



**FINANCE  
NEW YORK**

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE  
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# REVENUE NEWS

SUMMER 2004

FINANCE'S QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME I, NUMBER 2

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**Rochelle Patricof**  
First Deputy Commissioner

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## Commissioner's Corner

### Breaking the Rules

by Martha E. Stark

When I thought about what to write for the Summer issue of REVENUE NEWS, so many possibilities leapt to mind. It's been a busy spring, and it's going to be a busy summer, for Finance. We've published the final assessment roll, and mailed out the annual real estate bills; we're right in the middle of a delayed lien sale season; we've launched the next exciting phase of ACRIS; and, oh yes, there's that little tax rebate that should become law in August...

But since summer is typically a good time to slow down and reflect, I thought I'd write about something that transcends any particular job, whether it's taking payments at the window or conducting audits, and that's customer service.

A woman who works for JetBlue, the discount airline that has turned customer service into an overnight success story, said that she always asks anyone she interviews to give one example of a time when they broke the rules to deliver superb customer service. At first, this seemed to puzzle a lot of people in the audience. But when she gave us some of her most memorable examples, it started to make a lot of sense.

Her most inspiring story was about a woman who wanted desperately to fly to see her dying sister, but had such a fear of flying that she could not sit down on the plane. Most airlines might have hurried the woman off the plane to keep everything on schedule. But that's not what happened this time. Instead, a flight attendant worked with the woman to calm her down. And when that didn't work, he promised to sit with her and hold her hand for the entire flight. This meant that other attendants had to pick up the slack serving food and providing pillows. But at the end of the day, that woman got a chance to see her sister before she died.

This is a great story not just because it is touching, but because it is so relevant to the challenge of public service. Because of politics, because of tabloid journalism, and because of simple inertia, most of us are conditioned to do the safe thing. It's easier to say no because saying no rarely gets you in trouble. You won't rock the boat, and you won't get nasty headlines in the New York Post. But very often, playing it safe means missing an opportunity to better serve the public.

Taking risks is not something that people think about doing at Finance and other City agencies, because they are often not encouraged to take risks and do things differently. If I'm remembered for one thing after I leave this office, I hope it is that I encouraged you to ask questions, challenge the process, and push for change in order to improve customer service. Obviously, I'm not talking about doing anything illegal. I'm talking about helping someone with a parking question even though they got your number by mistake and you're an auditor.

I'm talking about helping a senior citizen fill out an exemption form line by line, even though you're an assessor who happened to see this confused man in the hallway. I'm talking about giving a brief history of the commercial rent tax to a caller even though you've got "real work" to do.

And I'm talking about treating every caller, every letter-writer, and every taxpayer with a grievance as a fellow New Yorker who maybe, just maybe, has a legitimate gripe, instead of assuming that everyone we deal with is simply trying to put one over on the City of New York.



Continued on page 2

## Banking Development District Program Comes to Queens

### Providing Banking Services to Underserved Communities



On April 12, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Finance Commissioner Martha E. Stark and City Comptroller William Thompson teamed up with Queens Borough President Helen Marshall to inaugurate the borough's first Banking Development District with the opening of Carver Federal Savings Bank in Jamaica.

### Commissioner's Corner

Continued from page 1

And I'm talking about challenging policies, and even laws. Too often I hear from people that we do things a certain way because "that's always been the policy." Well, maybe the policy made sense when it was created in 1974, but it might not make sense anymore. Or maybe it still does — but you won't know unless you really think about it.

I also hear this a lot: "Well, that's what the law says, so we have to do it that way." True — right now. But we're not talking about Newton's Laws of Gravity — we're talking about tax laws. They can be changed — if we think creatively, and make the case that there's a better way.

We all see things that should be questioned, and we probably do question them, at least to ourselves. For example, why is it okay to charge interest on a charge that we reopen due to a Finance error? And why don't we tell people that they have a credit on our system, instead of waiting for some lawyer to find it for them — and then take one third of their money when we issue a refund?

I mentioned the JetBlue story because often when we go the extra mile to help individuals, we don't just give that person good service; sometimes we discover a new way of providing better service to everyone else. That flight attendant might not have started a policy of always sitting with people to help them overcome their fear of flying. But he probably got the company to think about different ways of accommodating those customers, just by breaking the rules. And he almost certainly got JetBlue to think of customers with special needs not as nuisances, but as customers who deserved good service.

