



FINANCE  
NEW YORK  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE  
nyc.gov/finance

# REVE NEWS

FINANCE'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER • AUGUST 2007 • VOLUME 4, NUMBER 8

## Divisional Corner

Dara Jaffee, Assistant Commissioner, Legal Affairs



I'm glad to have a chance to tell you about our Division and myself. I joined Finance in 1999 as an attorney in Legal Affairs working mainly on property tax administration and other related issues. I then served as Special Counsel to the Commissioner as part of the Executive Office. Before Finance, I worked at the Office of Management and Budget in the Intergovernmental Relations Unit.

As many of you know, I recently had a baby girl. My daughter, Faryll, is about 21 months old. She walks, runs, really talks a lot (I can't imagine

where she gets that from, and amazes me with all that she knows and all that she can do every day). She is named after one of my very favorite people, my grandmother, Florence, who was my mother's mother. Being a working mom has been a huge change and, quite honestly, a challenge for me, and I now have tremendous respect for all the parents who do this. I am getting more sleep now (which really helps!) but as many of you know, it's still a constant balance to do the very best that I can both here at Finance and at home for my family.

Let me take a few minutes to tell you about Legal Affairs. We contribute to helping people pay the right amount on time by ensuring that our laws, rules and guidelines are clear, easy to understand and fairly applied to the public, and by providing great legal support to Finance Divisions.

We measure our success using two measures. We look at the rating by agency compilers on their understanding of the rules and information presented, and we look at the ratings by agency division heads on their satisfaction with the services they received from Legal Affairs.

As an internal service provider, Legal Affairs is very concerned with making sure that our internal agency customers are satisfied with the service they receive. We know that it is not only important to provide accurate and well-reasoned legal advice, but to present our advice in a way that is useful to our customers.

Every quarter, we survey agency division heads on whether they are satisfied with the service they received, if the service was received quickly and if they feel like a valued customer. The results of this

survey determine our score for customer service each quarter. We also use the responses on the first customer service question (satisfaction with services received) to help determine our contribution to mission indicator.

Legal Affairs is responsible for providing legal services and counsel to just about every part of the agency. We are a relatively small division of 46 staff members, including 32 attorneys who work on almost every legal issue that our agency faces (as I will explain below), a great support team of 11, and a conciliations team of three. Our management team includes Deputy General Counsel Alan Roth, Managing Director Joyce Lippman, and me. If you have legal questions concerning your work or have identified an area where our laws or rules should be clarified or guidance should be issued, please let us know. I'd like to tell you about our units:

Managed by Duncan Riley, Conciliations provides an informal appeals process here at Finance where taxpayers can contest their audit determinations—either assessments or refund disallowances.

The Legal Counsel unit (Director, Robert Dauman) gives legal advice on issues such as real property tax administration, City Register deed and recording issues, Treasury matters, Freedom of Information Law requests, and tax secrecy. This division also drafts many of our rules and legislation. David Atik (our FOIL expert) and Carolyn Russell coordinate our agency's Continuing Legal Education program, and Joy Bobrow handles DRIE appeals.

Our Tax Law unit, directed by Andrew Eisner, provides legal advice on the City's business income and excise taxes, works on tax forms, issues taxpayer letter rulings and drafts rules and legislation.

Together with the Tax Law Unit, Tax Advocacy & Resolution Director Michael Newmark and Deputy Director Kate Trachtenberg, form our incredible "Tax Team" providing legal support on business income and excise taxes and counsel to Audit. This team also represents our agency at the Conciliations Bureau.

Real Property Tax & Exemptions, headed by Fran Joseph, provides legal advice on real property tax assessment and tax exemption issues.

(Continued at bottom of page 4)

## SMART CORNER

### Peer Learning in Action

Some of you may have heard about, or know someone participating in, a **SMART** Learning Circle. These are small groups of seven or eight managers at Finance who meet monthly over the course of a year to share experiences and discuss questions, concerns, successes and other experiences with **SMART** at Finance. Last year, managers applied through their division head to participate and we began five Learning Circles. During their meetings, managers have an opportunity to share their experiences and engage in peer coaching, active listening, and feedback discussions.

