



# SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY

**Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force**

Visit us at:

[http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/BA\\_Diversity\\_Task\\_Force](http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/BA_Diversity_Task_Force)

**United States Department of Agriculture**

**Agricultural Research Service**

## Advancing Diversity in the Beltsville Area

### Disability employment awareness event focuses on access to information

On Wednesday, October 19, guest speakers David A. Dissinger (USDA Veterans Employment Program Manager), D'Ann Clayton (Director, USDA Target Center Programs), and Erin Buck (Outreach Director, Maryland School for the Deaf) provided a large crowd of Beltsville Area employees with information about programs designed to increase employment opportunities or enhance working conditions for individuals with disabilities.



*David Dissinger*

Dissinger outlined programs that disabled veterans can utilize to gain employment. These include special appointing authorities for Veterans, such as the Veterans Recruitment Appointments, the 30 Percent or More Disabled Veterans, the Disabled Veterans Enrolled in a VA Training Program, and the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 <http://www.opm.gov/staffingPortal/Vetguide.asp>. He also spoke of Wounded Warrior Programs that give free education to "target people that need to learn new skills." Information about these and other programs is available from Alison Levy (Disability Employment Program Manager, USDA Office of Human Resources Management, [Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov)).

Clayton related important information about Technology and Accessibility Resources Give Employment Today (TARGET) Programs. She emphasized that TARGET Programs have "enabled thousands of USDA employees across the country to contribute equally to public service. "TARGET provides USDA

employees with education, interpreting, and other assistive programs, as well as services related to accessible events, recruitment, advancement, and emergency preparedness concerning the disabled community. For more information about TARGET, visit <http://www.dm.usda.gov/oo/target>.

Buck presented information on Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD), which provides educational services aligned with Maryland State Department of Education standards for individuals from pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Buck stated that "only 30% of the English language is lip readable" and that lip reading is the "least effective form of communication" between deaf individuals and hearing individuals. The take-home lesson is "When in doubt, write." Also, the term "hearing impaired" is regarded by the deaf community as medically related and most deaf people regard deafness as a culture of which they are proud. MSD provides family and student support services for deaf individuals and prepares them for matriculation into college or for successful entry into the workforce. More information about MSD can be found at <http://www.msd.edu>.



*Clayton and Buck (center front) with Special Emphasis subcommittee members*

The Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force Special Emphasis Subcommittee would like to extend a special thanks to Friends of Agricultural Research - Beltsville (FAR- B) for supporting this event.

#### USDA Non-Discrimination Statement

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### Beltsville retiree reflects on Garden donations; shares stories of need among immigrants

Beltsville retiree Joan Marie Conway, one of *Washingtonian Magazine's* people of the year for 2010, spoke to a packed audience on Oct. 13 at the Hispanic Heritage Month celebration organized by the Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force (BADTF) Special Emphasis Subcommittee.

Conway, formerly a nutritionist at Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center, now volunteers as coordinator of the St. Camillus Catholic Community food pantries in Silver Spring and Langley Park. Each year, these pantries serve some 6000 families, mostly recent immigrants to the U.S. from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.

With the economic downturn, there has been more than a 50-fold increase in the number of families needing assistance from the food pantry from 2002 to 2011 and a corresponding 4-fold decrease in fund reserves. "We never turn anyone away," said Conway of the difficult situation, "we just have to give less." In a touching moment, a child in the audience asked if there was an age limit for volunteers. In fact, child volunteers over the age of six are welcome, as long as they have parental supervision. Conway encouraged BARC employees to volunteer to educate families about food, nutrition, and the laws pertaining to application for food stamps.

This year, BADTF's Student Discovery Garden contributed its harvests to the St. Camillus pantries – a total of nearly 1,200 pounds of produce (see "Reaping diversity" on page 6). More information about the pantries is available at

<http://www.stcamilluschurch.org/stewardship/food-pantry-needs.html>.

The Hispanic Heritage event also included a screening of the video "A History of Hispanic Achievement in America."



Joan Conway displays culturally appropriate foods offered by food pantry. Photo: Stephen Voss (<http://www.stephenvoss.com>)

## BADTF membership supports Area mission

The Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force (BADTF) has been making amazing strides in the past few years, thanks to the volunteer efforts of all task force members. We want the entire Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) to understand our grass-roots movement's benefit to BARC and the surrounding community. BADTF's primary mission is to "ensure that BARC performs the research mission of ARS at the highest scientific level possible through the recruitment and retention of a culturally diverse workforce." The charter establishing BADTF and other information about the task force can be found at <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/docs.htm?docid=17502>.

