

July 2014
Disaster Newsletter
Your quarterly update from the Office of Disaster Assistance

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We want to hear from you!

Do you have recommendations for what you'd like to see in this newsletter? Send your comments or suggestions to your Center contributor or to alejandro.contreras@sba.gov

Read and Conserve

Please read this newsletter electronically to save paper. If you do print, consider sharing with your team!

From the Deputy Associate Administrator

Greetings Disaster Team,

As we enter the last quarter of FY 2014, I want to acknowledge the great work we have accomplished so far and to encourage everyone to keep it up as we closeout the fiscal year. In the first three quarters, we processed a total of 11,745 applications with an average processing time of 8.42 days (7 days for homes, 13 days for businesses and 12 days for EIDLs). We also approved more than 5,360 loans for a total of more than \$294 million and an approval rate of 54%.

In this edition of ODA's Quarterly Newsletter, you will read about many exciting happenings around the Agency. First, with just a few weeks on the job, Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet paid a visit to ODA staff and disaster survivors working in Washington on the Oso Mudslide. You will also read about the great service being done at our Customer Service Center in Buffalo, NY where three ODA team members received Federal Executive Board (FEB) Excellence in Government Awards. Please join me in congratulating them. Also, you will read a sample of the many ongoing initiatives where ODA is working to improve its processes and provide training to its team members.

There is also a great send off to one of our most tenured employees, Walter Slazyk, who will be retiring very soon. Walter's story is similar to many others working at SBA...he joined the Agency and answered a calling to help others. ODA's mission to help homeowners, renters and businesses recover from America's worst disasters is what connects all of us. From Sacramento to Washington DC, from Buffalo to Ft. Worth and from Herndon to Atlanta, we're all here to accomplish our mission. Lastly, it is great to see our fellow employees enjoying time together, as you will see in the photos from the PDC Picnic Day and the CSC Ice Cream Social, because while we are all committed to the mission we should also enjoy the personal and professional relationships we build here at SBA.

All the best,

Joe Loddo

DISASTER ACTIVITY SNAPSHOT

As of July 24, ODA is working 5 open Presidential PA disasters, 12 Administrative declarations, 8 Governor certifications, 122 Sec Ag and 1 nationwide MREIDL declaration for a total of 148 open/active disasters.

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Administrator visits Oso Mudslide

Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet made her first trip to Washington State in April, where she toured a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC), and saw firsthand, SBA representatives assisting those affected by the State Route 530 Slide, which occurred near the town of Oso on March 22. The devastating slide killed 43 people, closed the highway indefinitely and economically impacted not only Oso, but the cities of Arlington and Darrington, which rely heavily on the highway for ease of access between the communities. During the summertime, State Route 530 is usually filled with tourists, which many of the local small businesses depend upon for the majority of their yearly revenue. Although a temporary road was opened, it was for very limited use and not for general travel. The slide caused commuter times for residents from the affected community to increase by as much as 2 hours each way.

The Administrator was accompanied by U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell, Associate Administrator James Rivera, FOC West Director Tanya Garfield, Region X Administrator Calvin Goings and Seattle District Director Nancy Porzio. The Disaster team explained to the group how the SBA disaster assistance program works with businesses to help stabilize community tax bases, and assist homeowners and renters with repairing property and replacing their personal possessions. During her tour of the DRC, the group met with customer service representatives (CSRs) who guided them on the steps a disaster survivor goes through when referred to SBA. CSRs illustrated for the group the ease in which the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) operates and how it speeds up SBA disaster assistance to survivors.

Following the tour of the DRC, the Administrator and Sen. Cantwell hosted a roundtable discussion of local business owners in the Arlington City Council Chambers. Business owners and community leaders described the aftermath of the mudslide and how it has impacted their businesses and communities. In her opening remarks and in responding to questions from the panel, the Administrator noted that SBA has been on the ground across the affected region, providing individuals and businesses with information, support and access to disaster recovery loans. As all of the affected communities rebuild, SBA will stay involved over the long term.

In addition to the disaster response team, the Administrator discussed the assistance available from business counselors at Small Business Development Centers, SCORE chapters and Women's Business Centers. She noted that they play a key role in helping the region's small businesses restart, rebuild and thrive again.

Photo caption: Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet meets with FOC W staff at the Arlington DLOC. L to R: Tanya Garfield, Dave Mar, Brad Steeg, Administrator Contreras-Sweet, James Rivera and Rick Jenkins - February 2012

Buffalo Federal Executive Board (FEB) Excellence in Government Award Winners
Three Customer Service Center employees received Buffalo Federal Executive Board (FEB) Excellence in Government Awards at a luncheon at the Buffalo Convention Center on Wednesday, May 6, 2014. The awards recipients were Paul Wustrack III who was presented with the Customer Service Award, Claritza Cedillo and Thomas Bullock who each received Distinguished Team Leader Awards.