Several of the Learning Circles will soon be coming to an end, so we are taking a step back to evaluate them and hear from participants about their experience. Based on both formal evaluations and informal feedback, the circles have been successful in achieving the expected results. Participants have told us that the circles deepened their knowledge and application of **SMART** and good management practices; helped them offer support to, and accept support from their colleagues; improved their skills in group interaction; provided them with a broader appreciation of the work and challenges of their colleagues in the agency; and created a sense of safety in the group.

If you want to hear more about Learning Circles directly from two participants, read on for interviews with David Cottes of FIT and Doris Lawson of Adjudications.

### Public Strategies Group

Since January 2005, three letters have been heard around the agency in relation to the Finance transformation: PSG. Many of you may have been wondering who or what exactly is PSG? Well, PSG stands for the **Public Strategies Group**, the Saint Paul, Minneapolis-based public sector consulting group that is

Finance's partner in our **SMART** transformation. PSG's mission is to transform governments. Billing themselves as "architects of results-based government," the PSG team works exclusively with local, state and federal agencies in the U.S. and around the world that undertake major changes. Specifically, they advise organizations on reform strategies, help them build competence and capacity to change through

consultation and training, and support them in the change management process.

The PSG Team currently assisting Finance with our transformation consists of nine individuals who bring a wealth of experience, knowledge and expertise to the table. For you to learn more about our transformation partners, we have asked each of the team members to share with us a bit about themselves and here's what we learned:

(Continued on page 2)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know? Finance Information Technology (FIT) launched a new **SMART** performance data reporting site during the July Operational Review Week that brings the most up-to-date agency and divisional data to every employee's desktop. To check it out, simply click on the SMART BSM (short for Business Scorecard Manager) icon on your desktop.

## LEARNING CIRCLE TEACHES PARTICIPANTS HOW TO SQUARE ISSUES

What happens when a group of Finance employees from various divisions holds a meeting without an agenda? The answer may surprise workers who ardently swear by business meetings with set topics and deadlines with an assistant who writes down minutes. For dozens of Finance employees involved in the Learning Circle, this agenda-less meeting benefits them in ways that their monthly staff meetings cannot.

The Learning Circle, part of the **SMART** transformation, is an innovative group dialogue between colleagues, which ultimately helps individuals enhance the quality of their work. Each Circle develops its own ground rules, and individuals offer their opinions and experiences in a free and open format in which there are no authoritative distinctions between members. Topics of discussion depend on what is foremost on the minds of the members.

The meetings are led by facilitators from the Public Strategy Group and are designed to deepen employees' understanding and application of **SMART** as well as help broaden managerial skills. Another important result is improving listening skills and gaining a deeper appreciation of colleagues' work.

These factors have made Finance employees into enthusiasts of these unique sessions.

"I was interested in learning more about **SMART**," said Doris Lawson from Adjudications. "I had recently taken over as a manager and I wanted to see if the Learning Circle could help me become better at my job."

"The Learning Circle has been great and I was able to enhance my skills as a manager by building on my strengths. Being involved in the Learning Circle gave me an opportunity to talk about issues without the fear of saying something that people would criticize. We can bring up any issue and still feel that we are being supportive of each other."

One of the main components of the Learning Circle is for employees to be comfortable enough to say whatever is on their minds without fear of any professional reprisal. One Learning Circle motto is that what is disclosed by individual members stays within the group. These open discussions allow employees to obtain a deeper appreciation of their colleagues and the work they do.

"I'm able to look at myself and my staff in a different way. I interact with them better," Lawson said. "I can honestly tell them, 'OK, we're a team.' I try to use the experience of the Learning Circle when I notice there are employees who feel like they're not important or not contributing as much as others. I will tell that person to try to find their strengths and that seems to work wonders."

"The Learning Circle was like managerial therapy for me," said David Cottes of Finance Information Technology. "I learned that I had a lot in common with other managers as far as dealing with pressures and problems. There are times when I think I'm at my wit's end and don't know how to deal with a particular situation. The Learning Circle was extremely useful in helping to cope with these anxieties."

By enhancing employees' managerial and listening skills, the Learning Circle sessions are ultimately helping to make Finance a more efficient agency while maintaining a positive atmosphere. "The Learning Circle is like a haven for managers," said Lawson. "It made me more outspoken but I'm still able to remain both friendly and professional."