By now, you may have attended some of our programs and seen BADTF's potential for far-reaching impact. Task force goals support the Beltsville Area mission to address "agricultural problems of high national priority" as the "largest and most diversified agricultural research complex in the world" (<http://www.ars.usda.gov/AboutUs/AboutUs.htm?modecode=12-00-00-00>). Your support of BADTF is directly relevant to the mission of your institute and, therefore, should be regarded as an asset to top job performance.

BADTF operates as a joint committee where everyone contributes ideas and where everyone's talents are valued. Each BADTF member also serves on one of the four subcommittees that are united in the common purpose of celebrating diversity. At minimum, volunteers attend two meetings per month - - the BADTF general meeting and at least one subcommittee meeting.

We invite you to look through the outline of committee activities on the pages that follow. Please think about where you could make a contribution, and call or e-mail a subcommittee chair to sign up as a member. Even as a non-member, you are welcome to help out as your time allows - - just get in touch with BADTF chair Verneta Gaskins at [BARC.Diversity@ars.usda.gov](mailto:BARC.Diversity@ars.usda.gov). We'll be delighted to welcome you to our BADTF family!



*Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force 2010-2011: Lew Ziska, Martha Tomecek, Dave Luthria, Eton Codling, Monica Santin-Duran, Tanya Zastrow, Ken Deahl, Jenny Allen, Martha Edens-Schmidt, Valorie Akuffo, Edith Blackwell, Talo Pastor-Corrales, Eunhee Park, Catherine Parsons, Ann Simpkins, Verneta Gaskins, Savi Natarajan, Mary Ann Guaragna, Tasha Sprague, Cecilia Wilkinson Enns. (Not pictured: Darryl Baxam, Katherine Darlington, Eilyn Fabregas, Jay Green, Bill Hare, Wendy Jacobs, Moon Kim, Bill Kustas, Ramona Mathis, Sue Mischke, Tunesha Phipps, Tom Sexton, Manan Sharma, Frances Truth, Jennifer Woodward-Greene.)*



- **Leadership Advisory Subcommittee:**

- Focus = Recruitment and retention.
- Co-chairs: Monica Santin-Duran (301-504-6774, [Monica.Santin-Duran@ars.usda.gov](mailto:Monica.Santin-Duran@ars.usda.gov)) and Tanya Zastrow (202-245-4563, [Tanya.Zastrow@ars.usda.gov](mailto:Tanya.Zastrow@ars.usda.gov))
- Making recommendations to the Beltsville Area Office concerning Best Hiring Practices aimed at increasing diversity in the Beltsville Area work force.
- Hosting a symposium at which graduate students present their research and interact with Beltsville Area scientists.



*Audience at Beltsville Area Graduate Student Agricultural Research Symposium 2011.*



*Talaysha Lingham presents her poster to fellow students.*

- **Special Emphasis Subcommittee:**

- Focus = Raise cultural awareness.
- Chair: Mary Ann Guaragna (301-504-9424 ext. 260, [MaryAnn.Guaragna@usda.ars.gov](mailto:MaryAnn.Guaragna@usda.ars.gov)).
- Relaying to Beltsville Area employees that our cultural diversity helps sustain the vibrancy of our research.
- Celebrating diversity through community service projects, outreach programs, cultural observances, and educational programs for Beltsville Area staff.



*"Day of Service" project (Feb. 2010) included a book drive and Cat in the Hat story time to encourage reading and scholastic achievement in area schools.*



*At Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May 2011) Lunch and Learn celebration, Dr. Ho presents "From China to Beltsville."*

- **Science and Technical Education Outreach Subcommittee:**

- Focus = Community outreach.
- Chair: Martha Tomecek (301-504-6213, [Martha.Tomecek@ars.usda.gov](mailto:Martha.Tomecek@ars.usda.gov)).
- Outreach to local schools, particularly in underrepresented or urban areas, with the goal of educating the next generation of scientists.
- Creating and maintaining a Student Discovery Garden that illustrates different science areas within the Beltsville Area.



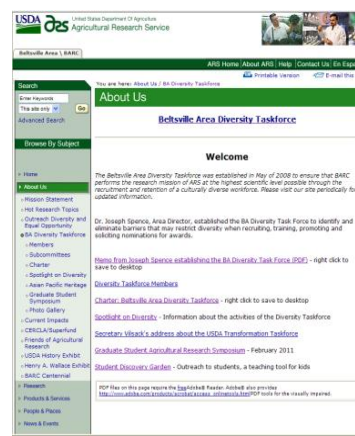
2011 season opening of Student Discovery Garden.



In 2010, nearly 200 pounds of vegetables harvested from the Student Discovery Garden were donated to feed the hungry. Six times that much produce was given to charity in 2011.

