

National Organization  of Professional Hispanic
Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees



La Voz

Newsletter

March 2012

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President's Message

Angel Figueroa, President



Dear NOPHNRCSE Members,

I would like to issue my congratulations to the former presidents of the three NRCS employee organizations who were recognized with the 2010 Chief's Team/Group Civil Rights Award. The award was for the success of the joint conference through team effort among employee organizations, Civil Rights Division, SEPM's, STC's and many others. Many NOPHNRCSE members worked in this effort. My appreciation and sharing of this recognition goes to them. Luis Hernandez, our own former president, was a recipient of this award and for that, we are very proud.

We continue to move forward with plans to meet via remote means due to NRCS budget considerations. I have asked Roney Gutierrez to activate the committees that will plan a remote conference for our organization this summer and details are forthcoming. I have also asked Roney to activate the elections committee so we can fulfill our by-laws obligations for a change in leadership and you will also hear from that committee.

We continue to work on our networking and leadership development for our members and others. Networking may be the one service that NOPHNRCSE offers to its members that sometimes goes unnoticed and unappreciated. Networking has been the single most important factor in the

development of Hispanic Leaders in this agency. When you work in committees, and participate in conferences and other activities you are networking with NRCS leadership and you are being noticed.

When I was a soil conservationist, I began benefiting from networking at NOPHNCSE early on. During committee work, I was being noticed by others and by speaking up at conferences and meetings I was being evaluated as a leader. I also developed friendships and mentor/mentee relationships that would result in the success of my career. I showed my leadership skills to regional leadership and was selected as district conservationist and later an area conservationist. Eventually, I would become a leader at NHQ and ultimately a state conservationist. All of this I owe to God, my family, my friends, and NOPHNCSE. Do you have a similar experience at this organization? What other organizations give you the opportunities for leadership development in this agency in an accelerated fashion?

When others ask you what we get out of being a NOPHNCSE member, National Council, regional representative, committee member, or participant, please mention "Networking". You are being noticed and evaluated and that will result in success for your career, thanks to NOPHNCSE.



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2012 NOPHNCSE Election News

By Mike Castillo, Elections Committee Chairperson

The 2012 NOPHNCSE Election Committee would like to officially announce that the 2012 NOPHNCSE Election will be starting soon.

This notice is to inform members that the 2012 election process is going to get underway within the next few weeks. This year, according to NOPHNCSE Constitution and Bylaws, the positions that will be open are **president, executive vice president, secretary and regional representatives for the North East, Northern Plains, Midwest and Caribbean Area.**

It is extremely important that all members get their dues paid ASAP for the 2012 calendar year. As per the Constitution and Bylaws, in order to participate in election, one must be a current paid member. **So if you are interested and/or plan to run for office, or most importantly, if you wish to nominate and vote in upcoming election, your 2012 dues must be paid. The membership chair will be notifying members of the deadline that will be established to be considered a current or paid member.**

Also, to login to the NOPHNCSE Web site to participate in the election, you will need to be a paid member or the Web site will not let you in.

The 2012 Election Committee will be working closely with all regional representatives to make sure they start getting the word out to members of the importance of getting dues paid right away.

The following timeline has been established for the 2012 election:

- Nomination period will be from March 4 to March 17, 2012.
- Election period will be from March 25 to April 14, 2012.
- Runoff election period (if needed) will be from April 23 to May 30, 2012.

The 2012 Election Nomination committee would like to thank those who participated in the 2011 election process in some form or other.

Any organization is only as strong as its members who care enough to participate in the process. Please don't forget to participate in this important process.

2012 Election/ Nomination committee members are:

- Mike Castillo, TX. Chair, SC Region
- Cristina G. Clark, Co Chair, DE. Member, NE Region
- Carlos Luna, TX Member, SC Region
- Dawn Afman, CA. Member, West Region
- Tamara Buitenwerf, member, Midwest Region

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Federal Hiring of Hispanics Slows, Nearly Flat

By Emily Long elong@govexec.com October 4, 2011

Hispanic representation in the federal workforce has increased just 0.2 percent in the past four years, according to new data from the Office of Personnel Management.