Future issues of **ReveNEWS** will feature more articles about the Learning Circle and give insight into participants' experiences on this **SMART** initiative.

(*SMART Corner continued from page 1*)



**Babak Armajani**, who prefers to be called Armi, is PSG's Chief Executive Officer and lead on the transformation partnership with Finance. He has worked in and with government for 30 years, including senior positions such as Deputy Commissioner of Minnesota's Revenue Department. He enjoys golf and wood-working. Of his work here in New York, he said, "Finance is a pioneer among New York City agencies in becoming a results-based organization; it's exciting to be part of this work."



**Mary Lofy** is PSG's Project Manager for **SMART**. "New York City Finance is a great place to implement performance-based service. It's a wonderful opportunity to work on the cutting edge with good people," she said. Mary has spent many years working in government and received countless awards for her contributions. With her husband Chuck Lofy, who is also working with Finance on the transformation, Mary founded Lofy Associates, a consulting company. Mary is not only a civil servant but also an author, wife, mother, and grandmother of 5.



**Laurie Ohmann** is Vice President and a co-owner of the Public Strategies Group. Laurie has experience with a wide array of governments, from federal government to school districts, in a range of subject areas, from community policing to ecosystem-based management. Among her experiences is a stint in Minnesota State Government as the Director of the Center for Crime Victim Services. "I had the opportunity to work with Finance at the beginning of **SMART** and am eager to re-join the team to support your progress," she said.



**Lorraine Chang** inherited her interest in public service from her grandfathers, who were both public officials in China, and her mother who worked in the United Nations. She chose to study law as an avenue for bringing about positive change in the world. She has worked as a law clerk during the Watergate scandal, as an environmental lawyer, and as in-house counsel, business group leader and internal quality consultant at the Union Pacific Railroad Company. She has learned from each new career experience. Joining PSG in 1998, Lorraine feels extremely lucky doing what she loves: helping government produce better results for citizens. "Having been born in Queens, I love the fact that our project with Finance is bringing me back to my roots in NYC," Lorraine said. "Getting to know and work with the managers and supervisors in the Managing for Results program has been a highlight for me."



**Jeff Zlonis** has been PSG's President and Chief Operating Officer since the late 1990s, but his career as a re-inventor of government dates back to the 1970s. He has worked with local, state, and federal governments in the U. S. as well as internationally both in staff capacity and as

a consultant. His greatest joy has been seeing public employees succeed at making a positive change in delivering their agency's mission. "I'm excited about the opportunity to support **SMART** at the Department of Finance and hope to make a contribution to helping people pay the right amount on time," Jeff said.



**Marjorie Rush** has worked with PSG for about four years. Currently the President and CEO of Decision Suites Inc., a management consultancy specializing in group processes, Marj has also worked in government, education and for not-for-profit organizations for the past three decades. Marj is the recipient of numerous awards in public administration, public affairs, and affirmative action. She said, "Each of us has the ability to change the place where we work if we really want to. It is hard work but it is worth the effort. I really enjoy facilitating groups and seeing change take place."



**Akilah Rosado-McQueen** is a native Brooklynite who has held a variety of positions in New York State government, including Legislative Analyst for the Assembly Majority Leader's office and Chief of Staff to two elected officials. One of Akilah's focuses in the Assembly was housing and community development policy. In June, Akilah earned a Master's of Science in Urban Policy and Management from the Milano Graduate School at The New School. "Coming from a government background, I had some reservations about one's ability to truly implement a performance management system into a government agency, but Finance has shown that it can be done," Akilah said. "It's far from easy, but in the moments when everyone is rowing in the same direction, it is amazing."



**Jeff Kober** is a sub-contractor at PSG. During his career he has focused on training initiatives in both the public and private sectors. As many of you who attended the Managing for Results workshops know, Jeff has done a lot of work with The Disney Institute. Currently he is working on the establishment and support of corporate cultures. He said, "The billions in tax revenue gathered by this agency does not begin to equate to the worth of those who serve to collect it. Most ironically, it is how we place value in those among us that ultimately improves our ability to collect it."



