

This month in OASIS—
A pictorial preview



Oasis

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PSCs celebrate 50 years of service

- a booklet on software and edit programs for magnetic media reporters;
- a pamphlet, *Your Social Security Taxes... What They're Paying For And Where The Money Goes*, for employers to distribute to their employees; and
- request forms for PEBES.

"One of the best ways to get farm worker wages reported correctly is to make the workers more aware of Social Security and what they can expect to receive from the taxes they pay into the system," Trish Butler pointed out. "The PEBES and other informational materials should help accomplish this." □

This month the Mid-Atlantic Program Service Center will celebrate its 50th anniversary. And before the year is out, three other PSCs-Northeastern, Great Lakes and Western-will also pass this milestone.

Janice Warden, Deputy Commissioner for Operations, was the keynote speaker at the Mid-Atlantic PSC ceremony held on May 6. Former PSC Directors David

Jenkins, Alvin Brown and Edmond Sabatini were on hand for the anniversary celebration, which was combined with the PSC's Employee Appreciation Day. Attendees enjoyed musical, dramatic and comedic presentations by employees and renditions by a choir from a local grammar school and by the PSC choir. Awards and door prizes were



presented during the ceremony.

The three other PSCs will also be holding special events to mark their anniversaries this year.

The Mid-Atlantic PSC in Philadelphia was the first to open its doors in June 1942. According to Laurie Watkins, Assistant Regional Commissioner for Processing Center Operations, PSCs have experienced organizational, administrative and systems changes over the past few years.

"In 1990, PSCs were organizationally placed in the direct line of the Regional Commissioner, leading to greater interaction among RO components," said Laurie. "There have been legislative changes and court decisions that have had an impact on PSC workloads. And we've received systems enhancements-particularly in the area of direct input-that have helped us do our jobs more efficiently.

"Over the years, many of the jobs in the PSCs have been redesigned. For example, the benefit authorizer technical assistant and exception and health insurance specialist positions were combined, creating the post-entitlement technical expert position.

"Also, systems changes in the case control process, which were brought on by the folderless initiatives, resulted in a change in the records analysis clerk position from a basically clerical function to one that requires the RACs to react to and analyze the remarks appearing on the case control system.

"Add in the upgrades of the PSC mainframes, TAP terminals and per-

sonal computers, and you have a much more modern operation."

What they do

Program service centers perform a number of important functions, including-

- maintaining and updating SSA records, making it possible for checks to be paid to eligible beneficiaries;
- making decisions concerning the eligibility of people seeking retirement, disability or health insurance benefits;
- determining the amount and starting dates of benefits;
- handling post-entitlement actions that update beneficiary records;
- responding to hundreds of requests daily for information from the files; and
- answering written inquiries and phone calls from claimants, district offices, other SSA components, other federal agencies and congressional staffs.

During fiscal year 1991, the 8,553 PSC employees processed a total volume of 15,700,500 actions for SSA beneficiaries and claimants.

Historical highlights

- **1942** — The Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance opens Eve area offices in Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, New Orleans and San Francisco
- **1946** — Area Office opens in Kansas City, Mo.
- **1947** — New Orleans office moves to Birmingham, Ala.
- **1958** — Area Offices renamed Payment Centers
- **1961** — Introduction of electronic data processing in PCs for keeping the master beneficiary records.
- **1967** — Development of the RSI Case Control System gives PCs modern operational and management control over workloads
- **1973** — Payment Centers renamed Program Centers
- **1972** — Modular operation experiment launched in Philadelphia
- **1974** — Birmingham Program Center moves into new building
- **1975** — Program Centers changed to Program Service Centers and renamed to reflect geographical designations (Northeastern, Mid-America, etc.) instead of city names
- **1976** — Mid-Atlantic, Western and Great Lakes relocated to new buildings
- **1981** — PSCs begin debt management and collection activities
- **1986** — TAP equipment installed to access MBRs and other online systems information
- **1988** — Folderless processing introduced throughout PSCs

Deputy Commissioner cites employees' 'cooperative spirit'

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"In 1942, when the Philadelphia, New York, Chicago and San Francisco Payment Centers were established, the objective was to decentralize



the claims review and benefit certification process. The magnitude of the program service centers' operation is such that the PSCs now process in excess of 15 million actions a year."