Since April 2011, Paul Wustrack III has been a member of the Disaster Assistance Service Desk located at the CSC. The Service Desk provides technical support for SBA's Office of Disaster Assistance personnel and disaster survivors. Paul has an extraordinary knowledge of SBA programs, systems and hardware and is a key employee on the Service Desk. Paul openly shares his expertise with his coworkers and ensures customers' issues are resolved. Outside of work, Paul is pursuing a second degree in Computer Information Systems.

Claritza Cedillo and Tom Bullock were promoted to Team Lead positions at the CSC in January 2013. Claritza has been with the Agency for over 10 years and started in the legal department in the former Area-1 office in Niagara Falls, NY. In addition to her Team Lead duties, which she carries out with the respect of her team members and management alike, Claritza also oversees the CSC's effort to recognize national breast cancer awareness month.

Thomas Bullock has been with the Agency for approximately 10 years and began as a loan officer in Niagara Falls. Tom actually began his career with the federal government with service in the US Navy and 20 years active duty in the NY Army National Guard. With SBA, Tom has continued to contribute maximum efforts to achieve positive results for ODA and the disaster survivors our Agency strives to help. Tom is well respected by his peers and is one to ensure his team members are all onboard and working together as one.

In case you were wondering, the Federal Executive Boards were created as a result of a Presidential Directive in 1961 by John F. Kennedy to promote communication, coordination and collaboration among Federal field agencies. As approximately 85% of Federal employees work outside the Washington, DC area, there are 28 FEB's located in US cities that contain substantial Federal activity. The Buffalo FEB represents approximately 15,000 employees and 100 agencies located in the seven Western New York county areas. The Federal government is the largest employer in this region. The FEB sponsors an annual awards program that recognizes government employees for outstanding performance and contributions to their Agency's mission. You can learn more about Federal Executive Boards at www.feb.gov.

Photo Caption: L to R: Thomas Bullock, Claritza Cedillo and Paul Wustrack III
Photo courtesy of Melissa Watson, CSC Administration Department - February 2012

Other News

TRAINING – Better People, Better Prepared, Better Results

In any organization, training is essential to maintaining the highest level of performance. Only when the workforce is well-trained can it meet the demands and expectations placed upon it. Training is pervasive throughout ODA as staffing, programs and technology are constantly changing. Over the past year, PDC training has been revamped in all areas to employ lessons learned during Superstorm Sandy with the focus on insuring the PDC staff is prepared to perform at the highest level when the next large disaster comes our way.

The PDC Field Operations Department consists of several functions ranging from Application Mail-out to Document Scanning and Uploading. All Field Operations staff are continually cross-trained in every functional area throughout the year. On-the-job cross-training in all areas makes it possible to move employees into areas to meet changing workload requirements, improves the overall utility of available staff and minimizes the chance of workload bottlenecks. In addition, all employees are provided required annual training and scheduled formal departmental classroom training opportunities, as needed.

In the past year, Application Processing developed a “Best Practices” approach to home and business loan processing and revised loan training materials to incorporate those practices. The goal of the revised training is to enable newly hired Loan Officers to achieve production more rapidly after training. All existing department staff have now completed the home loan training, and the business training will be completed shortly. Similarly, a new Supervisory Loan Officer (SLO) training course was developed to insure consistency in application of policies and procedures and to support a more production oriented approach to leading Loan Officer teams. Additional training in processing Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) will be provided later this summer once some recommended processing changes are finalized.

The Accounts Department continually assesses training needs throughout the year and provides training annually in Case Management, Drafting/Legal Review, Loan Modifications, Customer Service, Improper Payments, Insurance Requirements, Common Damage and Lease Reviews. Training activity at the PDC is constant, and constantly changing. Not a week goes by without some part of the PDC staff being offered new, updated or refresher training in some aspect of their job. The end result is a better skilled workforce that can better serve disaster survivors.

Automated Flood Mapping Process

In December, the DCMS Operations Center implemented the new LV Module. Included as part of this implementation, was an automated flood mapping solution. The automated process utilizes an interface with Flood Insights. When flood map requests are generated in loan processing, the interface auto flood maps the assignments and inserts the newly required FEMA Standard Flood Hazard Determination (SFHD) into ScanDocs.

Prior to the implementation of the automated flood mapping, the flood mapping process was time consuming and done manually. For a simple property where the address could be accurately

located, it would take about 2 to 3 minutes to manually look up the Flood Insights data, and then enter the data into DCMS. On a complicated property a Flood Mapper could spend upwards of 15 minutes to an hour to complete the assignment. During Super Storm Sandy, the PDC completed approximately 120,000 flood mapping assignments, manually. Now the process takes no time away from the user and is almost instantaneous.

