

IASCOE

The Iowa Association Of FSA County Office Employees

October 2013



2013/2014 IASCOE OFFICERS

President

Curt Houk
CED Poweshiek County



curt.houk@ia.usda.gov
curt80houk@gmail.com

Vice-President

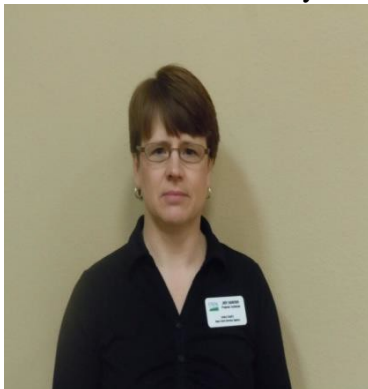
Curtis Goettsch
CED Howard County



curtis.goettsch@ia.usda.gov
curt.goettsch@gmail.com

Treasurer

Judy Dameron
PT Louisa County



judy.dameron@ia.usda.gov
jldameron@iowatelecom.net

Secretary

Jennifer Comer
PT Page County



Jennifer.comer@ia.usda.gov
jenniferburgoin@yahoo.com

2013-2014

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4 Director Alternate	Michelle Bruck, Shelby Cathleen Borst, Carroll	Steve Luke, Shelby Pat Warmbier, Harrison
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7 Director Alternate	Jennifer Comer, Page Monica Robinson, Cass	Lynette Gruchow, E/W Pottawattamie Justin Bahnsen, Polk/Dallas
8 Director Alternate	Keith Wheeler, Madison Ronda Harrison, Lucas	Daniel Curry, Ringgold David Lundquist, Lucas
9 Director Alternate	Judy Dameron, Louisa Deanna Rood, Mahaska	Dee Ann Lehn, Keokuk Gretchen McLain, Jefferson



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2013 IASCOE Directors

Other Roles

IASCOE Web Manager Brian
Beach - PT Sac County
brian.beach@ia.usda.gov
bbeach@mchsi.com

Convention Registration Devalyn
Wilson - CED Cedar County
devalyn.wilson@ia.usda.gov
dawilly@iowatelecom.net

Convention DoorPrizes/Silent Auction
Karen LaCour – PT Dickinson County
cmego@evertek.net
Karen.lacour@ia.usda.gov

Newsletter Editor
Kris Koth, CED, Jones County
kris.koth@ia.usda.gov
k_koth@hotmail.com

A Message from our State Executive Director



SED's Message

Farmers are eternal optimists, after all, they plant a crop every year not knowing what the weather will do or not really knowing what the markets will be. If they are livestock producers, they work through the worst weather knowing that if they do, their animals will be safe. The staff of FSA is the same, but it is our producers we look out for. We take whatever we are asked to do and get the job done. Thank you for your important work!

As I write this, we do not have a five-year Food, Farm, & Jobs Bill. We cannot have an extension! An extension of the current extension will not serve our producers well nor will it serve our agency. It will be difficult to gain an extension with DCP intact and if we do not have those dollars available when they do write a full five-year bill, how will they build the safety net that we all know agriculture needs? Crop insurance is a help, but how well did it sustain producers in past years when prices plunged? We all know that a safety net needs to be there not for when times are good, but for when prices fall. Our customers, the producers of this country deserve to have the peace of mind of a five-year bill.

When I read a story about the AAA, our original name, the writer said the difference between 1934 when most farmers had to sell breeding stock due to drought and 1936 when the drought was worse was this; the farm program from the AAA allowed farmers to put grain under loan and hold it into the next year. This gave them feed during a critical time. Times have changed, but the weather and markets really have not, farmers are still subject to both. Our nation should not wait to find out if we can weather more disasters without a safety net.

John Whitaker
State Executive Director



2013-2014 IASCOE President



The tale of two disasters, this explains the year we have had within FSA. Last time we spoke I wrote about the drought of 2012 coming to an end due to a moisture surplus that brought about anxiety for farmers and FSA employees alike. Who would have thought that with as many prevented planting and failed acres that Iowa totaled up this year that we would end up in a severe drought situation where people were scrambling to take advantage of emergency haying of their CRP? This year sure has been a challenging one in which we have seen compounded deadlines, extended deadlines, and near impossible feats in that we have been expected to complete. I mentioned this last time and will say it again, “We just have to keep taking things one deadline at a time and we will get done what work we can.” In times like these it is important for people to make sure that they are taking care of themselves as best as they can both physically and mentally.

