exceeded the expectations of 87% of our retirees and active members, according to independent surveys.
- We reviewed and strengthened the protection of our members' private information to support HIPAA.

See Successes on page 2

## Auctions a Rousing Success!

On Thursday, October 16, ORS featured two auctions. The basket auction featured ten creative and attractive entries, while the silent auction featured a variety of items including —more baskets, as well as bake sale items, candles, ornaments, stamp sets, and many, many others.

As closing time neared, determined bidders headed back to the tables to ensure they were not outbid on prized items.

*Clockwise starting at top right: Veronica Tsai heads back to place an additional bid; Megan Monkman and Nicole Henley check out items at the silent auction; Cheryl Moore looks over the contents of one of the baskets ; and Kim Groh takes a closer look at more auction items.*

**Bake Sale: \$55.95**  
**Auction in Crossroads: \$412.70**  
**Donation by one staff member: \$50.00**  
**Working with people like you: PRICELESS**  
**Total: \$518.65 (except for that priceless thing)**



## Santa's Helpers have been busy



*Josey McCloud and Judy McLean, working as Santa's Helpers, put together a special goody bag for every person in Customer Accounts. After they filled the bags with ornaments, candy and other treats, they then scurried around, quiet as mice, to place a bag at each desk.*

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## **Update** *Continued from page 1*

**Moving on to a new stretch of the highway.** The Road Crew has filled potholes and paved as much of the road as they can. Much of the work that is left needs skilled staff members spending research time to resolve. So, they're moving on to a new stretch of the highway. This week, they will begin resolving errors created when we converted State Police member data to the new system.

As we start work on this new stretch of the highway, we will say good-bye to our original

Road Crew and welcome them back to their regular work duties. **Mary Barrett, Pam Kibby, Fred Doll, Lisa Schmidt and Michelle Thompson** will all return to their regular assignments. Career Quest employee **Mike Goodman** will move back to Employer Reporting to help with new web reporting implementations. Thanks to all of you for such great, hard work! And special thanks to your coworkers for picking up some of your duties so you could help us pave the potholes!

## **Successes** *Continued from page 1*

- We deployed a scanning and indexing solution that delivers mail into electronic in-baskets. With this solution, we get to our work sooner and are better able to balance work between workers.
- We administered the policy changes of the MPSERS board that changed the cost of service credit. With these policy changes, we ensure that the cost of service will support the eventual retirement benefit.
- Through meetings and personal appointments, we counseled almost 17,000 members. This is in addition to the 242,000 members who took advantage of our toll-free phone service for advice.
- We eliminated some red tape to allow judges to participate in both the Defined Contribution 401(k) program and the Deferred Compensation 457 program.
- We introduced *CitiStreet Advisor*, a web-based tool that helps members set and achieve personal retirement goals. This tool evaluates the member's current investments, recommends savings and investment adjustments, and allows members to include a spouse's separate account information in the evaluation.
- Brought a fresh and innovative approach to customer education by rewriting the State Employees' Retirement System Guidelines into four books targeted for time-of-life information.
- We met the challenge of reaching our membership in northern Michigan with quality retirement planning information by deploying videoconferencing.
- ORS took the first step in delivering accurate information quickly and easily to our members by implementing web reporting of wage & service information. With this tool, the most current information about service credit and wages is collected during payroll processing. About 25% of employers are participating in the program with 100% on schedule to be using the new reporting system by April 2004.
- Implemented a new file tracking system that is now connected to the main database. This allows for more accurate tracking of file locations and reduces wait times for files.

***Reminder: Holiday Party is Tuesday,  
December 16, 11:30 am - 1 pm  
in Conference Room A.***



## Holiday Health Tips

Today it seems that almost everyone's schedule is jam-packed. Add the pressure of preparing big holiday meals, planning parties, gift buying, and visiting relatives and you've got a recipe for stress.

It's no secret that a healthy diet and regular exercise can help offset stress and give you the extra energy you need during this holiday season while helping to keep away colds and the flu.

Here are some easy tips to help you manage your stress and health during this hectic time of year.

### Watch what you eat

- Watch your portions. Eat the dishes you enjoy, but try eating smaller amounts.
- As an alternative to some of the desserts high in fat and sugar, try fruit instead.
- Keep some healthy snacks like a veggie tray, sliced fruit, or granola bars around for between meals.