I saw how individual cases can lead to big changes first hand last year during the lien sale outreach sessions, when homeowners came to me with their problems. In several instances, I made a decision to pull a property out of the lien sale because, to me, it would have been unfair to sell a lien. When I discussed this with staff, they agreed. And this year, we have implemented these several policy changes so everyone will benefit.

Now, it's easy for the Commissioner to question a policy. But you can do it too. I've told all my managers to encourage employees to look at problems differently, and I really mean it. If you think something can be done better, tell your manager. Don't just do things the same way when a newer, better way is possible.

The Department of Finance is blessed not just with hard workers, but with smart ones. We're blessed with employees who care about New Yorkers, because most of us are New Yorkers. So let's all ask questions and push ourselves to provide the kind of customer service we expect to receive when we're the ones asking for help.

Have a great summer!

Sincerely,

*Martha E. Stark*

Banking Development Districts, or BDDs for short, were first created by the State in 1998 to attract banks to communities that had limited or no access to banking services. BDDs provide easier access to traditional banking services and encourage residents and business owners to establish relationships with a community bank, some for the very first time. Such relationships provide long-range benefits to the community and strengthen the local economy. Increased access to business and personal loans, the ability to establish a bank account, encouraging savings, and community outreach offering educational financial seminars are just some of the benefits that BDDs bring to neighborhoods in need.

Institutions receive incentives to support and encourage their participation in BDDs, for example, real estate tax relief and substantial deposits from local government. These municipal deposits translate into direct improvements for the community and its economy. That is because BDDs strengthen the relationships that develop between the bank, local residents and business owners which, ultimately, enhances business development and creates new jobs. The surrounding neighborhoods in Queens will no doubt soon benefit from the up to \$10 million that Mayor Bloomberg pledged in April to deposit in Carver Federal Savings' new Jamaica branch.

The City's Banking Development District Program is overseen by the New York City Banking Commission, which is chaired by Mayor Bloomberg and includes City Comptroller Thompson and Finance Commissioner Stark. The program is administered in the five boroughs by Treasury's Associate Commissioner Robert Y. Lee, in collaboration with Denise L. Pease, the Director of Commercial Banking for the Office of the City Comptroller.

Since its inception in 1998 thirteen Banking Development Districts have been approved in New York State. BDD bank branches in the five boroughs include Carver Federal, Citibank, City National, Community Capital, Independence Community, New York National Bank and Victory State Bank. You can learn more about the history and regulatory process of BDDs at [banking.state.ny.us/bdd.htm](http://banking.state.ny.us/bdd.htm)

## New Head of Collections Appointed

Upon Michael Phillips' retirement, Commissioner Stark tapped another Finance veteran in her appointment of Pamela Parker-Cortijo as Acting Assistant Commissioner of the Collections & Data Management Division. Pam has been with Finance for 16 years, after a stint as



a Revenue Officer with the Internal Revenue Service. She started here as an Investigator in Field Collections, then moved up to Manager of Collections Processing. A few years later, Pam was promoted to Director of Collections Processing, where she remained until her recent appointment as Acting Assistant Commissioner for this relatively new division. REVENUEWS congratulates Pam, and we look forward to writing about her plans for the division in future issues.

## A New Finance Press Secretary

In June, Commissioner Martha E. Stark and Communications & Customer Service Assistant Commissioner Sam Miller welcomed Joanna Perlman to the Department of Finance as the agency's new Press Secretary. Joanna's experience includes work as a Researcher at the Population Council, as a Planning Editor for NY1, and as Administrative Director for NOW New York, where she organized news conferences and handled press inquiries. Joanna's background and knowledge of New York City media will no doubt serve the agency well. Beyond responding to daily media inquiries, Joanna also plans to work closely with the Communications & Customer Service team to proactively promote Finance programs and initiatives in the media.

## Star of the Season Launch

### A New Face for the "Employee of the Month" Program

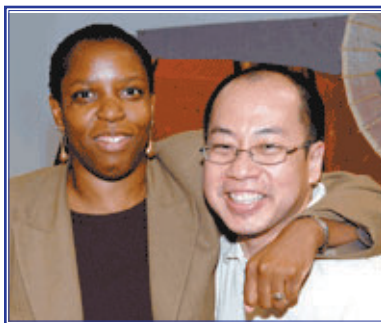
The QWL Employee Recognition Committee is pleased to announce the launch of Star of the Season — a new program dedicated to acknowledging the efforts of exemplary employees. Star of the Season replaces Finance's previous Employee of the Month Program.