In its annual report on Hispanic employment in government released on Sept. 30, OPM found that the group's representation among federal civilian employees held steady at 8.0 percent in fiscal 2010 compared to the previous year. Hispanics made up 6.5 percent of federal civilian workers in fiscal 2000 and grew to 7.8 percent by fiscal 2007.

According to OPM, Hispanics made up 6.3 percent of new hires in fiscal 2010, down from 7 percent in fiscal 2009. Retention rates remain high, however, resulting in steady representation among the workforce as a whole. The report found notable declines in Hispanic hiring among the Senior Executive Service and General Schedule employees, while there was an increase among other white collar workers. During the past three years, SES-level Hispanic federal employees grew by 0.2.

Ten of 23 large agencies increased Hispanic representation in fiscal 2010, while seven reported declines. The Homeland Security Department employs the largest percentage of Hispanics at 20.8 percent of its total workforce, followed by the Social Security Administration at 14.1 percent and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission at 13.7 percent. The Health and Human Services Department brought up the rear, with just 3.3 percent of its workforce identifying as Hispanic.

Jorge Ponce, co-president of the Council of Federal EEO and Civil Rights Executives, called the news "horrible," adding that no progress has been made in recent years, especially for Hispanics in top leadership positions.

"A 0.2 percent growth in three years in the Hispanic representation at the SES rank -- where decisions are made and budgets are approved -- is unacceptable," Ponce said.

A report released last month by the Center for American Progress painted a bleak picture for Hispanic representation in the SES in the coming decades. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that Latinos will make up 23 percent of civilian workers nationally in 2030, but CAP projections put them at just 6.8 percent of the government's senior executives. The gap is expected to extend through 2050, when 30 percent of the workforce will be Hispanic compared to 12.5 percent or less of the SES, the report found.

Obama administration officials recently have taken steps to boost employment of Hispanics and other minorities across government. OPM in February launched the Hispanic Council on Federal Employment, an advisory group charged with boosting Hispanic hiring, recruitment, retention and advancement in government.

According to the report, the council is working on increasing the use of internship programs, strengthening accountability, preparing Hispanics for entering the SES, and creating recruitment and communication strategies for Hispanic communities.

In addition, President Obama in August issued an executive order directing agencies to develop roadmaps for hiring, training and promoting more minorities, women, and disabled employees in an effort to diversify the federal government, particularly at the senior levels. According to OPM Director John Berry, that framework is forthcoming.

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Census Facts, August 2011

Hispanic Heritage Month

- In September 1968, Congress authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to proclaim National Hispanic Heritage Week, which was observed during the week that included Sept. 15 and
- Sept. 16. The observance was expanded in 1988 by Congress to a month long celebration (Sept. 15 – Oct. 15), effective the following year. America celebrates the culture and traditions of those who trace their roots to Spain, Mexico and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South America and the Caribbean.
- Sept. 15 was chosen as the starting point for the celebration because it is the anniversary of independence of five Latin American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence days on Sept. 16 and Sept. 18, respectively.

Population

- The Hispanic population of the United States as of April 1, 2010, was 50.5 million, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or race minority. Hispanics constituted 16.3 percent of the nation's total population. In addition, there are 3.7 million residents of Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory.
- Between April 1, 2000, and April 1, 2010, the Hispanic population grew 43%, making Hispanics the fastest-growing minority group.
- The projected Hispanic population of the United States on July 1, 2050 is 132.8 million. According to this projection, Hispanics will constitute 30 percent of the nation's population by that date.
- The nation's Hispanic population during the 1990 Census: 22.4 million.
- The U.S. Hispanic population worldwide, as of 2010, ranked second. Only Mexico (with 112 million) had a higher population of Hispanics.
- The percentage of Hispanic-origin people in the United States who were of Mexican background in 2010 was 63%. Another 9.2 percent were of Puerto Rican background, 3.5 percent Cuban, 3.3 percent Salvadoran and 2.8 percent Dominican. The remainder was of some other Central American, South American or other Hispanic or Latino origin.

States and Counties

- The population of the Hispanic-origin population that lived in California in 2010 was 14 million, up from 11 million in 2000.