A quick update on what your IASCOE leadership has been up to. On August 5th Vice President Goettsch and I took annual leave and traveled to Des Moines for a face to face meeting with our SED. We discussed several topics concerning IASCOE members with the main focus of the meeting being a reform of the current performance review process in Iowa. I received from NASCOE leadership a breakdown of each state PWP ratings for 2012. A couple of questions were raised by NASCOE as to why Iowa had such low ratings versus other states that are “like sized” as far as number of employees and workload. There also is concern as to how the CO ratings for Iowa compare to the GS ratings in the state. A far greater number of GS employees were rated above the fully successful level as compared to CO. Curtis Goettsch and I both looked over the numbers for Iowa and “like sized” states, in most cases Iowa lagged behind in the percentage of CO employees rated above Fully Successful. There are 5 rating levels: Unacceptable, Marginal, Fully Successful, Superior, And Outstanding.

It was important for us to bring up this issue with the SED at our meeting.

Issues we discussed in our meeting that we felt needed addressed are as follows:

1. Clarification on each Performance Element as to what constitutes an rating of:
 - a. Three possible rating for each element: Does Not Meet, Fully Successful, Exceeds
2. Training for Managers (CED, FLM, COC and DD) as to the above clarification and explanation of National Notices pertaining to PWP ratings.

3. One Element that seems to give us fits is the EEO, Civil Right and Diversity, one thing we pointed out is in a training we all took this year "Diversity on the Job: The Importance of Diversity and the Changing Workplace" and how this training defines Diversity.
4. Many CEDs we talked with made comments that at times they had been asked/told to change ratings for PTs or COCs had been directed to rate a lower rating then they had wanted and told that some elements are not able to be exceeded.
5. All of these combined = The need for training!

What IASCOE asked for was training for all managers as well as PTs so that everybody knows what to expect and what is expected. There are too many differences in the rating process that we would like to see narrowed. We must maintain a level of consistency and make sure that everybody is treated as fair as possible. We have asked that the DD's not dictate what ratings are to be given but to help in maintaining a level of consistency across their districts, and across the state.

In August I traveled to my first NASCOE National Convention in Asheville, North Carolina. I highly suggest that each member experience this event at least once during your career. You will never find a more amazing opportunity to meet new people and build your network of peers. There are many meetings and breakout sessions where you learn about everything FSA and NASCOE. You also have the opportunity for one on one access to agency department heads from Washington DC.

If you ever have any questions about what the agency or association is doing to represent you please feel free to contact either myself or a director. One thing to remember is that IASCOE/NASCOE is looking out for all FSA employees no matter where you are from. If you want to know something, just ask, there is no such thing as a dumb question.

See you all later.

Curt M. Houk
IASCOE President



2013-2014 IASCOE Vice-President



What a year! This spring started as one of the wettest on record followed by a very dry July and August. It seems that we are seeing the extreme end of the weather spectrum. Kind of like the extreme conditions we have seen as of late in FSA. To say it's been a tough few years would be the understatement of the decade. To tell you to hang in there it will get better, would be adding insult to injury. I just take it day by day and try to do so in a positive way, however hard it may seem.

In early August I had the opportunity to travel to my first NASCOE National Convention, in Asheville, NC. I have to say if you have not attended a NASCOE National Convention it is worth the trip. Once you meet other people you soon find out that we are not the only FSA employees who have had a tough year. That being said it is nice to learn about other states and how they are going about dealing with these issues at hand. As you can imagine there are many various ways each state has chosen to tackle the issues that face us today.

The 2014 NASCOE National Convention is a little closer to Iowa as it is being held in Oklahoma City, OK. If that's not close enough for you the 2015 NASCOE National Convention will be held in Milwaukee, WI. Still not close enough well the IASCOE Board of Directors have put their support behind IASCOE making a bid next year in Oklahoma City to host the 2016 NASCOE National Convention right here in Iowa.

I for one am very excited to be part of this project. Looking to get involved? Great we have just the thing for you! Gretchen McLain and I will be heading up a new 2016 NASCOE National Convention Committee! Many smaller states continue to host this event year after year, yet it's been 48 years since Iowa has. IOWA = Agriculture = FSA/NASCOE. We have a huge IASCOE membership to be proud of and other states have looked to Iowa to lead the way in FSA and NASCOE. Yes it's about time Iowa hosted the NASCOE Convention, and we will need your help. Help is needed at varying levels so don't be afraid that you have too little time to give. Give what time you can and we will find a place you can help! If you are interested in helping contact Gretchen McLain or myself.