**Jennifer Billig** We also want to take this opportunity to say a special thank you to Jennifer Billig, who many of you know from her work for PSG over the last year on various aspects of the transformation. Jen played a pivotal role in training **SMART** coaches and facilitators, launching Results Teams, working with Communications on the **SMART** Jams, and delivering the Managing for Results Program. Her efforts here at Finance have earned her a promotion at PSG and so, in addition to consulting, she will now also be handling marketing. We extend our thanks and congratulations to Jen, and wish her well in her new position!



## THE NETWORK TEAM: WE KEEP FINANCE CONNECTED

All employees at some point must call on the FIT Help Desk to handle network and communications-related problems. But how many Finance employees know the range of services these professionals handle each day? So for this **ReveNEWS** issue we offer readers a quick glimpse into what these invaluable workers do to keep everyone at Finance connected.

Headed by Peter Yuin, the Network Computer and Help Desk Services consists of two units in addition to Help Desk operations: Advanced System Planning, and Client Services. Rao Pathori leads the Advanced System Planning group that includes a technical staff of four, while Fady Mesak manages the Client Services group of three highly competent and experienced computer technicians.

The Team is responsible for the configuration, maintenance, monitoring, and troubleshooting of Finance's 60 Windows servers spread throughout the agency's

various locations, Active Directory infrastructure, and network security. The Team also troubleshoots software that diagnoses network servers, as well as monitors various logs and hardware diagnostic tools.



Standing: Jackie Hassell, Fady Mesak, Liza Garnier, Elliot Glass, Kenneth Thomas, Gland Singletary. Sitting: Dennies Serrienne, Rao Pothuri. Not pictured: Moshe Adesnik.

In addition to these ongoing server-related projects, the Team handles approximately 30% of the calls made to the Help Desk. The calls include a wide range of commu-

nication activity including e-mail, user account, Blackberry, network connectivity, security, and data access requests.

Rao Pathori summarizes the Team mission as "providing our users secure access to data and network resources 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." It would help the Network Team provide the best service possible to its users, if at the time an issue is reported to include specifics. For example, include the scope of the problem (is it limited to one PC/User or does it effect the entire group), or when did the problem start? Were any changes made recently to the PC (such as installation of a new software) that resulted in this problem, etc.

The Team thanks everyone at Finance for helping create an efficient and effective computing environment. We welcome any suggestion and feedback from employees. The Team is here to serve your computing needs to ensure that we have all the equipment to enable us to help taxpayers pay the right amount on time.

## DIVISIONAL AWARDS

Four Finance employees were honored at a combined divisional ceremony on July 24th at Finance's Brooklyn Offices on 345 Adams Street. Commissioner Martha E. Stark recognized *Vera Carter* (Customer Assistance); *Robert Freeman* (Advocate's Office); *John Greenidge* (Employee Services-Agency Support Distribution Services); and *Linda Owens* (Customer Assistance) for their dependability and efficiency. These divisional awards honor employees for accomplishing extraordinary results that help support the agency's mission. Carter, who was honored with a Service Award was recognized for her reliability and dedication. She is one of the early risers who assist callers on taxes and

parking inquiries at 8 am – the very first calls that come through each day.

Department's Code of Conduct and is known for thinking outside the box.

Greenidge, who has successfully utilized **SMART** principles in his work, was presented with an Innovation Award. His comprehensive review of his division has led to an innovative operational plan. Owens, who also received a Service Award, has worked for the City for 19 years. Honored for her dependability and productivity, she is known for always being up for a new challenge by learning new topics and pitching in. Honorees are nominated by colleagues and then approved by department heads.

Congratulations and keep up the great work!



Commissioner Martha E. Stark with Vera Carter's daughters Terry and Arlene



Robert Freeman and the Commissioner



John Greenidge and the Commissioner



Linda Owens and the Commissioner

Freeman, who also received a Service Award, has helped to revise the

## LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

This past June the New York State legislature passed several major bills that were part of Finance's legislative agenda. The most significant bill will help give relief and simplify some of the complicated tax issues for small businesses and proprietors who pay the Unincorporated Business Tax. This tax is imposed on every individual or unincorporated entity carrying on a trade, business, or profession – in whole or part – in New York City. Also passing the legislature was a bill allowing not-for-profits to benefit from a property tax exemption from the date of purchase.