While nominations can be submitted at any time, Star honorees will be selected on a quarterly basis. Any employee, excluding members of the Employee Recognition Committee, who has been with the Department for at least one year, is eligible for nomination by any other employee. Contact your Divisional Administrative Liaison for more information, a program brochure and nomination form. Nominations should be submitted to the Labor Relations Unit, 345 Adams Street, 7th Floor, in Brooklyn.

Do you know a colleague or have mentor in Finance that you admire? Perhaps someone who consistently impresses you in how they approach their work or do their job? Take the time to acknowledge their effort with a nomination and let their star shine next season!



## Private Sector Yields New Director

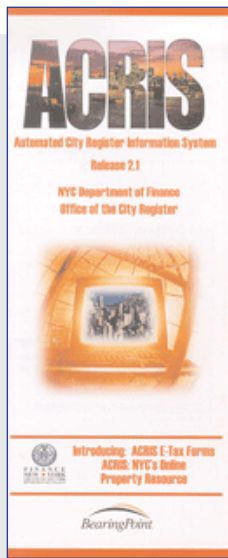


Commissioner Stark and ISS Assistant Commissioner George Mark welcomed Peter Yuin as Director of Network and Computer Services in the Information Systems Services (ISS) Division. The Director is a newly created position now responsible for Finance's network, server, desktop, e-mail, as well as Helpdesk services. In short, Peter is basically responsible for everything that is not related to the mainframe or to application programming. He brings to Finance many years of IT experience from the financial services industry, most recently with GE Capital Markets, where he managed the technical environments of both demanding customers and Wall Street traders. Before that, Peter worked for Citibank Capital Markets and the Asset Management Group.

In his new role, Peter says that a primary goal is "to have ISS view itself more as a service organization rather than a technical support organization." To accomplish this goal, he is setting standards across technology infrastructure, establishing standard operating procedures, and realigning his staff to encourage teamwork. One of his short-term goals is for his team to communicate on a regular basis to all Finance employees about ongoing ISS activities.

## Office of Technology Solutions & City Register Launch

### ACRIS 2.1: E-Tax Forms New Release Advances Finance's Online Service to the Public



Most Finance employees probably already know that ACRIS, which stands for Automated City Register Information System, provides quick and easy access to the City Register's recorded documents through the Internet (or from one of the public access terminals in the City Register's offices). This amazing document imaging and management system allows users anywhere in the world to view or print recorded documents for Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens, going back to 1966, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. ACRIS also allows you to search the City Register's records by owner name, the property's borough/block/lot designation, the document type, or other identifying factors.

Building on the strength of the original system, the ACRIS 2.1 release of E-Tax Forms enables users to create a series of tax forms electronically from their home or office. Forms included in the 2.1 release are the NYC Real Property Transfer Tax form, the Smoke Detector Affidavit, the NYS Real Estate Transfer Tax form, and the NYS Real Property Transfer Report.

To make it easier for the user to complete the form and to reduce the risk of error, ACRIS 2.1 automatically pre-populates owner and property information within the forms application and allows you to copy and paste repeated information from one field to the next. A handy checklist also tells you when all the required information has been entered, automatically validates key information to ensure its accuracy, and calculates the taxes and fees. You only have to print out the forms created and submit for filing with the City Register!

"With this launch, ACRIS will be, far and away, the most robust interactive application on the City's website" said the agency's Chief of Technology Solutions Herb Stratton. City Register Annette Hill also took the opportunity "to thank Joy Bobrow and Andy Eisner from Legal, Lincoln Williams and Dalton Lowe in Audit

for assisting with User Acceptance Testing (UAT), and Manhattan Deputy City Register Gladys Leonard for leading the UAT Team and coordinating training classes for Finance users."

REVENUE congratulates all of the staff and managers who worked to make ACRIS 2.1 a reality - for their hard work and for once again putting Finance on the map in terms of online services to the public!