2016 NASCOE National Convention

"Is this heaven? No, it's IOWA"

August 1st – 7th 2016

DoubleTree by Hilton

Hotel Cedar Rapids Convention Complex.

Cedar Rapids, IA

You are always welcome to voice a concern, comment, idea or question to your IASCOE directors, President or Vice-President. We can only gauge what the feeling is in Iowa on topics, based on what you tell us. We share these things often with the SED and the NASCOE leadership. The organization is only as good as its members and we all have something to contribute. I look forward to hearing from you!!

Curtis Goettsch

curt.goettsch@gmail.com

319-290-6339

2013-2014 IASCOE Treasurer



I attended the NASCOE National Convention in Asheville, North Carolina in August. There was a lot of great information, great discussions, and good times with old and new friends. It was an unusual convention this time because the temperatures were amazing. Usually it is so darn hot that you can hardly stand it. A big thank you goes out to the North Carolina delegation for a great convention and for the great weather. If you haven't seen the Q & A session that occurred on Friday, it is posted on the NASCOE website. Next year's convention will be held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Then in 2015 it will be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Rumor has it that Iowa will be bidding in Oklahoma for the 2016 National Convention. If we win the bid, we will be in need of lots of volunteers. So be thinking about how you can help make OUR convention the best.

As your treasurer I have been busy recording dues for the 2013-2014 membership year and reconciling them with the NFC report that I get every pay period. One of the issues I have to deal with, is when someone gets a grade increase and they move into a different payroll deduction category. If this happens to you, you must submit a new FSA-444 to the State Office. If you don't, then the incorrect amount will be deducted from your pay. Also, if you have been using payroll deduction and wish to write a check for the entire year's membership, you must remember to fill out a FSA-444 to terminate that deduction or you end up paying double for your membership. If you do not remember to do any of the above, I should catch it in the reports. So if I contact you about revising your FSA-444, please respond quickly and get it submitted. If you are not currently a member of IASCOE I would appreciate you considering doing so. IASCOE/NASCOE works very hard for all FSA employees and there are a lot of benefits we wouldn't have without the hard work of a lot of dedicated people. The larger our membership, the more influence we have in Washington D.C. If you have any questions or concerns about IASCOE/NASCOE please contact one of the directors in your district or feel free to contact any one of the officers.

AUTUMN – The crisp air, changing colors, falling leaves, caramel apples, pumpkin patches, & Halloween. Thank goodness for the change! Hope everyone has a great season!

Judy Dameron

PT Louisa County

IASCOE Treasurer



Benefits Report
2013 National Convention
Asheville, North Carolina
Friday, August 15, 2013

National Benefits Chairperson, Phil Morton from Oregon began the meeting with introductions and announcements.

The committee then discussed the availability of amusement park discounts. The larger parks are no longer offering special discounts to organizations. Members should sign on the website of the park they are interested in visiting and secure the best price offered through the website. Area chairpersons and State chairpersons are encouraged to secure local discounts for their members for any of the smaller theme parks in their areas.

NASCOE is interested in launching a poster contest for the NASCOE travel page. Each time a member uses the page to book a vacation or order tickets, etc.; NASCOE receives a percentage of the fee. The poster contest would hopefully increase awareness and use of the web page.

NASCOE would like to hear from the members as to what kind of discounts they would like to see. We need to get feedback from the members. One idea is an auto discount. GM could offer a \$500.00 discount to members.

The Employee Assistance Program is not being used to its fullest by the employees. Phil Morton had an opportunity to meet with some of the HRD staff members that work with this program and they would like to see greater program participation.

Trevor Gartner of JM Marketing met with the committee to explain how JM Marketing functions and the products they have available as well as new products they are researching for the membership. Trevor answered questions from the group.

Finally, the committee discussed the endorsement of either JM Marketing or Dillard Financial Solutions. According to reports, details of the information from the various area meetings differed. Members had questions about maintaining policies with JM Marketing if Dillard Financial Solutions was endorsed. Members questioned why the delegates were not voting on the issue instead of the executive committee. Members were encouraged to voice their opinions to their area executives before Saturday's session.

Respectfully Submitted.

Dee Ann Lehn

MWA Benefits Chairperson

Biltmore Estate Asheville,
North Carolina By: Judy
Dameron



While in Asheville, North Carolina for the NASCOE National Convention, a few of us were able to take a tour of the Biltmore Estate and its beautiful gardens. If you ever get to that area, I would recommend stopping in and taking the tour. I have included some information from their website and some pictures of the gardens that I took while there.