Since the new LV process went live on 12/15/2013 to 5/25/2014, approximately 77% of all the flood mapping assignments were eligible for auto flood mapping. Out of the 77% eligible assignments, 78% were successfully auto flood mapped, resulting in a net yield of 60%. If Auto Flood mapping was available during Super Storm Sandy, 72,000 Flood mapping assignments would have been completed automatically.

Guess who's retiring?

Employee Spotlight

It's time to bid farewell to "road warrior" Walter Slazyk. Walter's first day working for the Agency was Jan. 3, 1990. He left the next day for Puerto Rico, where he processed four business loans on his first day, helping local businesses recover from the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo. Over the next two decades, Walter was deployed to many other disasters including the L.A. Riots, Hurricane Andrew in South Florida and the Gulf Coast, Northridge, Hurricane Marilyn, and Typhoons Paka and Chata'an. Like many who find themselves working for ODA, Walter answered an ad in the local paper in December 1989. At that time, the former Area-1 disaster office was transitioning from Fairlawn, NJ to Niagara Falls, NY. Walter was working in a local bank when he decided that he wanted to help people in need while still providing for his family; he wanted to become part of the solution to a devastating situation. Walter said that he "never wished for a disaster but was always thankful that we can be in a position to help people." While on field assignments, Walter enjoyed his surroundings, experience and embraced the local cultures and languages. To better communicate with disaster survivors, he drew from his 3 years of high school Spanish while in Puerto Rico; and while in Korea Town, Los Angeles, he obtained assistance from local UCLA students in learning the language. Walter enjoyed field duty, especially in the islands. One of Walter's many hobbies is Ham Radio, whose call sign is KF2XN. While working in Guam, Walter met Danny, a fellow radio operator at KH2JU, who he communicated with over the air prior to Super Typhoon Paka.

In 2006, Walter became the CSC's Workforce Management Coordinator and assisted management with forecasting staffing, preparing schedules and reporting critical, essential, statistical operations data. While this career path was exciting and rewarding, it has meant time away from home, family and friends. Like many of us, Walter spent Christmases and other holidays on the road. Fortunately, he has planned for his retirement and recommends that everyone start early with proper retirement planning and TSP contributions. Walter plans to lead an adventurous, active retirement. He will begin sailing lessons with the goal of navigating his own sailboat around the Caribbean, where his SBA career began. He also plans to travel with his Harley, fishing and musical gear visiting friends and family across the country. Walter has a passion for music and will devote more time to playing and recording; he plays the keyboard and guitar. To help give back he will volunteer his time at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. Walter's last workday is July 25. We wish Walter well and bon Voyage.

Adios amigo!

Photo 1 Caption: Above: Walter & Danny, Guam (1998)

Photo 2 Caption: Below: Walter & Danny, Niagara Falls (2013)

Process Improvements

SBA ODA has been working on many process improvement implementation projects. One that is directly related to the CSC is the Phone Based Support Team.

The Phone Based Support Team was delegated the task of identifying potential options on streamlining the contact procedure for customers of the SBA disaster loan making process while making the most of the current staffing strategy. This team was comprised of representatives from each ODA location.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, it became apparent that having customer service departments at the Customer Service Center (CSC) and the Processing and Disbursement Center (PDC) was not the best uses of resources. As the loan volume increased at the PDC, loan officers were detailed to staff the PDC customer service phone lines, even though the CSC had well trained and skilled staff that could easily manage those incoming calls. In addition, the CSC customer service agent may have been able to answer the customers' questions without having to transfer the call to a loan officer or case manager. This would free up time for the loan officers and case managers to continue processing loans.

The Phone Based Support Team proposed and received approval on a plan to transition customer service calls from the PDC to the CSC. Effective Monday, June 2nd, the CSC is now responsible for the PDC customer service calls. This transition is seamless to the disaster survivors, increases staff to process loans at the PDC, and allows the CSC to provide best in class customer service to even more people.

All work, and a little play...“Picnicking with the PDC” - 2014 Annual Picnic”

Photo 1 caption: Rajon Sanabria (left), grandson of Denise Sanabria, and Braylon Richardson (right), grandson of Bernie Richardson (shown in background)

Photo 2 caption: Matt Seely (above) on the grill

Photo 3 caption: Kathleen Littwin (holding baby at top) and Rebecca O’Sullivan (above)

The CSC Health and Wellness Ice Cream Social

The Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center located in Buffalo, NY enjoyed an ice cream social on Thursday, May 22. The Center’s Health and Wellness Committee sponsored the event, which included an abundance of goodies from healthy yogurt and fruit toppings to assorted ice cream and fudge/caramel toppings, along with many other sweets such as cheese cake, brownies and cookies. There was even a “bullet” machine available to whip up individual shakes.