## Legislative Update

### Lobbying for Change to Improve Tax Administration

Although the State legislative session ended in June, Finance continues to lobby for passage of its legislative agenda items. The co-operative and condominium abatement program, which was set to expire this year, was extended, but work continues on passage of legislation that would authorize Mayor Bloomberg's property tax rebate, and legislation that would allow Finance to make Administrative Law Judges full time employees.

The Department is also trying to get the remaining pieces of its assessor reform bills passed. These reforms focus on assessor training and certification, authorizing the Department to go after revenue lost due to fraudulent assessments, and removing the cap on State aid received by the City to perform assessments.

At the local level, the City Council tabled the Absentee Landlord Surcharge until 2006, and also finally passed legislation reauthorizing the City's annual lien sale.

### DATES TO REMEMBER

— September 6, 2004 Labor Day	— September 30, 2004 First Day of Sukkot	— October 31, 2004 Halloween	— December 8, 2004 First Night of Hanukkah
— September 11, 2004 Patriot Day	— October 11, 2004 Columbus Day Observed	— November 2, 2004 Election Day	— December 21, 2004 Winter Begins
— September 16, 2004 First Day of Rosh Hashanah	— October 12, 2004 Columbus Day	— November 11, 2004 Veterans Day	— December 25, 2004 Christmas
— September 17, 2004 Citizenship Day	— October 24, 2004 United Nations Day	— November 25, 2004 Thanksgiving Day	— December 25, 2004 First Day of Kwanzaa
— September 22, 2004 Autumn Begins			— December 31, 2004 New Year's Eve

## City Sets '04 Lien Sale for July 29

### Finance Mails 60-Day Notices to 13,000 Property Owners

The City kicked-off the 2004 Lien Sale Program on May 25th with the publication and mailing of the 60-Day Notice of the City's Intention to Sell Liens, the legal requirement that begins the annual sale. As you may know, a lien is a legal claim against real property for unpaid real estate taxes, water, sewer or other property-related charges, as well as the interest due on these taxes or charges. When property owners fail to pay after a specified period of time, the City is allowed to sell the debt to a third party for collection.

There are some common misconceptions about what the sale of a lien means to a homeowner, and a major focus over the past two years has been on lien sale outreach and education. Most important, when a lien is sold, the City does not sell the property and the third party does not take title to the property. The third party - called the lienholder - purchases the right to collect the back taxes or water/sewer charges and interest that were owed to the City.

During the 60 days between notification and the actual sale date, Finance tries to make it as easy as possible for property owners who are on the Lien Sale list to obtain information, pay what they owe, or arrange an installment plan:

- The Tax Lien Ombudsperson Margaret Donadio, the Senior Citizen Tax Lien Ombudsperson Richard Robertson and their staff, now located at 66 John Street, on the 13th floor, assist the public both on the phone and in person. They advise owners, arrange installment agreements, and accept payments. Representatives of the Ombudsperson's Unit are also available at the Business Centers to assist property owners in the boroughs as well.
- Working with the Department of Environmental Protection, and with the Department of Housing Preservation & Development, Finance also offers community outreach sessions in all five boroughs, where owners on the lien sale list can receive one-on-one counseling to, avoid the lien sale.
- Finance also conducted a special briefing on the lien sale process for elected and community board officials so that they to could properly advise their constituents seeking assistance. The agency is also partnering with various elected officials on targeted outreach to their constituents.

The 30-Day Lien Sale List was recently posted online and will be updated weekly through the sale date. If you know anyone on the list, urge them to take immediate action to resolve their unpaid taxes or charges. The biggest mistake any property owner can make is to ignore a lien sale notice because once the lien is sold, the amount owed automatically increases. The Ombudsperson's phone number is 212-504-4039 and the Senior Citizens Ombudsperson can be reached at 212-504-4037. For water and sewer charges, contact DEP's Bureau of Customer Services at 718-595-7000. For those that need financial guidance and assistance, HPD's Owner Services Program offers a number of loans, grants and counseling services, and can be reached at 212-863-5300.

**Check Finance Lien Sale Webpage For Regular Updates And A Final Listing Of The Liens Sold At [nyc.gov/finance](http://nyc.gov/finance).**

## Reorganizing Exemptions

### New Management and Procedures to Improve Processing



In an effort to streamline the real estate tax exemptions and abatements process, the Commercial Exemptions Unit and the Personal Exemptions Unit were recently reorganized. Processing, which involves the intake, review and implementation functions, were transferred to the Payment Operations Division and matters of policy or eligibility are now reviewed in the Office of Legal Affairs.