The History of America's Largest Home

Building Biltmore was, at the time, one of the largest undertakings in the history of American residential architecture and the results were astounding. Over a six-year period, an entire community of craftsmen worked to build the country's premier home. The estate boasted its own brick factory, woodworking shop, and a three-mile railway spur for transporting materials to the site.

A New World Château

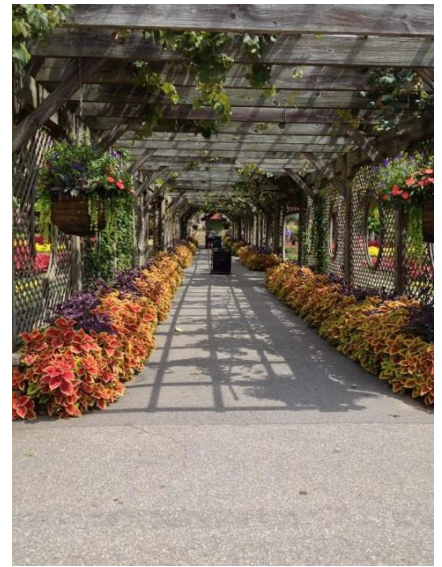
The celebrated architect Richard Morris Hunt modeled the house on three châteaux built in 16th-century France. It would feature 4 acres of floor space, 250 rooms, 35 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, and 65 fireplaces. The basement alone would house a swimming pool, gymnasium and changing rooms, bowling alley, servants' quarters, kitchens, and more.

An Environmental Wonder

The grounds of the 125,000-acre estate were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the creator of New York's Central Park and the father of American landscape architecture. He not only developed acres of gardens and parkland, but in his efforts to protect the environment and reclaim over-farmed land, Olmsted established America's first managed forest.

A True Family Home

George Vanderbilt officially opened the home to friends and family on Christmas Eve in 1895. He had created a country retreat where he could pursue his passion for art, literature, and horticulture. After marrying the American Edith Stuyvesant Dresser (1873–1958) in Paris during the summer of 1898, George and his new bride came to live at the estate. Their only child, Cornelia (1900–1976), was born and grew up at Biltmore.



National Convention: Experiences of a Couple of First Timers

By Justin Bahnsen & Mary Roberts

We want to start by saying what a great opportunity it was for us to attend our first ever National Convention held in Asheville, NC this year. Here is our take on our first ever national convention. On a cold spring day in April, two people were convinced by Curt Houk to get our tickets booked for the National Convention in Asheville, NC. Going in as newbies, we weren't sure what to expect over the course of four days, so we went in with an Iowa attitude to just have fun with it. At that time, neither of us had any idea we were in for one of the most memorable trips of our FSA career. It wasn't without sacrifice at home, but the friendships made and opportunities given made the trip more than worth it.

Our flight left bright and early @ 6am on August 14 from Des Moines and arrived in Asheville just before Noon. After we got checked in and luggage to our rooms, we took the shuttle downtown. We met up with a group of folks from Indiana, Illinois, Florida, and Louisiana. We made fast friends with our counterparts from the East and South and had a fun time trying to translate the accent of the Ragin' Cajun. They were a lively bunch that we ended up spending quite a bit of time with at the convention. After seeing some of the sights downtown, it was back to the hotel so "The Curts" could attend their delegate meeting. This allowed time to get a quick recharge in before the beach party that was planned for the evening. Few braved the outdoor pool due to the unseasonably cool weather, but many folks mingled and danced in the courtyard area. After saying goodnight to our new amigos it time to crack a chin, or turn in (however that saying goes) for the evening.

Thursday morning opened with the presentation of the states. Each state had a pole with their name on it and all attendees sat near this sign. Roll call was taken and a representative from each state stood up and gave a count from their state. Some even provided an entertaining ditty about the highlights of their state. At that time there were pictures running on the screen that had been submitted from the states. To the surprise of some, there was an Iowa State logo on the state of Iowa the Cyclone State. That got a rise out of some in the Iowa group. The NASCOE legislative lobbyist, Hunter Moorhead, spoke via skype and informed the NASCOE members about his take on the upcoming farm bill and what his company was doing to help keep FSA as an integral part of the future of agriculture. The business meeting followed the roll and we heard from Juan Garcia. Mike Schmidt, DAFP, and Greg Diephouse, DAFO, were also in attendance to answer questions from the audience.