- **Communications Subcommittee:**

- Focus = Education.
- Co-chairs: Cecilia Wilkinson Enns (301-504-0345, [Cecilia.Enns@usda.ars.gov](mailto:Cecilia.Enns@usda.ars.gov)) and Tasha Sprague (301-504-5864, [Tasha.Sprague@usda.ars.gov](mailto:Tasha.Sprague@usda.ars.gov)).
- Promoting communication of Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force initiatives and other diversity related information to Beltsville Area employees through producing *Spotlight on Diversity* and maintaining the BADTF website.
- Conducting the BADTF Survey (2008).



Visit BADTF online at  
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/docs.htm?docid=17502>



### BARC Employee in the Spotlight: Phyllis Martin

Mentoring students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields is a strategy identified as being helpful in promoting increased diversity in the nation's workforce (<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12984.html>).

Dr. Phyllis Martin of the Invasive Insect Biocontrol and Behavior Laboratory has some 30 years of experience with mentoring students. In 2011, Martin was one of three Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) scientists who volunteered for the Adopt-a-Scientist Program. This program enables scientists in the Beltsville Area to mentor eleventh- and twelfth-grade STEM students from a Prince George's County high school with a diverse student population.

From past experience, Martin knew that STEM students were required to do a yearlong research project that consisted of papers and presentations and thought the Adopt-a-Scientist program would be a suitable opportunity to get students started in the lab early. She had also noticed in the past that students have had problems interpreting data and felt this program would help them to learn techniques and work in a lab more efficiently.

"This program provides various benefits," said Martin. "The student gets the requirement of a yearlong project completed, and the lab gets extra help at little to no cost." The Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity supports expenses for students who are hired for internship positions during the summer and winter breaks.

"Some students say there is a big difference between working in a school lab and in one that is more research based," Martin continued. "Some have realized that the profession may not be for them, and others have found it to be a wonderful experience and gone on to pursue a career in science."

When asked if she had any advice for someone considering volunteering for the Adopt-a-Scientist Program, Martin suggested, "First and foremost, do you like kids? Are you aware of what the present day student population is like – their mannerisms and interests, as well as how techno-savvy they are?"

In addition to the students learning from the scientist, the reverse can also happen, according to Martin. "Students may not have that same level of passion you may have for science, but you can still learn many things from them. At times in science, one may get stuck in a rut, and students have an amazing ability to get you out of it, just by their inquisitive nature alone. They force you to explain your science in a non-technical way, especially in the beginning."

For more information about the Adopt-a-Scientist Program, contact Jenny Allen ([jenny.allen@ars.usda.gov](mailto:jenny.allen@ars.usda.gov); 301-504-6507).

– Tasha Sprague

### Reaping diversity: Student Discovery Garden

"I really enjoyed the tour and had a great time. I just wanted to personally thank you for your enthusiasm and the wealth of information that you shared with the group."

That compliment was sent to Jay Green, Information Products and Services Branch, by a student who toured the Student Discovery Garden at Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) this summer. At that time, Green was on the staff of the ARS National Visitor Center and often led student groups to the Garden, where Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force (BADTF) members interacted with students and provided hands-on learning experiences.

During 2011, the Student Discovery Garden hosted around 400 student visitors, mostly from middle school to college level. As a registered People's Garden, the Student Discovery Garden donated nearly 1,200 pounds of produce to this year's Feds Feed Families campaign, specifically to St. Camillus Food Pantries (see "Beltsville Area retiree" on page 2).



The garden, created by the BADTF Science and Technical Education Outreach Subcommittee, has the goal of enabling young people in urban areas to experience some of the agricultural research being done at BARC in the hope of inspiring them to become the scientists of the future. Each of the garden's seven sections exhibits a different aspect of BARC research, from urban gardens to biofuels.

"Looks like we made a nice impression on this student!" commented Green. The photos accompanying this article show that the Student Discovery Garden is bearing a good harvest in more ways than one.

– Cecilia Wilkinson Enns



Want to arrange a tour or help out in the Student Discovery Garden? E-mail BADTF chair Verneta Gaskins at [BARC.Diversity@ars.usda.gov](mailto:BARC.Diversity@ars.usda.gov).



## Transgender matters

"Today we are going to have a critical conversation," said William Scaggs (USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights) as he opened his workshop on "Diversity and Inclusion: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity" presented at the Beltsville Area on Sept. 27 and 28. "Critical conversations may make you uncomfortable because they may cause you to question your own values or biases. But having this conversation will help to avoid conflict in the workplace."

Scaggs went on to say that his intent was not to change anyone's personal opinions or beliefs, but rather to inform and educate employees and to address issues that prevent the workplace from being a secure environment in which employees can perform their jobs without encountering discrimination. The workshop is posted as a four-part video (identified as "Training Video - Diversity and Inclusion: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity") on the Beltsville Area Staff Only website at <http://staffonly.ba.ars.usda.gov/admin/civilRights.html>.