"Social Security pays over 35 million title II beneficiaries monthly. Our PSCs provide ongoing support and maintenance of the rolls for these beneficiaries, ensuring that their benefit rate increases, recomputations and annual reports are processed timely and accurately. This is an annual function for the PSCs and it is critical that they perform this function well—and they do! PSCs are a vital part of the SSA team.

"The PSCs continue to demonstrate that they have a fundamental 'cooperative spirit.' They have traditionally performed a paper review process that involved limited contact with the public; however, their functions have expanded to include significant direct contact with the public. One example are SPIKE units

in the PSCs. They support our national 800 number network by answering telephone calls from the public during SSA's peak call-receipt periods. The work the SPIKE units provide is a tremendous assistance to our teleservice centers. I honestly do not know what SSA would do without our SPIKES!

"As I reflect back to the fall of 1991 and the incident at the Western PSC, I am reminded of how our other PSCs chipped in and processed work during a three-month period for WNPS. This spirit of service exemplifies the PSC ethic.

"In my regional tours, I've had the pleasure of meeting some of SSA's most dedicated employees in our PSCs! I am proud of our employees in the four PSCs celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, and I am also proud of our PSCs nationwide for their cooperative spirit. I wish them 50 more years!"

Janice L. Warden

Janice Warden
Deputy Commissioner for Operations

PSC employees talk about their work

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Cynthia Maxwell has worked at the Great Lakes PSC as a records analysis clerk (RAC) for 10 years. An important part of the RAC's job is to keep the work moving smoothly. "Part of my job consists of associating incoming materials with the case folders, routing the work to the proper person and keying information into the computer." Although systems improvements, such as folderless processing, have reduced the amount of paper being handled, Cynthia says that the RACs' workload has increased slightly. "Computers do allow the work to move faster," she noted, "but we now have fewer employees performing the job."

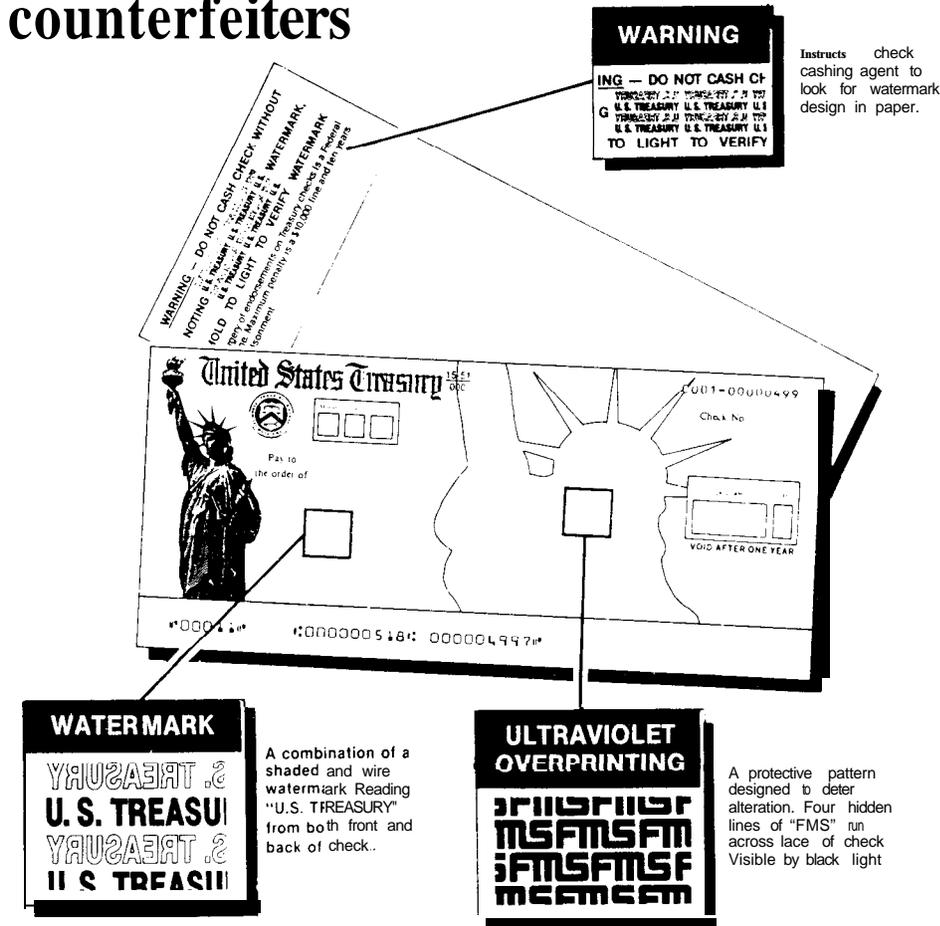
Hired 19 years ago, Section 3 Secretary **Mary Carbajal** has held the positions of RAC and typist at the Western PSC. Along with performing her regular secretarial duties, Mary has become an expert on personal computers. She offers assistance to other employees who may have PC questions or problems. Although hearing-impaired, Mary reads lips and has an amplifier on her phone that allows her to easily communicate with her co-workers. "I really enjoy my work," she said. "I'm busy and I like being able to help others."