Two bills to extend programs that help the City's financial growth were also passed by New York State legislators. One program allows the City to extend the \$400 rebate to property owners for another three years. The rebate is provided to all eligible one, two and three-family homeowners and cooperative and condominium owners in New York City. Also extended is the Industrial Commercial Incentive Program (ICIP) for one year until June 20, 2008. This program provides a partial exemption from or abatement of property

taxes for varying periods of up to 25 years for eligible industrial and commercial buildings that have made physical improvements. The relatively short extension allows City and State legislators to craft a longer-term ICIP law over the next year that will more effectively spur development.

At press time, Governor Spitzer was expected to sign three of the bills into law. The Governor already signed the ICIP extension into law on June 29th. **Read the bills.**

## ENTER! HOW SMART ARE YOU?

Since the **SMART** transformation is such an invaluable part of every facet of how Finance does business, it also deserves to have its own quiz. We hope you enjoy this fun way to show



your knowledge of **SMART**. The quiz demonstrates how much **SMART** is incorporated into employees' work lives, while reminding them how it is also involved in their everyday lives.

Submit your answers on a separate sheet of paper and fax to

**August Contest at 212-232-1890.**

Include your name, work location, and work phone number. The first three correct answers will receive a prize. Good luck!

1. Who inspired the **SMART** transformation and what is the goal of **SMART**?
2. Name two **SMART** films that were shown at the **SMART FILM SERIES** and the topic of those films.
3. When did the Department of Finance hold its first **SMART** Jam?
4. Who is a compiler?
5. What does PSG stand for and what is it?
6. When is the next Operational Review Week?
7. Name an online source where you can find the Agency and all divisional **SMART** Cards?
8. Name one of the ways in which Finance helps people pay the right amount on time?
9. What are the four values of the Department of Finance?
10. Name any of the key components that your division's **SMART** Card measures?

## Finance Family Day Has Been Postponed Until Further Notice

(Divisional Corner continued from page 1)

Joyce Lippman and her team form our Employment Law unit, providing counsel on employment law and conflicts of interest matters, and assisting with training. This unit works closely with our EEO officer, Annie Long. Supporting Finance's Pension Unit, Marty Kleinman handles pension disability matters.

Under Alan Roth, the Parking Unit

## INTERNING AT FINANCE

By Amethyst Tate



Standing left to right: Carl Hill, Vanessa Echevarria, Tobias Morgan, Amethyst Tate, Rayvon Guevara, and Chastity Robinson. Not pictured: Chevonne Byas.

As high school and college students, interns know that an internship can be an important factor in determining a career path. Internships help provide practical hands-on experience, so finding one that is the right fit for each individual is imperative. At the Department of Finance, we have found a place and a position that we truly enjoy. We therefore decided to reach out to fellow interns to better understand what they are learning and see what they have to say about their new jobs.

The interns interviewed were *Chevonne Byas* (Audit Division), *Vanessa Echevarria* (Refunds & Adjustments Unit), *Tobias Morgan* (Refunds & Adjustments Unit), *Rayvon Guevara* (Communications Unit), *Carl Hill* (Data Management & Collections Unit) and *Chastity Robinson* (Refunds & Adjustments Unit).

When asked why they were attracted to the Department of Finance as an internship opportunity, Chastity acknowledged that she wanted to gain experience in New York City government, and learn more about what goes on behind the scenes. She is currently visiting New York from Arkansas, and is staying with relatives to complete her internship to see what the city has to offer.

Tobias was not aware of the internships but became involved when his aunt, who is an employee here, informed him about the possibilities of interning at Finance. Tobias is now glad he took advantage of the opportunity.

Rayvon was intrigued by the idea of learning the career-related skills demonstrated at the Department of Finance. He believes this experience will assist him in the future. In the fall, Rayvon will join the freshman class at Villanova University as an Engineering major. He is looking forward to next summer to update everyone about his experience at college. "I was attracted to the internship at Finance, because I enjoy research, writing, and reading, which is a critical part of my work in the Communications

Unit. I have enjoyed learning new information about the City that otherwise I would not be aware of."

Carl, a high school intern, was motivated to work here based on positive input from friends who worked here in past summers. Chevonne was enticed by the office environment and the specific job she would be doing, which includes utilizing information supplied from taxes and tax forms. Vanessa was interested in the opportunity to gain work experience as a college intern and work with others in a new environment.