- Sixteen is the number of states with at least a half-million Hispanic residents — Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Washington.
- New Mexico's population that was Hispanic in 2010 was 46.3%, the highest of any state. Hispanics also made up at least one-fifth of the population in California and Texas, at 38 percent each, followed by Arizona (30 percent), Nevada (27 percent), Florida (22 percent) and Colorado (21 percent). New Mexico had 953,403 Hispanics.
- The percentage increase in the Hispanic population in South Carolina between April 1, 2000, and April 1, 2010 was 148%, the highest of any state.
- The Hispanic population of Los Angeles County, Calif., in 2010 was 4.7 million. This is the highest of any county.
- Proportion of the population of Webb County, Texas, that was Hispanic as of 2010 was 96%. This is the highest proportion of any county.
- Of the 3,143 counties in the United States, 82 were majority-Hispanic.
- The increase in California's Hispanic population between April 1, 2000, and April 1, 2010 was 3 million.
- In 25 states Hispanics were the largest minority group. These states were Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming.

Businesses

- The number of Hispanic-owned businesses in 2007 was 2.3 million, up 43.7 percent from 2002.
- Receipts generated by Hispanic-owned businesses in 2007 were \$345.2 billion, up 55.5 percent from 2002.
- 23.6% of businesses in New Mexico in 2007 were Hispanic-owned, which led all states. Florida (22.4 percent) and Texas (20.7 percent) were runners-up.

Families and Children

- The number of Hispanic family households in the United States in 2010 was 10.4 million.
- The percentage of Hispanic family households consisting of a married couple was 63%.
- The percentage of Hispanic family households consisting of a married couple with children younger than 18 in 2010 was 39%.
- Percentage of Hispanic children living with two parents was 67%.
- Percentage of Hispanic married couples with children under 18 where both spouses were employed in 2010 was 44%.

Spanish Language

- The number of U.S. residents 5 and older who spoke Spanish at home in 2009 was 35 million. Those who hablan español constituted 12 percent of U.S. residents. More than half of these Spanish speakers spoke English "very well."
- The number of U.S. residents 5 and older who spoke Spanish at home in 1990 was 17 million.
- Percentage of Hispanics 5 and older who spoke Spanish at home in 2009 was 76%.

Income, Poverty and Health Insurance

- The median income of Hispanic households in 2009 \$38,039.
- The poverty rate among Hispanics in 2009 was 25.3%, up from 23.2% in 2008.

- The percentage of Hispanics who lacked health insurance in 2009 was 32.4%, up from 30.7 percent in 2008.
- Education
- The percentage of Hispanics 25 and older that had at least a high school education in 2010 was 63%.
- The percentage of the Hispanic population 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2010 was 14%.
- The number of Hispanics 18 and older who had at least a bachelor's degree in 2010 was 3.9 million.
- Number of Hispanics 18 and older with advanced degrees in 2010 was 1 million (e.g., master's, professional, doctorate).
- Percentage of college students (both undergraduate and graduate students) in October 2009 who were Hispanic was 12%.
- Percentage of elementary and high school students that were Hispanic in 2009 was 20%.

Foreign Born

- The foreign-born population that was Hispanic in 2009 was 47%.

Names

- Hispanic surnames ranked among the 15 most common in 2000 was 4. It was the first time that a Hispanic surname reached the top 15 during a census. Garcia was the most frequent Hispanic surname, occurring 858,289 times and placing eighth on the list — up from 18th in 1990. Rodriguez (ninth), Martinez (11th) and Hernandez (15th) were the next most common Hispanic surnames.

Jobs

- Percentage of Hispanics or Latinos 16 and older who were in the civilian labor force in 2009 was 68%.
- The percentage of civilian employed Hispanics or Latinos 16 and older who worked in management, professional and related occupations in 2009 was 19%.

Voting

- The number of Hispanic citizens who reported voting in the 2008 presidential election was 9.7 million, about 2 million more than voted in 2004. The percentage of Hispanic citizens voting went from 47 percent in 2004 to 50 percent in 2008.

Serving Our Country

- Hispanics or Latinos 18 and older who are veterans of the U.S. armed forces is 1.1 million.

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Once Upon a Member

By Julie MacSwain



Several years ago I met Kris Graham-Chavez at an International meeting of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS). It was through my SWCS connections with Kris that I became aware of the NOPHNRCS organization. I remember vividly Kris mentioning to me that "NOPHNRCS was one of the best organizations she had ever joined and became involved in." She encouraged me to become a member! The rest is history.

