

SUMMER 1998

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O.A.S.I.S

Anniversary Celebrations



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF 800 # SERVICE

63 years

Cornerstone holds a part of Social Security history

As the Social Security Act celebrates its 63rd anniversary, we want to focus on an item that few employees may know exist.

When the Altmeyer Building at headquarters was being built in July 1959, a diamond gray, Minnesota granite stone was mortared in position in the new Social Security building. Under the cornerstone lies a box that contains artifacts of history. Using the medium of microfilm and tape recording, various items were recorded, specially treated against deterioration and placed in the box. Some of these items include a motion picture of President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the original Social Security Act, with sound track; picture and story of the first account card; and a photograph and biographical sketch of SSA's first Commissioner, Arthur J. Altmeyer.

Besides these documents, which were reduced to fit into the capsule, some things were placed in the box without any conversion. These included the Statement of Bureau Objectives, punchcards, electronic tape used in the accounting operation and a copy of the January 1959 *OASIS*. Also included are stories from seven Social Security beneficiaries.



Shown above are some of the artifacts placed in the box that lies beneath the cornerstone of the Altmeyer Building.

Before being welded shut, the container was filled with inert gas to retard the deterioration of the contents.

Unlike some time capsules, the SSA cornerstone capsule is not designed to be opened on a certain date. The cornerstone is to stay intact as long as the building is standing.

"The cornerstone is intended as a reminder to future generations," said SSA Historian Larry Dewitt, "just as the Social Security pro-

gram is a compact across generations."

The contents of the cornerstone now lay as a silent sentinel to all the things the agency holds dear. Here are the physical mementos of principles and philosophy—the policy and dedication to an ideal. Sealed in granite, they stand at the foundation of a program that has grown to be vital to every American. ♦

10 years

800 number celebrates anniversary of providing customer service

In October, SSA will celebrate its 10th anniversary of providing toll-free 800-number telephone service.

To meet increasing demands for telephone service and to improve the public's ability to contact SSA by phone, the agency initiated a national 800-number service on Oct. 1, 1988. Initially, service was implemented for 60 percent of the country—50 percent of the public previously covered by local metropolitan TSCs plus an additional 10 percent of the public who previously paid toll charges to reach SSA offices. The new service was provided by the existing 34 TSCs plus two new sites in San Juan and Honolulu and a new “mega-TSC” in Birmingham. Service was available 12 hours each weekday, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

By October 1989, toll-free service was extended to all U.S. callers through the addition of three new mega-TSCs in Baltimore, Albuquerque and Auburn, Wash.

“The national 800 number serves as the primary telephone answering point for general inquiries and reports from people who receive benefits as well as members of the general public,” said **Steve Aprile**, Acting Associate Commissioner for Telephone Services. “SSA’s public service objective on the 800 number is to



Baltimore TSC Director Terry Stradtman (l.) and Deputy Director Carolyn Cooper-Solomon (r.), join employees who were there at the beginning and who continue to serve the 800 number. Front row, from l.-TSRs Beverley Flester, Carolyn Vick, Beverly Dryhurst and Geraldine Burrell, Technical Assistant June Sheffey, TSR Dirk Dana, Unit Manager Valarie Olson; second row—Unit Manager Dayne Yost, System Coordinator Keith Jackson, TSR Noel Flater, Technical Assistants Vivian Smith, Eva Green and America Cordero and TSR Linda Fillinger.

provide world-class service to everyone who calls. Our standard is to provide access to callers within five minutes of their first try and to provide accurate and courteous service.”

Calls to the 800 number are handled by teleservice reps (TSRs) in 36 teleservice centers and Spikes (non-TSC telephone reps who provide answering support during peak call traffic periods) in the six program service centers and the Office of Central Operations.

“SSA has a long-standing reputation as the premier government agency when it comes to providing service,” said Steve. “Our 800 number reps have been rated best in the nation for their courteous, knowledgeable and efficient service. Our challenge has been to pro-

vide our customers with the highest possible quality services. The program knowledge, technical accuracy and people skills of the TSRs and Spikes deliver on that promise.

