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DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE  
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# REVE NEWS

FINANCE'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER • JUNE 2006 • VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2

## Divisional Corner

Mary Gotsopoulos, Chief Law Judge, Adjudication Division



At the beginning of this year, I proudly accepted the post of Chief Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). When I took the position, my first priority was to meet with the staff and take a look at our biggest challenges. One of the things that came out of these meetings was that we had recently experienced an increased hearings load due to better Citywide enforcement. We knew that approximately two million parking tickets are contested in the City every year, each one adjudicated by an ALJ in Adjudication in person. We also recognized

that it was important to integrate our work with that of other Finance units to minimize the wait time that the public experienced at the Business Centers when they requested a hearing. We also determined that we needed to better handle the significant increase in walk-in payments for parking fines and the number of requests for hearings-by-mail.

The first step we took was to set up a focus group made up of staff from Payment Operations, ISS, Executive, and Adjudications. This group was asked to look at ways to develop a more effective system that would allow motorists to have a hearing in any one of the Business Centers within an hour. The result was the development of the Parking Summons Clerk Program.

Fifteen employees participate in this new program and are assigned to each Business Center. Under this program, when a motorist comes into a Center for a hearing, summonses are automatically dismissed if they are defective. However, if a summons has all the required information completed correctly, one of our Parking Summons Clerks will offer the person an opportunity to pay a reduced fine instead of seeing a judge for a hearing. If the person does not want to accept the reduced fine, he or she can go directly to the Administrative Law Judge to have his or her hearing. This new approach – and the innovative thinking of the working group – allows people who want to handle their business in person to do so on their lunch hours and allows the Adjudication Division to fulfill one of the Commissioner's customer service goals. Of course, the public can still request a hearing-by-mail or online through the Finance web site.

For more information on improvements in the Adjudication Division, I hope you enjoy another article, highlighting the special efforts of the Hearings-by-Mail staff and the Herculean effort that went into clearing the backlog of over 400,000 requests for hearings.

*After completing both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from John Jay College of Criminal Justice and her law degree at Benjamin Cardozo Law School, Mary began her tenure with Finance in 1996 as one of hundreds of part-time Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) who adjudicate parking tickets at the Business Centers and by mail. She also worked in the Red Light Camera Unit and the Commercial Appeals Unit. She was appointed the Managing ALJ of the Brooklyn Business Center at the end of 1999 and promoted to the position of Deputy Chief Administrative Law Judge in May 2003.*

## Hearings by Mail

Adjudication Division Accomplishes a Major Goal

It's no secret that when Finance is faced with a challenge, staff members can do what needs to be done. Imagine facing a backlog of 458,000 parking violations waiting to be adjudicated – 200,000 people (about 20% of all those who receive parking tickets) waiting for decisions on their tickets to be mailed to them – and a steady flow of 60-80,000 more requests (sometimes 100,000!) mailed in each month. This was the situation in the Adjudication Division at the end of 2005. In addition to the impact on the division, the impact on members of the public waiting for decisions resulted in increased calls to Customer Assistance and letters to the Correspondence Unit.

Because of the backlog, people were waiting up to 11 months for a hearing decision. This delay had financial as well as customer service ramifications for Finance. The Adjudication staff had to implement a fair and more efficient process that would reduce the backlog and prevent it from reoccurring. Under the guidance of newly appointed Chief Administrative Law Judge Mary Gotsopoulos, these goals were reached.

Adjudication has gone from an 11-month wait for a hearing by mail to case resolutions in 90-

110 days, 60 days of which is due to a new settlement offer program.

When the division receives a request for a hearing-by-mail, a settlement offer is sent within 30 days to the motorist. The offer allows the individual to accept a reduced fine in exchange for waiving the hearing. Each individual has 60 days to respond, and many accept this offer and pay, so no hearing is required. This frees the ALJs to focus their attention on the hearings of citizens who refuse the settlement offer and the result:

hearings-by-mail adjudicated many months faster than before, even with the 60-day waiting period!