Most of us found out about the internship through a friend, relative, or school. When Chastity was asked how she perceived this work experience will help interns with future jobs, she stated she believed it would make her resume much stronger, and Rayvon felt the interaction between workers here would teach him more about real world experiences.

As for me, I worked within the Department last year, in the Adjudications Division, and now I'm working with the Communications Unit. Being involved in another unit has taught me how to tackle different tasks, which is imperative since versatility is an important element to have in the workplace.

Carl believes working here will broaden his horizons and help him gain fundamental work experience before college. Chevonne is now considering business school based on what she learned as an intern at the Department of Finance. She believes her exposure to this setting will help her establish the career she wants to pursue. Vanessa felt the experience would help her interact and work with others in a more professional manner and aid her in becoming a more reliable individual. And though Tobias is going down a different career path, studying Sociology & School Counseling in college, the responsibility of communicating, teamwork and meeting deadlines have proven beneficial to him.

We all agree that working at Finance over the summer has helped us learn more about the City as well as help us become a even more comfortable in a work atmosphere. Interacting with the employees has been extremely beneficial. It has allowed us to understand what Finance employees do on a regular basis, what they find enjoyable about their job and what they have accomplished. Overall, the experience has motivated all of us to work hard and strive to accomplish our goals, both in the workplace and outside the office.

advises on parking related matters, including adjudications and collecting parking debt. We also have a parking fraud unit managed by Ellen Young, which investigates and takes legal action against those who commit fraud in connection with our adjudications process. Daisy Alverio and her team at 66 John Street serves the public when motorists believe we have improperly towed their vehicles.

The Collections team headed by Heidi Chain provides legal counsel to the Collections Division and also represents Finance in collection matters, working diligently to protect our interests and our ability to collect City debt.

I'd like to thank everyone at Legal Affairs for their hard work and professionalism, which enable us to provide great legal support to our customers in operating divisions.

## REVE NEWS

A Monthly Publication of the  
NYC Department of Finance  
Communications & Government Affairs  
59 Maiden Lane, 22nd Floor  
New York, New York 10038  
Phone 212.232.1775/Fax: 212.232.1890

**Communications**  
Sam Miller, Assistant Commissioner  
Theresa Sarica, Director of Communications

**NEWSLETTER STAFF**  
Editor: Theresa Sarica  
Writer: David Miller

E-mail comments & suggestions  
for future issues of ReveNEWS  
to [SarricaT@finance.nyc.gov](mailto:SarricaT@finance.nyc.gov)

Email [walvickh@finance.nyc.gov](mailto:walvickh@finance.nyc.gov) to receive a hard copy of ReveNEWS. Include your full name, unit, and building location and enter "ReveNEWS Subscription" in the subject line.

### EXECUTIVE

Martha E. Stark, Esq.  
Commissioner  
Rochelle Patricof  
First Deputy Commissioner

**Adjudication**  
Mary Gotsopoulos  
Chief Administrative Law Judge

**Audit**  
Pauline Hyles  
Assistant Commissioner

**City Register**  
Annette M. Hill  
City Register

**Collections**  
Pamela Parker-Cortijo  
Assistant Commissioner

**Enforcement**  
Carlton Butler  
Assistant Commissioner

**Payment Operations**  
Leslie Zimmerman  
Assistant Commissioner

### Pension

Diane Bratcher  
Director

**Property**  
Fadil Brijja  
Acting Assistant Commissioner

**Sheriff**  
Lindsay Eason  
Deputy Commissioner

**Treasury**  
Robert Y. Lee  
Deputy Commissioner

### INTERNAL SUPPORT DIVISIONS

**Employee Services**  
Galia Galansky  
Assistant Commissioner

**Budget**  
Pat Mattera-Russell  
Director

**Finance Information Technology**  
Chief Information Officer  
Jane Landon  
Deputy Commissioner

### Communications & Government Affairs

Sam Miller  
Assistant Commissioner

**Customer Relations**  
(vacant)

**Department Advocate**  
Nancy Goodman  
Director

**Equal Employment Opportunity**  
Annie Long  
Director

**Internal Audit**  
(vacant)

**Legal Affairs**  
Dara Jaffee  
Assistant Commissioner

**Tax Policy**  
Michael Hyman  
Assistant Commissioner