Thursday Night entertainment was a DJ and dance for the themed 70s/80s night. There were many creative and unique outfit choices that night. One of us met up with a couple gals from North Carolina who happened to have extra attire and a crimper to boot. You can guess who might have been excited about a crimper!?! Being first timers, we didn't know how much fun it could be to "dress up" for the themed nights so we didn't bring any extra clothes. No carry-on space was wasted as it had to be proven to Curt that a woman can get by for 4 days with only one piece of luggage.

Friday Morning there was a question and answer session with Juan Garcia. Many great questions were asked. (The NASCOE website has the Q & A) The areas broke out for the afternoon to hold their business meetings and discuss changes that are needed and items that would be voted on by delegates and the executive board. While in this meeting, there were candidates running for national office that came in to introduce themselves, state their position and qualifications, and request votes. It was like the presidential campaigns, but not near as annoying.

After the area breakouts, they had the small group meetings for legislative, programs, benefits and awards. At the programs breakout, Mike Schmidt and Greg Diephouse along with other Washington DC individuals via teleconference answered questions from the group. I thought there were some really great questions asked and

found that the staff in WDC is trying to help us as much as they can. I don't know of any other place that you can get a direct line to the Chief of FSA, DAFP, and DAFO plus having WDC on teleconference to ask any question you want. At the conclusion of the meetings, everyone gathered for area and state pictures outside of the hotel.

Friday evening the North Carolina folks planned a trip to the Taylor Ranch in nearby Fletcher, North Carolina. The Taylor ranch is known for their organic, grass-fed longhorn cattle and quarter horses. Chartered buses delivered nearly all of the 450 attendees to this beautiful 500 acre ranch. Along the way, we took in the beautiful scenery and snapped pictures of the rolling Appalachian Mountains. The countryside is absolutely beautiful in this area and it's likely more amazing this time of year. While at this 4th generation ranch we enjoyed a great barbecue meal, professional clogging group, live band, horse-drawn wagon rides, and bean bag toss. A lovely ranch style building nestled in the valley next to a small pond served as our convention hall for the evening. We also had plenty of time to network with fellow FSA employees and Juan Garcia, himself.

Saturday morning wrapped up the final meetings then the afternoon was free to do as you wish so we decided to end the trip on an adventurous note. We had the opportunity to go zip lining (which was conveniently located on the grounds of the hotel) with some really fun "new friends" from Illinois, Indiana, New Mexico, Connecticut, and Kansas. After a quick lesson by our two instructors on how to properly stop ourselves from slamming into the oncoming tree, we set off on zipping around the course. Any apprehensions the members of our group may have had prior to speeding along a metal rope 60 feet above the ground was soon overcome midway through the course. We ended the adventure racing one another down the highest and longest zip line, thus concluded the thrill ride after about 2.5 hours.

Immediately after our zip lining adventure we had to scramble to get ready for the formal banquet to celebrate the awards and honor the newly elected and outgoing members of the NASCOE board. Iowa took home 3 of the 5 major awards, so it was a great night to be from Iowa! After the great food and awards then there was the final dance. North Carolina lined up a local musician and they rounded out the convention with big band and jazz. It was our final night in Asheville and time to say our goodbyes to many new friends. After 4 days of nonstop action, and with a 5am shuttle ride looming, we stretched the night for all it was worth. Needless to say, morning. CAME EARLY. We had another bright and early flight departing at 7:30am Sunday, laid over in Detroit for a few hours (beautiful city judging by the airport) no one got sick 3 times either!?! Some of us just handle flying better than others.

It was a long 4 days and nice to get back to the heartland, but what an incredible time! The new friends we made and the relationships strengthened by the trip were worth the money, time, effort, and nausea. For anyone that hasn't been to a national convention, area rally, or even state convention, enough can't be said for what one misses out on by not attending. When the opportunity arises, we encourage everyone to try and attend a convention, national or state, and embrace the new friends, old friends, and networking opportunity. Also, you will need a week to recover from convention withdrawal. Look forward to seeing many of you in Oklahoma City in 2014! Plan your leave now! ☺



THE ZIP LINE

By Rose Woerner, Black Hawk County

Zip lining is about as much fun as a person can stand in the short span of 2+ hours time. It's gaining popularity all over the United States and loads of fun, but keep in mind it is considered to be a 'high risk' activity. There are all sorts of zip line courses, for all levels of skill, but I'm going to focus on the zip line site in Dubuque, Skyline Tours at Union Park, given it's right here in Iowa.

The folks at Sky Line Tours are safety conscious. They not only help you strap into the gear (harness, lanyard and hard hat), they constantly check the harness to make certain it's tight. There are nine zip line stations in the park. This is a guided tour, which means a person clips you in at the beginning of the zip, and another person slows you down/unclips you at the end.