In June 2011, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued "Guidance Regarding the Employment of Transgender Individuals in the Federal Workplace," available at <http://www.opm.gov/diversity/Transgender/Guidance.asp>.

Scaggs related some core concepts contained in that guidance, such as:

- **Gender identity** is the individual's internal sense of being male or female. Gender identity is generally determined in the early years of an individual's life and, if different from the individual's physical gender, may result in increasing psychological and emotional discomfort and pain.
- **Transgender** individuals are people with a gender identity that is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. Someone who was assigned the male sex at birth but who identifies as female is a *transgender woman*. Likewise, a person assigned the female sex at birth but who identifies as male is a *transgender man*.

- Some individuals will find it necessary to **transition** from living and working as one gender to another.... Managers and supervisors should be aware that not all transgender individuals will follow the same pattern, but they all are entitled to the same consideration as they undertake the transition steps deemed appropriate for them, and should all be treated with dignity and respect.

Specific guidance for managers and other employees working with a transgender individual who is in the process of gender transition is presented on the OPM site mentioned earlier. Topics include confidentiality and privacy, dress and appearance, names and pronouns, sanitary and related facilities, recordkeeping, and insurance benefits.

— CWE



### Calendar of Events

- January – Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday
- February – Black History Month – Lunch and Learn – February 15, 2012, Building 003, Room 020, 12:00noon-1:00pm
- March – National Women's History Month – Lunch and Learn – March 21, 2012, Building 003, Auditorium, 12:00noon-1:00pm
- May – Cinco de Mayo
- May - Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month - Lunch and Learn - May 16, 2012, Building 003, Room 020, 12:00noon - 1:00pm
- June – Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Month - Lunch and Learn - June 20, 2012, Building 003, Room 020, 12:00noon - 1:00pm
- August – Women's Equality Day - August 26, 2012
- September – National Hispanic Heritage Month - Lunch and Learn - September 19, 2012, Building 003, Room 020, 12:00noon - 1:00pm
- October - National Disability Employment Awareness Month – Lunch and Learn – October 17, 2012, Building 003, Room 020, 12:00noon-1:00pm
- November – Native American/Alaskan Native Heritage Month - Lunch and Learn – November 15, 2012, Building 003, Room 020, 12:00noon-1:00pm

### Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force and Subcommittee Meetings

Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force - Second Tuesday of each month, Building 003, Room 020, 9:30-10:30am

Communications Subcommittee - First Thursday of each month, Building 003, Room 238, 1:00-2:00pm

Leadership Advisory Subcommittee - First Wednesday of each month, Building 173, Conference Room, 9:30-10:30am

Science and Technical Education Outreach Subcommittee - Third Tuesday of each month, Building 001, Room 342, 1:00-2:00pm

Special Emphasis Subcommittee - Second Tuesday of each month, Building 003, Room 020, 10:30-11:30am

## Helpful Links

### BARC:

Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/docs.htm?docid=17502>

Spotlight on Diversity – diversity news for the Beltsville Area

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/docs.htm?docid=20124>

### ARS:

ARS & You – news about ARS

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/services/Introduction/ARS%20and%20You.htm>

Your Two Cents – cultural transformation in ARS

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/yourtwocents/>

### Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO):

Cooperative Resolution

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/programs/coopres/>

EEO Complaint Process

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/complaintprocess.htm>

Outreach and Recruitment

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/outreach.htm>

Reasonable Accommodation

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/reasonableaccommodation.htm>

### USDA:

USDA Connect (social networking) - Create your profile!

<https://connections.usda.gov/homepage/web/homepageRedirectAction.action>

(requires e-authentication login)

USDA news and information

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome>

USDA's Roadmap to Diversity

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/docs.htm?docid=17506>

(link at bottom of page opens 5.46 MB PDG file)

MyUSDA – cultural transformation in USDA

<http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctdiscuss.nsf/dx/about>

(requires e-authentication login)

### Other:

Smithsonian diversity information and events

[http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/heritage\\_month/index.html](http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/heritage_month/index.html)

***Spotlight on Diversity*** is produced by the Communications Subcommittee of the Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force. Members of the Communications Subcommittee are Ken Deahl, Rose McIntosh, Catherine Parsons (***Spotlight*** formatting and production), Linda Reynolds, Tasha Sprague (co-chair), Frances Truth, and Cecilia Wilkinson Enns (co-chair).

**“Cultural Transformation is the process of creating a workplace where all employees and customers are treated with dignity and respect, and provided the opportunity for success.”**