“Public response to the 800 number has been very enthusiastic,” said Steve. “In 1994, attempts to call us exceeded 100 million. Our 800-number operation is the most active in the federal government and one of the world’s largest 800-number networks. Callers tell us they prefer doing business with SSA over the phone. Our TSRs provide accurate information and receive high ratings from callers in the areas of customer satisfaction and courteous and respectful treatment. These are extraordinary achievements considering that many calls in-

volve complex eligibility, payment and benefit questions.”

As the 800-number service became overwhelmingly popular, SSA found itself unable to meet the demand, which resulted in long waits and high busy rates. SSAs executive staff made a commitment to focus on improving public accessibility through additional answering resources, enhanced network technology initiatives and process simplification to allow more calls to be handled at the first point of contact.

Today, approximately 8,000 employees provide answering support to the 800 number. The changes made to systems and procedures allow front-line employees to completely handle more calls. The effect is two-fold: increased customer satisfaction and higher job satisfaction for employees. Since its inception, 800-number technology has evolved to provide telecommunications devices for the hearing-impaired community, Spanish language services, voice recognition capabilities, more automated customer choices and after-hours information services.

“Continuous 800-number service improvements are needed because customer expectations continue to change, and we see annual increases in demand for telephone services,” Steve said. “In anticipation of changing expectations, we must look to even more technology refinements, such as state-of-the-art routing features that will direct calls to the next available representative and reduce the need to make manual traffic routing adjustments. Also, the Customer Help Information Program screens will support TSRs and Spikes in continuing to provide consistent and accurate public service.” ♦

Evolution of a desk guide

“How long will it take to get a Social Security card?” “Am I eligible for disability benefits?” “I need to report a change of address.”

The answer to these and hundreds of other questions received daily on SSA’s national 800 number can be found in the Teleservice Center Operating Guide (TSCOG). As SSA celebrates the 19th anniversary of the national 800 number, it’s important to remember that the TSCOG is part of its success. The TSCOG has evolved from a paper desk aid to an online reference source that is used to answer more than 65 million calls per year.

At the startup of the national 800-number service, the agency recognized a tool was needed to provide uniform national guidance on how to handle the public’s questions. The TSRs and Spikes needed a manual that was comprehensive yet compact, accessible and easy to read and understand.

A small group of central office and regional employees met to compile regional “best practices” on call handling. From that workgroup, the TSCOG was created. Although the first TSCOG was 50 pages, a major rewrite in 1991 expanded it to more than 350 pages. Today, the manual is more than 500 pages, but it still fits in one book.

Maintenance of the TSCOG is performed by a four-member team of analysts in the Office of Telephone Services.

“In order to maintain the guide at a manageable and effective size, authors must continually balance the amount of information placed in the TSCOG,” stated Team Leader Pat Taylor. “A quick reference loses its effectiveness if it becomes too large



TSR Tamara Johnson, Baltimore TSC, said she couldn’t do her job without the TSCOG.

for information to be quickly accessed.

“The TSCOG combines telephone operational procedures with abbreviated versions of policy,” Pat added. “It condenses and merges information from several of SSA’s primary references, such as the POMS, Modernized System³ Operational Manual, etc. Its 38 chapters cover nearly every program area administered by the agency. Major updates are issued once or twice a year. OTS also produces the TSCOG in a special format for the visually impaired.”

This year marks a milestone in the evolution of the TSCOG because it will be made available online to offices that have the Customer Help and Information Program (CHIP) in their IWS/LAN configuration. CHIP is a personal computer program that provides instant access to facts, policies and reference material. Also, the TSCOG has been added to the CR-ROM.

From paper to online, the TSCOG has evolved into a primary tool which empowers employees to meet our agency’s commitment of providing world-class customer service. ♦

25 years

Social Security Alumni Association celebrates silver anniversary

They came to see old friends, reminisce about years gone by and to celebrate. They came from surrounding states, and as far away as Alabama and California. And, the bond between them keeps them together. They are retirees of SSA.

Over 230 former employees and their guests gathered at a local restaurant in Baltimore to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the SSA Alumni Association.