For beneficiaries, employees

New checks protect against counterfeiters

Claims Authorizer **Richard Whitehead** began his Northeastern PSC career in 1975 as a temporary benefit authorizer. But a year later, he became a permanent claims authorizer. "When I started, everything was paper-oriented," said Richard. "A request for information on a claim could take a week because we had no access to online systems. But now our systems allow us instant access to the information we need." Richard says that being able to call beneficiaries also helps get information that can quickly resolve problems relating to a claim. "We do a lot of 'troubleshooting,'" he said. "Having direct contact lets us get a prompt answer to a question, which, in turn, allows us to process an action faster."

As a benefit authorizer in Mod 4, **Shirley Cook** has been adjudicating claims and processing overpayments at the Mid-Atlantic PSC since 1979. "I think BAs have to be 'jacks of all trades,'" she said. "We're always busy and handle many different functions." Shirley joined the PSC as a Keyplex operator in August 1964 and believes the biggest improvement over the years has been the installation of computers. "They are faster, more efficient and have greatly reduced the amount of paper necessary for claims processing," she noted. "We can also communicate with district offices via our computers, which often allows us to receive a response to an inquiry the same day. This helps improve our service to the public."



Treasury checks containing new features to make them more secure against alteration or counterfeiting are being issued to Social Security and SSI beneficiaries, federal employees, veterans and others getting payments from the U.S. government.

The checks are being phased in by Treasury's seven regional financial centers as their supplies of the old checks are depleted. The conversion will be completed by the end of this year.

According to Treasury's Financial Management Service, while counterfeiting and alterations are not major problems relative to the number of checks issued by the government, even a few threaten the integrity of government payments and pose unacceptable costs to taxpayers and financial institutions.

The new checks look much the same as the old ones because most of the new security features are almost invisible to the naked eye. The most obvious change is the placement of a "warning" notice on the back of the checks, instructing check cashers to hold the checks to the light to ensure that a "U.S. Treasury" watermark is visible. Also, the "USA" pattern containing the hidden word, VOID, has been removed.

The checks were last changed in 1985, when Treasury converted from the green card check to the Statue of Liberty paper check

Direct deposit is still the safest and most secure way to receive payments. In addition, the cost to the taxpayer of handling a direct deposit payment is only 5 cents compared to 36 cents for processing a check. □

Major exhibition includes our card punch operations

Social Security plays a part in a major exhibition, *Information Age: People, Information and Technology*, at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

Described by Smithsonian Secretary Robert Adams as "one of the largest and most important exhibitions we have ever done," *Information Age* is a trip through the information revolution.

On display is an authentic card punch machine that Social Security workers used in Baltimore's Candler Building in 1938. A life-like figure is seated at the machine, punching in cards.

The legend accompanying the display states that Social Security had 222 card punch machines and 79 card sorters. Each day, some 715,000 accounts were recorded, with each card-punch operator punching in some 2,000 employees' wage reports.

Pressing a button at another display activates an oral description of our early activities: "In 1935, the Social Security Administration, to support the centerpiece of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, embarked on the most ambitious record-keeping program government ever attempted. Five thousand employees processed data about wages from 26 million wage earners and three million employers. Information

was stored on individual punch cards.

"This information was then sorted, stored or processed. People organized this information in a 13-step procedure that used automated information sorting machines. It was the most advanced information technology of the day."

The card punch machine is one of more than 700 artifacts relating to communication and information processing that are included in the exhibit. It also features about 700 graphics, more than 40 computer-driven video stations, two films and a number of audio and video programs.

People can interact with the video screens to learn more about the ways

technology has changed their lives. One interactive TV display offers information on automation and its uses at SSA.

Curator David Allison says that *Information Age* "is really about people and how the technological innovations of the past 150 years have transformed our lives with our own active involvement." It will continue indefinitely at the Museum of American History. □