The entire Hearing-by-Mail Unit staff worked tirelessly to resolve the enormous backlog and streamline the process for the long term. Of special note are *HBM Supervisors Judy Henson, Irene Cordova, and Denis Huges*; the excellent temporary workers from *L. Tina Barnes'* staff in Administration; and the Managing ALJs *Brian Keeney, Alan Patricof, Peter Sanso, Pat Powers, and Bill Evers*, who, with the other ALJs and Senior Administrative Law Judges, adjudicated the backlogged cases. Special thanks also to *Winston Brown*, who keyed in mountains of documents, and *Joel Bernstein* and his staff.



## Mark Your Calendars...

July 10th Finance Launches Phase One Of the Intranet

The Finance Intranet is an internal website that only Finance employees can access. We have had an Intranet for some time but realized there was more to be explored. Building on the success of Finance's website, which is still receiving accolades, the Communication and Customer Service Division (CCS) set out to revamp and update the current Intranet site, to create a more sophisticated and robust tool for Finance employees. Working with Administration, the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), and the NYC Department of Information Technologies (DOITT), we are in the process of planning a bigger and better Intranet.

It will be implemented in several phases. Phase One will give you access to many more Employee Forms, Award Ceremony information, Equal Employment Opportunity policies, Employee Resources, Polices and Procedures, the SMART Bulletin, and the Finance newsletter, *ReveNEWS*. And that's just Phase One!

The Finance Intranet is your site. It is a private site that only Finance employees can access. As we build into the future and aim for the best possible results, we need to know what you, as Finance employees, would like to see on your Intranet. Soon CCS will be forming Intranet Focus Groups to help us with our mission...of providing the most updated materials and information to the Finance staff...our colleagues...our friends.

## Asian-Americans Celebrate Their Heritage

On May 31st, Finance celebrated Asian Heritage Month with a variety of Asian cuisines. This innovative celebration, attended by close to a hundred Finance employees, was a fun-filled reminder of the diversity that makes Finance strong.

The planning committee included *Virginia Ching* (Payment Operations); *Dayan Deonarine* (ISS); *Anthony Fung Quee* (OTS); *Eva Gambino* (Payment Operations); *Kelly Ko* (Treasury); *Ricky Kwong* (Treasury); *Chandra Mohan* (ISS); *Don Lee* (ISS);

*Karlai Lee* (ISS); *Keith Lee* (ISS); *Kalim Malik* (OTS); *Elaine McNeil* (ISS); *Lakur Prasad* (ISS); *Pramila Rao* (ISS); *Kamal Sharma* (Audit); *Su Smith* (ISS); *Helena Wong* (Payment Operations); *Helen Yuen* (Tax Enforcement); *Susie Yuen* (ISS); and *Peter Yuin* (ISS).

The Chefs for the event were Finance's own *Shailendra Bhatt* (Audit); *Dayan Deonarine* (ISS); *Anthony Fung Quee* (OTS); *Chandra Mohan* (ISS); *Pramila Rao* (ISS); *Kamal Sharma* (Audit); *Jasvinder Wahia* (Audit); and *Susie Yuen* (ISS).



**AIDS WALK NEW YORK**

**Finance Joins the Fight**



June 5th marked 25 years since doctors first identified what is now known as AIDS, and this year was the 21st AIDS WALK NEW YORK. Not surprisingly, Finance was once again involved in improving the lives of New Yorkers. On May

21st, over 47,000 people, including a team from Finance, braved rather challenging weather to participate in the 10K AIDS WALK NEW YORK. The walk through Central Park raised over \$6 million for the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and other AIDS services organizations.

Although a lot has been done in the fight against AIDS, and despite modern treatments and ongoing research, there is still more to do. Activities like the AIDS Walk are very much needed to raise both funds and public awareness.

Thank you to all who participated by walking, making a contribution, or both, and a special thanks to our committee: *Maria Bonanni* (Audit); *Quentin Brown* (Property); *Sharon Danner* (Payment Operations); *Marian DeCandia*, (Property); *Lillie Foy* (Adjudication); *Eva Gambino* (Payment Operations); *Renee Hazzard* (Administration); *Jane D. Hood* (Collections); *Colette McCain* (City Register); *Maria McGhee* (Executive); *Anita Mullin* (Property); *Portia Perkins* (ISS); *Patrick Sullivan* (Executive); *Sheryl Williams* (Payment Operations); and *Joseph Williger* (ISS).