Both OLA and Payment Ops now share responsibility for administration of the exemption programs, which provide real estate tax reductions to eligible property owners and businesses. STAR, the Veterans' Exemption, the Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE), and the Disabled Homeowners' Exemption (DHE) are some examples of what we call personal

exemption programs; the Commercial Revitalization Program (CRP), the Commercial Expansion Program (CEP) and Industrial and Commercial Incentive Program (ICIP) are examples of what we call commercial exemptions and abatements.

The focus of the reorganization was twofold: (1) to get taxpayers their benefits more quickly, and (2) to eliminate any unnecessary requirements in the application process. Towards that end, exemption and abatement applications are also being simplified and the review processes are being streamlined.

These exemptions translate into incredible savings for New York City property owners. If you, your friends or family own property in the city, be sure to visit the website's Exemptions & Abatements webpage for more information or to download applications. Basic and Enhanced STAR applications are also now available in Chinese, Korean, Russian and Spanish!

## Finance Employees on the Move

### After Almost Two Decades, Finance Closes Doors at Elm Place



After 19 years, Finance has finally moved from 25 Elm Place in Brooklyn. During the last two months, almost all of General Services' efforts were directed toward vacating Elm Place and moving its 485 employees to nicer, new quarters at 59 Maiden Lane in Manhattan. According to Senior Director of General Services Sheila Williams, "five tractor trailers of Herman Miller [units] were turned over to the requirements contractor, three Finance storage rooms were cleaned out to accept usable furniture, five truckloads of furniture were put into inventory, and forty 30-yard dumpsters along with 15 sanitation trucks of debris were removed."

Most employees who moved were part of Payment Operations but some were with Collections & Data Management (C&DM). The C&DM units that were located at 210 Joralemon Street also moved to 59 Maiden Lane, finally putting that division in one consolidated location. Maiden Lane's most recent Finance addition is the Customer Relations Unit, which moved from 66 John Street.

Employees at 59 Maiden Lane who were interviewed about the facility unanimously agreed that the building was much nicer than either 25 Elm or 210 Joralemon. Even those who live in Brooklyn don't seem to mind the slightly longer commute to be in such a clean, pleasant work environment.

Next on the move? Sheila Williams told REVENUEWS that the Office of the Sheriff's facility at 550 W 59th Street has moved to Starr Avenue in Long Island City. And, while the new Bronx Business Center, to be located at 3000-3002 Third Avenue, is not projected to open until May 2006, it's still exciting to anticipate a high-quality, comfortable facility with room for the public and a modern telephone system — a real improvement over the two current offices.

## Woman's History Month

### Honoring Finance's Women of Distinction

March was officially designated as Women's History Month in 1987. Since then, many different individuals and organizations have commemorated the achievements and history of the women's movement in different ways. Here at Finance, our tribute to Women's History culminated with the Women of Distinction



Awards Ceremony, which was held on Tuesday, March 30, 2004 at the 345 Adams Street Training

Center in Brooklyn. Eight outstanding females were selected as Women of Distinction based on their notable contributions at work, in their community, and/or in their personal lives.

The 2004 Women of Distinction are Christine Avin—Audit, Brenda Caldwell—Executive, Daphne Harris—ISS, Ethel Havens—Payment Operations, Ellen Hoffman—Office of Legal Affairs, Pamela Parker-Cortijo—Collections & Data Management, Yolanda Taylor—Sheriff's Office, and Sophia Walkes—Audit.

## Take Our Children to Work Day

### Today's Vision — Tomorrow's Reality

On April 22, 2004, Finance participated in Take Our Children to Work Day festivities. "Today's Visions, Tomorrow's Reality" was the theme for this year. This special day, sponsored by the city's Commission on Women's Issues and endorsed by the Mayor, featured activities for 150 Finance Children ages 9-15.

These projects included actual work assignments, such as helping Administrative Law Judges in the Adjudication Division conduct hearings, creating PowerPoint presentations, "shadowing" Finance staff, and assisting with other work operations throughout the agency.

Commissioner Stark played an active role in each of the participating locations—345 Adams Street, 66 John Street, 1 Centre Street, and 1932 Arthur Avenue. Latisha Usman, daughter of Mustapha Usman (Audit), and Herbert Franklin, son of Loretta Franklin (Audit) won the agencywide Take Our Children to Work contest to shadow the Commissioner for the day.