Most starting points require a leap from a boxlike platform, although a couple of sites afford a running start, so that you can pick up some speed before you leap. The fourth zip lands and takes off from a tall wooden platform that lends a fluid feel as the group gathers around the guide and listens to the history of the park. (Think wave-in-the-wind) This is a gravity site and weight tends to make a person go faster. The guides offer tips along the way like how to stay face forward and land on your feet, but a backwards view and/or a 'rear' landing are just as pleasant.

There is a certain amount of hiking that goes along with zipping. This is Dubuque, remember, and the hikes, however short are a sharp ascension upward. No gradual hills here. Just keep in mind, the higher the climb, the better the downhill experience.

It's an incredible adventure to fly through the air and dangle from a cable. This is an excellent course for a beginner or folks who aren't interested in more strenuous challenges like Tarzan swings, rope bridges, and extremely high zips. The biggest zip in Union Park is about 50 – 60 feet.

Dubuque is a hub of interesting things to do. Try out the zip line, then head to the riverfront museum and aquarium or go downtown and ride the Fenelon Elevator (one of my personal favorites). By the end of the zip line course, you can proudly tell your friends 'Batman ain't got nothing on me!'

<http://www.skytourszipline.com/union-park/>

<http://www.mississippirivermuseum.com/#images/Homepage/Thumbnails575/TurtlesOpenSlide.png>

A Journey of Determination

(Granddaughter of PT Maria Lund)

By: Michael Praska

Ada soaking wet would not push the 40 pound mark and vertically she is probably not going to be a member of the WNBA, however fame and sense of accomplishment come in many levels. Ada Lund, now 5, is the daughter of Tanner and Brittina Lund of Corning and has been dancing since she was 2 years old. Ada started participating in dance at the age of 2 in 2010, following in the footsteps of her older sister Norah. She loved it so much that she wanted to participate in competitions and express her talents to the world. Being rural Iowa as it is, it's sometimes difficult to find the opportunity to participate in more delicate athletic events that do not involve physical contact teams and take place on a court, field or track.

However there is one, a talent competition that travels the whole state looking for the best and brightest talented youth that Iowa has to offer, The Bill Riley Talent Competition. By the time Ada was 4 in 2012 she was on the road and competing in this Iowa famous competition. She qualified for the 2012 Bill Riley Talent Search at age 4 dancing to the song "Butterfly Driving a Truck". This competition was held at the 2012 Iowa State Fair and when it was over she was named a "Stars of Tomorrow" by Bill Riley Jr. This allowed Ada to perform in exhibition, in the championship round. "Stars of Tomorrow" which was started by Bill Riley Sr. to give recognition to younger children ages 2 to 4 the opportunity to participate in the talent search.



Ada Lund performing "Butterfly Driving a Truck"

With 2 years of dance under her belt and Adonica, dad, mom, grandma & grandpa pitching in to help with transportation to make all the practices Ada added on an additional tumbling practice schedule and she had her goals set for 2013. In February 2013 she started her travels to many towns across the state, starting at Council Bluffs where she competed in the 12 year old and under 2013 regional competition. Attending this competition were 9 dance studios from Nebraska and Iowa. She received dancer of the year and had the high score for her Acro-Dance. Then to her surprise she received the overall award for the 12 year olds and under which was a gold trophy cup. The cup started at her chin and ended at her knees.

Ada qualified to compete in the 2-12 year old Sprout Division at the Bill Riley talent search at the Iowa State Fair again in 2013. Her dance, "Best Friends" was choreographed by her aunt and dance instructor Adonica Struhar from the Spotlight School of Dance in Creston. Ada advanced to the semi-final round for her age bracket competing against others twice her age. This is where Ada finalized her 2013 Acro-Dance year but there was no disappointment when she did not make the finals. Making it to the Semi-Finals in 2013 has guaranteed her a place in the 2014 Bill Riley Talent Search competition and getting the chance to dance and compete for another year was the greatest reward for this young lady.

Ada's drive and determination is fueled by admiration of her older sister Norah who is 9. Norah is equally talented and was crowned Petite Miss Dance for Dance Masters of America, Chapter #47 in January 2013. She represented the state of Iowa at the Dance Masters of America National Solo Title competition held in New Orleans in July 2013. This honor is recognized as the most prestigious title among dance educators across the United States and Canada. While attend the DMA National Convention, Norah won 5th place for her Acro Scholarship auditions.