Shortly after becoming a member I became involved with NOPHNRCS by presenting at the annual meeting; moderating at annual meetings; serving on various NOPHNRCS committees, including chairing the Communications committee; NOPHNRCS grant committee and the 2007 NOPHNRCS Annual conference in Bloomington, MN. Through my involvement I came to know our NOPHNRCS members.

NOPHNRCS members care; they are committed to the organization and in making a difference in their personal and work lives. My recent volunteer experience has brought me to the position of serving as Secretary of NOPHNRCS. Again I have had another great opportunity to work with more NOPHNRCS members and serve on the national council. Through these connections I have grown professionally and certainly have expanded my friendships throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Consider taking the next step in NOPHNRCS; get involved. You just might surprise yourself how rewarding it can be to become involved in an organization such as ours!

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NRCS Receives Business of the Year Award, NRCS Employee Roel Guerra Honored

By Melissa Blair, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Texas

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was recently named 2011 Business of the Year by the Harlingen Region of the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)/Division for Blind Services (DBS). NRCS received the award for its commitment to working with and employing blind and visually impaired individuals in Rio Grande City and throughout Texas. Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in South Texas, Tomas Dominguez, received the award for NRCS.

NRCS employee of 24 years, Roel Guerra of Rio Grande City, was also honored for his commitment and hard work with the agency in helping landowners with conservation planning. Guerra, who is legally blind and hearing impaired due to a hereditary eye condition that affects peripheral vision and hearing, was presented with a proclamation from State Representative

Ryan Guillen. The House of Representatives' resolution, which was presented by Starr County Judge Eloy Vera, recognized Guerra's career as a soil conservation technician and planner that has earned him an outstanding reputation among the landowners in Starr County and his peers.

The House Resolution No. 1888 states: "This esteemed Texan has successfully forged a notable career to which others may aspire, and he may take justifiable pride in his many accomplishments; now therefore, be it resolved, that the House of Representatives of the 82nd Texas Legislature hereby honor Roel Omar Guerra for his personal and professional achievements and extend to him sincere best wishes for continued success."

Ralph Rangel, field director and Bonnie Notargiacomo, vocational rehabilitation coordinator, with DARS/DBS in the Harlingen Region, shared with attendees which included family, friends, NRCS and DARS/DBS employees, Starr County officials and others, that the cooperative effort of employers, such as NRCS working in cooperation with DARS/DBS, enables individuals such as Guerra to live full productive lives by being employed and being able to provide for their families.

"Roel is a valued employee and a strong role model for his family as well as his community as a whole," said Notargiacomo, who is Guerra's vocational counselor. "Roel has demonstrated time after time his unwavering dedication to continue to work and provide for his family despite the many obstacles he has faced. You see, Roel is legally blind and severely hearing impaired due to Retinitis Pigmentosa and Ushers Syndrome, a hereditary eye condition that affects the peripheral vision and hearing."

Notargiacomo said Guerra's wife of 29 years, Reyna, stated that, "My husband will not give up, he is a fighter, and he never let his disability define him as a person."

Guerra came to DBS seeking assistance in job retention and after developing a comprehensive assessment, it was jointly agreed upon with NRCS that Guerra would benefit from the vocational rehabilitation service that derive from the "Big Six" philosophy: Employment lifestyle skills training, adjustment to blindness, orientation and mobility, low vision and hearing evaluations, along with specialized glasses and hearing aids. In addition, DARS/DBS provided adaptive technology equipment so that Guerra could continue to complete his work tasks independently. Notargiacomo told the audience that after a year of receiving DBS services that Guerra had reached his goal of retaining employment and had benefitted from their rehabilitation services.

Arturo Ibarra, resource team leader with NRCS in Edinburg, who has assisted Guerra during his career and Dominguez, told the audience about their work with Guerra and how NRCS is like a big family who works together not only for improving Texas lands, but also improving employees. Both Ibarra and Dominguez, and State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas, were presented framed recognition certificates for their cooperative efforts with NRCS and DBS in working with Guerra.