**Building A Better Newsletter One Focus Group At A Time**

By now, the first issue of the newly revamped **ReveNEWS** has been widely circulated and enjoyed throughout Finance. Although very well received, the newsletter staff plans to continue improving each issue. Because our readers are the most important part of Finance's newsletter, the newsletter staff scheduled three focus groups to ensure that **ReveNEWS** reflects what Finance employees wanted to read about. . .

**To read full story**, go to the pdf version of **ReveNEWS** on the Employee Services Page at <http://dofweb>.

**How Well Do You Know The Department of Finance?**

**Win a prize!... Try your hand at a Finance Crossword Puzzle!**



If you are reading a hard copy of this month's newsletter, go to the pdf version of **ReveNEWS** on the Employee Services Page at <http://dofweb> and click on the puzzle to download and print the crossword.

**SMARTSTAT Improving Service for Sheriff's Division Customers**

On May 16th, *Sheriff Lindsay Eason* inaugurated the first SMARTSTAT meeting in the Sheriff's Division. Incorporating aspects of a successful program used by the NYPD known as COMSTAT and Finance's SMART Initiative, SMARTSTAT reviews operations within an operational unit, focuses on maximizing success, and addresses areas where additional resources are needed.

The Sheriff's Division is the primary civil law enforcement arm of the City. "I see this as the first step to enhance and improve the Sheriff's Office's contribution to the Department of Finance and to the citizens of New York City," stated Sheriff Eason at the first SMARTSTAT meeting, which focused on the Warrants Unit, headed by *Undersheriff Robert Thalasis*. This unit serves warrants and summonses, including those warrants from the NYC Human Resources Administration for parents who are delinquent in child support (formerly known as "The Deadbeat Parents Program"). Undersheriff Thalasis reported on the number of summonses and warrants received and served during the last four fiscal years and the unit's future plans to improve this operation. SMARTSTAT has already proven its

value, namely, a marked increase in "warrant attempts" and a higher "warrants served" success rate. A review for the month of May indicated that both areas had improved in comparison to April.

Each month, a different unit will be asked to report on their activities and key measures of success, followed by questions from the Sheriff and his staff regarding problem areas, enhancements and accomplishments. The specific goal of SMARTSTAT is to deliver the best service possible to the customers of the Sheriff's Office. At the conclusion of the first SMARTSTAT meeting, *First Deputy Sheriff Oliver Pufolkes* said, "This was the first of many [meetings], and I am extremely excited about the positive impact SMARTSTAT will bring to the Sheriff's Office and the Department of Finance."



**Finance Fashion**

**Cabinet Members and Managers Test Nametags**

Look around and you might see a new fashion trend starting here at Finance. This month, members of the Cabinet and managers throughout the agency can be seen sporting a new fashion accessory: a classy goldtone magnetic nametag.

As a result of the SMART Initiative, there was a collective desire on the part of the majority of staff members to facilitate communication both internally with peers and externally with customers. A group of Finance staff got together to examine one way to accomplish this desire. They researched and evaluated the use of employee nametags in other municipalities and in the private sector, including the success and failure experienced in other places, and submitted their findings in the form of recommendations. This fact-finding committee also actively participated

in the design, functionality, and maintenance issues of nametags before the first tags made their way to the lapels of the first users in May.

In July, the program will be further evaluated, and, depending on the results, these well-designed nametags may be available for use by all staff in August or September.

Thanks to the nametag fact-finding team for their efforts: *Diane Bratcher*

(Executive); *Annette Hill* (City Register); *Pauline Hyles* (Audit); *Mike Hyman* (Tax Policy); *Pam Parker-Cortijo* (Collections); *Patrick Sullivan* (Executive); First Deputy Commissioner *Rochelle Patricof*, and from The Public Strategies Group, *Jennifer Billig*.

**ReveNEWS** will update everyone as to the results of the test run as well as the date of the "nametag roll-out" as details are learned.



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