Norah Lund

Both of these young ladies have shown drive and determination to succeed and they provide a lesson to anyone who watches them. Try hard, do your best, let the chips fall where they may and if you have given all you can on a journey of determination you will get a chance to do what you love again.



Inspired by Ian

By: Jennifer Comer

September 14, 2013 was an absolutely glorious day. The week before we saw record heat, wind, continued dry weather and our crops were taking a swift turn for the worse. Work was crazy busy, CRP deadlines were lurking, DCP signup was coming to an end and the prepayment reports were never ending. I was looking for something besides Coffee Mate to put in my morning coffee. It was a *trying* time to say the least!

Nothing as trying as the day to day tasks that Ian and his family face! Ian is a beautiful, charming, 8 year old boy who has a smile that will melt your heart; he also has Pitt Hopkins, a rare, genetic disorder affecting a specific gene in chromosome 18. Ian is also the grandson of Page County CED, Chris Irvin.

September 14 was Ian's day and he shared it with 250 of his closest friends. Trevor and Jessica Fletcher, Ian's parents hosted a fundraiser for Pitt Hopkins research and invited anyone to attend.

We have all talked about the "family spirit" FSA has and the 'higher-ups' keep referring to us at the "can-do agency". All of that came together on September 14! Twenty five Southwest Iowa FSA employees, and family members, converged on the Taylor County office parking lot on that cool, crisp morning, donned our *Inspired by Ian* t-shirts and headed down the street to join the crowd and surprise Chris! SUCCESS!! How that many women from that many counties kept a secret for over two weeks has to be some kind of record, right????

At 9:30AM Ian was joined on the track by 3 other boys and their families that also have Pitt Hopkins. They led us in the first lap. I am not sure whose smiles were bigger, those boys' or all the people behind them. It was an *inspiring* day, we walked the track, danced to the music, the little kids played in the bounce house, some raced the track with an Oreo cookie stuck to their forehead (new IASCOE convention event???), there was an Iowa vs. Iowa State tug of war competition (we won't discuss the winners), and a cake walk with over 70 baked items donated for prizes! The FSA clan even continued on to my house for a quick lunch and some rehydration. But most of all it was a day for Ian! It wasn't a day for us to focus on Ian's (or any of the Pitt Hopkins kids') disabilities; it was a day for us to celebrate the accomplishments of these kids and their families and try to raise some money for further research on a cure for this syndrome.

I didn't know a lot about Pitt Hopkins before this and I am not sure I know a lot more about the syndrome itself but here is what I do know after September 14:

- Don't EVER under estimate the power of a small town/community – over \$11,000 was raised for Pitt Hopkins research. FSA alone raised over \$1,000.
- No matter the policy changes, staffing changes, or other uncertainty facing this agency, the family spirit and can-do attitude still exists
- There were four young boys that were on top of the world on that beautiful morning. And if there is *ever* any doubt that the days won't get better, I will remember September 14, and forever be *Inspired by Ian*.

September 18, is National Pitt Hopkins Awareness Day. For more information on Pitt Hopkins; visit www.pitthopkins.org or on Facebook **Inspired by Ian**.



County Office Spotlight

Cerro Gordo FSA Office

By: Heather Muenchrath



From left to right:

Sam Offerman: He writes, “The Cerro Gordo FLP team has a broad range of clients from the most up-to-date farmers with the latest technology and equipment to Mennonites that use steel wheeled tractors and Old Order Amish who farm with horses and horse-drawn equipment. Production for the different types of operations ranges from organic produce to conventional row crops as well as diverse livestock operations.”

Joan Ewer: Joan has 32 years of service. She writes, “I am anxiously waiting for retirement to enjoy the things I don’t have the time to do now. I enjoy dogs and training them in obedience. I help teach puppy obedience class with the local kennel club in Mason City. I also like to quilt and have numerous projects just waiting to be completed or even to be started!”

Colleen Barnes: Colleen has 24 ½ years of service. She writes, “I live northwest of Sheffield. I live on the county line of Cerro Gordo and Franklin but I do live in Franklin County. I have been with the agency for 24 ½ years. Time flies when you are having fun!!! I sit up front and am the first person a customer sees when they come into the office. I was a little apprehensive when I was first placed up front, but after time and getting to know the producer’s, I couldn’t find myself sitting anywhere else.

“Our office staff is known to have a knack for decorating for events of our co-workers!!! If you have a milestone birthday coming up, you never know what your workspace will look like when you arrive. I figure it is all in fun and then we can think about what we can do for the next person’s big day!!!