Keynote speaker for the occasion was Jack Futterman, who founded the SSAA. Jack was serving as Assistant Commissioner for Administration when he retired in 1972 after 36 years of service with the agency. He reminisced about the group's beginnings and also what it was like to work at SSA in the early years.

"We worked because we liked our jobs," he said. "It was an opportunity to work for a program that had great appeal. Employees were proud. We had a tough job, but each participated and gave his or her best. So when I retired, I did not want to give up all my friends and co-workers. There was a camaraderie among us. A lot of people felt the same way. We also wanted to keep ties with the organization. So we worked together to create the association."

Attendees had the chance to meet newly-appointed Commis-



Ed Tall (l.), presents Commissioner Apfel with a proclamation making him an honorary member of the SSAA. Jack Futterman and Deputy Commissioner for Communications Joan Wainwright display the proclamation from the Commissioner recognizing SSAA for its service to the community and the agency.

sioner Apfel during the luncheon, as he presented a proclamation to the organization in recognition of its service to the community and the agency. He told attendees, "The alumni association has always been there to meet the needs of the agency."

The Commissioner asked attendees to join the effort in helping people decide the future of Social Security. "In my opinion, our program is the most important issue facing this country for the next 20 years. There will have to be

changes, but the Social Security program is going to be there for future generations, just like it has for the past. . . . Our employees and retirees can be ambassadors for our program because so many people today still don't understand what we are about."

Ed Tall, President of the SSAA, then presented the Commissioner with a proclamation making him an honorary member of the organization.

Attendees also enjoyed strolling "down memory lane" by

viewing a pictorial display of SSA buildings and employees, created by SSA Historian Larry Dewitt.

With national headquarters located in Baltimore, SSAA is a non-profit organization comprised of 17 local chapters in various regions of the country. Approximately 3,400 retirees are members of the organization. SSAA members are entitled to participate in all national association activities and receive the *Social Times* newsletter, *OASIS* magazine and the SSAA membership directory.

"We'd really like to increase our membership," said Ed Tall. "There are a lot of retired SSAers, as well as current employees, who aren't aware of our association. It's a great way to retain friendships after retirement. And it's really fun to get together socially with people you've known for many years."

Anyone interested in joining or finding out more about the SSAA can call 410-965-7433 or write to them at P.O. Box 47126, Baltimore, Md., 21244-7126.

"As active members of the alumni association, SSA retirees can contribute a lot to the agency and have fun at the same time," said Ed. ♦

MI architecture

Framework modernizes delivery of data

What's the processing time for disability cases that have congressional inquiries? How many title II and title XVI weekly claims did the Appleton, Wis., Field Office receive?

To answer these and similar questions about the work processes at SSA, the Office of Information Management developed a Management Information Architecture that will serve as the framework for all SSA management information.

"We hope to modernize the delivery of management information with the MI architecture," said **Judy Ziolkowski**, Acting Associate Commissioner for Information Management. "The new framework will make management information much more user friendly for our diverse customer base, which includes SSA executives, managers and program analysts."

The MI architecture has four components—a Data Warehouse, Operational Data Stores, an Executive and Management Information Site (EMIS) and a Repository.

"The Data Warehouse stores Social Security mission-critical data in a multi-dimensional database structure," said Judy. "Em-

ployees may access this data through powerful online analytical processing tools in order to make strategic decisions about their workloads."

Through an ongoing pilot Data Warehouse, implemented last May, the Office of Disability has access to data pertaining to all aspects of SSA's disability case decisions.

"The Data Warehouse has reduced the time required to respond to our customer's data inquiries and freed staff to concentrate on other projects," said Team Leader **Terry Dodson**, OD. "And, once we access information, we have the online capability of viewing and manipulating data to suit the customers needs."

Operational Data Stores within the MI architecture will provide office managers with information to help them make day-to-day tactical decisions about their workloads. There is currently a store for title XVI data, and, in the future, there will be stores for title II, disability, earnings, enumeration, processing center and administrative data.

"The title XVI Operational Data Store is very exciting," said **Anna Crane**, a team leader in the San Francisco Regional Office. "The store provides operations