- Don't starve yourself all day in anticipation of the big holiday meal. Eat at least a little something at your regularly scheduled meal times. You'll be less prone to overindulge later.

### Fit some physical activity into your schedule

- When shopping for those last minute Christmas gifts park your car farther away from the store's entrance. The extra walking will do you good.
- Vacuum the house. This can count as exercise and you also get the benefit of a cleaner house.
- If you don't have back problems, try shoveling the driveway when it snows instead of using the snow blower
- Take a walk after that big holiday meal to see the holiday lights and burn off those extra calories.

## Comings & Goings



**Jennifer Siegel** joined the ORS Benefit Management staff on December 4 as a student assistant. She attends Lansing Community College as an Interior Design Student. Jennifer currently resides in Haslett with her two feline "babies," Princess and Diana.

ORS said good-bye to **Cheryl McKinch**, who left December 1st to accept a full-time position.

**Dichondra Johnson** is also leaving us December 12th to begin a job with the City of Detroit's Cobo Hall. Dichondra says the people at ORS "were nice and helpful," and that there was always "something good to eat."

Dichondra will be in the Lansing area for a while though, and invites us to see her one last time as she performs in Dream Girls at the RiverWalk Theatre beginning January 29th.

Last, but not least, ORS bids farewell to **Jeffrey Dumroese** as he heads off to Minnesota, to be near family, and maybe add a branch to his family tree. Jeff will be taking a couple of months off to work on restoration of an 1887 house. When asked what he would miss about ORS, in addition to the people, he said he will miss "the constant change and challenges." Jeff's last day will be December 19th. ORS extends best wishes to all in their future endeavors.

## SPOTlight

...on Eve Baumgart



### ***“Let them eat cake!”***

What’s the pièce de résistance of any birthday party, wedding, shower, anniversary party or other celebration? It’s the cake of course. The cake often serves as the focal point for the decorations and when it’s time to cut it, everyone gathers around to take one last look before it’s devoured.

You may have admired any number of beautifully decorated cakes, but did you ever think about how much effort went into creating those masterpieces? Eve Baumgart knows first hand how much time and talent it takes to craft one of these centerpieces, since she has been making and decorating cakes since she was in her teens.

“It was my mother who got me started in cake decorating,” Eve shares. “A friend of hers took cake decorating classes and my mother asked if she would be willing to show me how to do it. I was 16 at the time, and she must have thought I had the creative talent and interest to do this – plus we had lots of kids in the family, so if I learned how to make these beautiful cakes, we wouldn’t need to buy them anymore.”

Eve has decorated a lot of cakes over the years. She used to decorate cakes for some extra money, but the stress of having to do it as a “job” took away some of the joy and fun of doing it for friends and family. Now she tends to limit her cake-making efforts mostly to providing cakes for her family’s and extended family’s special celebrations, with occasionally making cakes for others – but she encourages two weeks notice on those. So, now it’s down to a more manageable one to two cakes a month.



“I probably have over 50 different novelty pans with all kinds of different themes,” Eve explains. “Just to name a few, I have some Disney and other types of cartoon character pans, several different animal shapes, various seasonal pans, and of course the common shapes. Because I’m just doing this on the side and don’t have a lot of little kids in the immediate family, I haven’t bought some of the newer character pans, like Sponge Bob Square Pants. I do have a friend who is also into cake decorating, so when I need something different that I don’t have, I can borrow from her or from my mother’s friend who first got me started in this. We keep a list of what pans we each have so we can take advantage of a greater assortment of cake possibilities.”

When asked about lessons learned through past experience, Eve shared a couple of stories. “I decided to make my own wedding cake to save some money. Big mistake. I didn’t realize how much time it was going to take to make it, and how many other things I would need to be doing right before my wedding. It was very stressful!! Plus I way overestimated how much cake we would need for the reception – my family was eating wedding cake for over a week! The cake did come out very pretty, but it really was not the smartest thing for me to have done at the time.”

“I also learned early on not to let my husband or really anyone else carry my decorated cakes. Before we were married, I had my then fiancé carry one of my cakes that was in a round cake carrier. He put it under his arm like he was carrying a football! As you might expect, the decorations on one side of the cake were rather smushed. He and I both learned a lesson that day!”

Eve is now sharing her cake decorating talents with another generation – her daughter. Eve’s daughter is learning how to use the various decorating tips and tools, and she’s already mastered creating those beautiful but challenging frosting roses.