"NRCS is honored to have an outstanding employee like Roel who knows the true meaning of Helping People Help the Land," said State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas. "We also appreciate DARS/DBS recognition of NRCS' efforts to recruit, hire and train a diversified workforce that includes disabled employees, who we work with to provide the environment, equipment and assistance they need to overcome challenges in the workplace."

Guerra's few words of heartfelt thanks and appreciation to his family, friends, co-workers, DBS and NRCS contractors and landowners who have provided him the support and help over the years said that NRCS mission of Helping People, Help the Land is the right mission and he has enjoyed every year of it.

Starr County Judge Vera also honored his long-time friend Guerra. "This is a topic we do not talk about often enough because historically people thought it was rude or inappropriate. Thanks to research in the field of rehabilitation and a good friend like Roel, we have moved past those times and grown into a better society."

“Blindness is defined as not being able to see. However, I believe Roel “sees” and “hears” just fine. He has seen the beauty of a productive life and a wonderfully happy marriage. He hears how much he has inspired us not to see the glass half empty, but half full. He inspires us to look on the bright side and see greener pastures.”

Guerra’s two children, Roxanne and Roel Jr. have followed in his footsteps working for NRCS. Roxanne has served as a technical service provider in the Zone 3 office in Corpus Christi and Roel Jr. is currently a soil scientist in the Abilene NRCS office.

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Another Trip to Help Ethiopia

By Tamara Buitenwerf, Soil Conservationist, West Union, Iowa

This past fall, I made a trip home to central California where I met up with my family. While stuffing my face with chile rellenos, we reminisced about how far we have come since the days of our grandparents being migrant farm workers. My father learned and passed on more than just hard work ethic. It’s those family roots that helped mold who I am today. Childhood Christmas vacations spent picking oranges brought lots of dreaming and those dreams continue to motivate me to do more for people who have nothing.

For my husband and me, one area we give back is in a rural, poor community in Southern Ethiopia. In the [August issue of LaVoz](#), I shared with you a little about my volunteer work in Ethiopia. At that time, I was preparing to head back to Ethiopia to do famine relief work that would have long term sustainability. If you have a few minutes to spare, I would love to give you an update and encourage you to get involved.

For 10 days in late October, Joe Wagner (District Conservationist in Anamosa, Iowa) and I left the comforts of our home and headed to Ethiopia. In the 3rd month of drought, our goal was to teach widowed women various cropping practices that would conserve soil moisture and provide food as the famine was impacting everyone around them. A simple training session becomes a little more drawn out when the women you’re training show up having eaten nothing for breakfast and having walked an hour to be trained. So, we started our mornings with a nutrient rich snack and clean water. The women learned methods of preparing and utilizing compost which use “wastes”, provide nutrients and retain soil moisture. Thanks to the generous donation of Earthway, we took along a garden seeder and trained the women on using it to plant corn and other vegetables. The previous method of sowing corn included broadcast seeding which prevented good seed to soil contact, poor growth and corn maturation, etc. This little garden seeder is considered the most high-tech piece of equipment in the town of Shanto. We discussed intercropping with nitrogen producing plants, water catchment basins, and the importance of veggies.

While my specific focus is crops and conservation related, each trip becomes so much more than that. Similar to NRCS’s slogan of helping the people help the land, we’re helping people help themselves with long term sustainable help. Sometimes that includes feeding the women each morning, taking a woman who’s literally dying of starvation to see a doctor, teaching basic sanitation skills, chasing kids on the soccer field and encouraging those who have very little.

With the area now in their 7th month of drought and having two failed crops so far, there is a HUGE need for assistance. While sometimes overwhelming, we can make a difference one step at a time. Whether its crops and conservation related work that I’m involved with, training teachers, community outreach, livestock related, medical related, or other basic issues, we can make a difference. Maybe you have a connection with the local inner-city kids, or the country of Paraguay, or somewhere else on the map; you don’t have to serve in Africa. The need is all around us. You can do something in your own hometown. Let this article encourage you to take action and do something.

If you are interested in specifically what work I'm doing in Ethiopia, feel free to email me at tam4buit@hotmail.com with any questions you might have. I'm tentatively planning to head back to Ethiopia this June. If you want to take that step and join me for a life-changing few days, be sure to let me know.



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