## March of Dimes WalkAmerica

### Raising Money for One of Finance's Favored Charities



The Finance March of Dimes Team, sporting zippered gray sweatshirts, got off to a nifty start in WalkAmerica on Sunday, April 25, 2004. Full of energy and raring to go, the Finance Team was already in place when the March of Dimes photographer was ready to take the official team photo. Finance's team of approximately 50 walkers collected approximately \$23,000, and the walkers are still collecting pledges, so this amount is expected to increase. REVENUE honors all those who walked, and thanks their generous sponsors. Commissioner Stark served as the Government Industry Chair for the March of Dimes and will continue the role next year.

## Finance Celebrates Asian Heritage

### East Meets West at 345 Adams Street

May is Asian Heritage month and, this year, about 150 Finance employees took advantage of this great opportunity to share in the diverse cultural background of our employees. Finance's Asian Heritage Committee organized the Department's 2nd annual celebration in two parts — first, the EXPO, which took place on Friday, May 21st, at 345 Adams in the Training Facility. EXPO participants displayed novelty items, dolls, books, games, musical instruments, origami items, traditional clothing, and Asian cuisine. The rooms were decorated with colorful posters from Asian countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, Korea, Thailand, and Hong Kong, as well as the various fabrics from China and India, and Asian snacks were served.



The second part of the celebration took place on Wednesday, May 26th. Celebrants met again in the same decorated rooms and had the opportunity to hear short speeches by Commissioner Martha E. Stark; Associate Commissioner Robert Lee; Assistant Commissioner George Mark; ISS Director Peter Yuen; and Kalim Malik, from the Office of Technology Solutions. These were followed by a presentation of music from Pakistan and India, and attendees also had an opportunity to sample a variety of Asian foods and treats, with delicacies from India, Vietnam, China, and Japan. Our Commissioner even used chopsticks!

Special thanks are due to the many Finance employees who worked so hard to organize the event, they are the reason it was such a tremendous success. REVENUE salutes Anthony Fung Quee, Chandra Mohan, Don Lee, Eva Gambino, George Hu, Helena Wong, Judy Houser, Keith Lee, Karlai Lee, Kalim Malik, Peter Yuen, Pramila Rao, Ricky Kwong, Virginia Ching, Susie Yuen, Bob Contard, Callie Harris, Cassandra Stevens, Daphne Harris, Elaine McNeil, George Mark, Helen Yuen, Henri Clermont, Jennifer Ngo, John W. Hunt, Jr., Joseph Mathai, Joyce Soso, Lai Tang, Linda Chan, Peggy Dowd, Robert Lee, Stu Smith, Susan Cheung, Tina Lee, Virginia Chin, and (last but not least) Wayne Oba.






## Employee Recognition Ceremony

### Honoring Finance's Finest

Over 400 employees were honored for career service, perfect attendance, educational and professional achievement, and community service at the annual Employee Recognition Ceremony held at DC37 Headquarters on May 12. Finance Commissioner Martha E. Stark and DC37 Program Director Frances Curtis congratulated the winners. Honorees returned to work with gifts such as duffel bags, thermos, clocks, etc. The Quality of Work Life (QWL) Employee Recognition Committee sponsors the annual ceremony honoring "our finest".



# COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

-  Update On Plans For Property Tax Rebate
-  Feature On The Surveyor's New System — MAPS
-  Finance To Launch New Website Design
-  The New Autodialer System
-  More On Finance Operations, Employees & Events!

## [nyc.gov/dofstaff](http://nyc.gov/dofstaff)

### Reminder — Our Emergency Employee Notification Webpage

Did you know that the Department of Finance has an Emergency Employee Notification web page on the Internet? In the event of a weather or other emergency, Finance will post important information or other instructions for employees on this page, so remember **[nyc.gov/dofstaff](http://nyc.gov/dofstaff)**. In a true emergency, Finance would also use the traditional methods to communicate important information to those employees without Internet access.

### 2004/5 REVENUE Deadlines:

- Fall Issue 8/20/04
- Winter Issue 12/01/04
- Spring Issue 3/01/05
- Summer Issue 6/01/05

E-mail comments & suggestions  
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