“I can say I enjoy coming to work and working with producers. Some days can be very hectic but every day seems to be a little different. I hope we don’t have a sign up or certification again like we did this year, but I guess those things are out of our control. Let’s hope we have a late frost and everyone can have a good harvest.”

Cindy Willis: Cindy has 31 years of service. She writes, “Have only worked at FSA. Love knitting, quilting, watching wrestling meets and being outdoors.”

Jennifer Ashley – Miller: She has 5 years of service with FSA, but has a total of 7 years of federal service. She enjoys spending time with her husband, 3 year old daughter, and 10 month old son.

Patti Oswald: She has 26 years of service. An interesting fact she shared was she is 1/32nd American Indian decent. She worked at the Wright County office before coming up to Cerro Gordo.

Barry TerHark - He has 11 years of service. Although not that unique his wife started with agency before him. He started as a PT in Hardin County. The greatest percentage of his computer knowledge was self-taught with a 1999 Gateway computer on the farm. Although various youth sports occupy a majority of his life today, this was something he had no interest in prior to having kids.

Our office is unique in that we do have several places to eat in town. It also takes long time to get used to the “building maze” since we have many chopped up rooms in the building. Milestone birthdays usually present quite a surprise for the recipient.



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WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN YOUR BOAT STARTS ON FIRE??

BY Paul Berte

The Pocahontas USDA Service Center witnessed a most unusual event on September 4, 2013. What started out as a normal day in the county ended very event-filled. Around 10:00 AM an older gentleman was likely driving without a care in the world while pulling his fishing boat behind his RV. He was heading south on Highway 4 when he apparently noticed his boat was on fire while driving through Pocahontas.

Immediately the driver pulled into the local Kum N' Go immediately west of the Pocahontas USDA Service Center. Yes you heard me right...his boat started on fire so he pulled into a GAS STATION!! Hmmm...fire and gasoline not necessarily a good mix.

I will attempt to make some good-natured humor out of a very unfortunate set of circumstances. I do want to clarify NOBODY was hurt during this incident. When he drove into Kum N' Go, one of us noticed the small fire in his boat which eventually became a large fire. I considered running out to his boat now approximately 70' from our building but quickly reconsidered after thinking about two things: the possibility of the fire igniting the fumes from the gas pumps and the possibility of the boat fuel tank exploding.

One of our PT's quickly dialed 911. During this time the driver of the RV scurried into Kum N' Go only to come out carrying a large bottled water container?? He attempted to pour it on the fire but it was too hot so he threw his hands in the air. The flames quickly engulfed the boat. Honestly it was a tense ten minute timeframe and nobody knew how this would end. Within 10 minutes or so the Pocahontas volunteer fire department arrived and put out the fire. The boat was a complete loss. Jokingly, one of the NRCS employees said "I'm going over to talk with him, I have a boat I've been trying to sell for a while." We told him "timing is everything" when you're trying to make a sale. HeHe.

All of us felt very bad for the elderly driver and learned the following from his unfortunate set of circumstances:

1. When your boat starts on fire don't pull into a gas station.
2. When your boat starts on fire while driving past the fire station just one block from the gas station, choose the fire station rather than the gas station. (bringing the fire to the department will save them gas leaving a smaller carbon footprint on the environment)
3. While trying to put out a boat fire use something more effective than bottled water.
4. Make sure your boat insurance policy is up to date and for an acceptable amount of coverage.

On the same day, just four hours later, the local bank in Gilmore City (just 12 miles east of Pocahontas) was robbed by a gunman. We can all say life in Pocahontas County was anything but boring during this 4 hour stretch.

Below is a picture of the RV and the boat engulfed in flames.





OPEN LETTER TO THE MEMBERSHIP

Dear Fellow Employees:

The Publicity Committee needs your help!

We would like to start a newsletter segment called Faces of Us, and we need your pictures. This could be you on vacation, enjoying your hobby, or whatever else. Given that we have so few opportunities to see each other, we feel this would be an ideal method to keep up with each other. We don't need a write-up (we realize that not everyone likes to write). Just send a picture and appropriate identification.

Another segment we would like to start is called What Are They Up To Now? If you keep in touch with a retiree, please send in an update of that person. A picture would be awesome, but if you can't swing that, an article will suffice.

Also, if you have comments about the newsletter or ideas for improvement, please let us know. You can send your ideas and/or submissions to Kris Koth at:

This is your newsletter. Please help us make it great!

Many thanks,
The Publicity Committee



NASCOE NATIONAL CONVENTION PICTURES



