

OST Reconnects to the Internet

It has been more years than most employees want to think about but Internet access is once again available to the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST). OST employees are able to communicate via email to conduct business.

In 2001, as a result of the Cobell lawsuit, the Department of the Interior was disconnected from the Internet. Parts of the Department were permitted to reconnect in 2002. However, five offices that work closely with Indian trust data remained off the Internet. On May 14, 2008, Judge Robertson, the presiding judge in the case, vacated a previous order, thus allowing those offices to reconnect. In addition to OST, other offices that resumed access to the Internet are the Office of the Solicitor, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of Hearing and Appeals, and the Office of Historical Trust Accounting.



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OST Chief Information Officer Bob McKenna explained, “IT security has changed significantly since the December 2001 court-ordered Internet disconnect. OST’s security incorporates advances in the IT industry. OST employs a full time Bureau Information Technology Security Officer, protects its IT resources with multiple firewalls, intrusion detection solutions are in place, and real-time monitoring of computer activity is happening.”



Visit OST’s website, www.doi.gov/ost, for information updates.

Fractionation Update

Members of the Intertribal Monitoring Association (ITMA) have been reaching out to tribes and IIM account holders for recommendations and solutions to fractionation, which occurs as land passes from one generation to the next and more and more heirs acquire fractionated shares of undivided interests. Highly fractionated land is less economically productive due to the complications of multiple owners.

In May, ITMA met with the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and in June with the Council of Large Land Base Tribes. Additional sessions are being planned in the Northwest and Great Plains Regions and in Oklahoma. In the fall, ITMA will arrange a meeting to review options and make recommendations about this matter of significant importance to Indian Country. Please contact ITMA for meeting dates and locations and email your comments and suggestions to itma@itmatrustfunds.org or call the ITMA office at 505-247-1447.

Updates Always Needed! *Whereabouts Unknown Outreach*

OST refers to beneficiaries who do not have current contact information on file as “Whereabouts Unknown (WAU).” As of July 31, 2008, there were more than 83,000 WAUs. OST wants to put money into the hands of the beneficiaries. Therefore, when beneficiaries don’t come to OST, OST goes out to find them!

Finding WAUs is an important task of each Fiduciary Trust Officer (FTO). Events—sponsored or attended—are one way they try to locate beneficiaries with out-of-date contact information.



FTO Karen Whintonon, with the Western Navajo Agency of the Western Region, meets with a beneficiary.

For instance, recently, FTOs in the Pacific Region planned outreach events. In addition to finding WAUs, such efforts provide opportunities for beneficiaries to meet their FTOs and ask questions about their trust accounts.

The staff of FTO Charles Jackson at the Warm Springs Agency in Oregon, part of the Northwest Region, came up with another proactive idea of hanging out at the post office. OK, not really hanging out but setting up a table on the day of the month that per capita checks arrive. When they find a WAU at the post office location, the person can update contact information right then and there.

To provide information about a WAU or to ask questions, call the Trust Beneficiary Call Center, toll-free, at 1-888-678-6836. TBCC operates six days a week Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to noon, Mountain Time.

BIA AND OST DEVELOP JOINT SOCIAL SERVICES TRAINING

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) recently formed a joint Social Services working group. The primary goals of this working group are to strengthen communication between the two organizations and address specific issues that will improve the efficiency of their joint management of supervised Individual Indian Money (IIM) accounts. Implementation of training for BIA social workers and OST Fiduciary Trust Officers (FTOs) was the main objective of an initial meeting between representatives from the two organizations.

Staff met in May 2008 to discuss the curriculum and training materials developed to date. Meeting participants shared and analyzed stories that reflect current operational procedures between social workers and FTOs. Of particular note was the practice of collaborating on community outreach events held throughout Indian Country. The group reconvened in June 2008 to review the training materials and launched the first formal training in July 2008.

The training focuses on defining BIA and OST roles and responsibilities as they relate to social services offered to IIM account holders. Course components include the background and history of BIA and OST relative to social service fiduciary duties to beneficiaries; the process for authorizing disbursements; applicable CFR regulations, procedures, and audits; the Trust Fund Accounting System and Stratavision reports produced by the system; the importance of IIM records; and compact/contract tribal responsibilities.



Generations Interact

Haskell Indian Nations University Plans for 125th Anniversary



1908 Bandstand, listed on the National Historic Registry, with Tommaney Hall visible behind.

Haskell Indian Nations University opened its doors in 1884 as the U.S. Indian Industrial Training School. From its origins as a boarding school, Haskell has evolved into a four-year degree granting university.

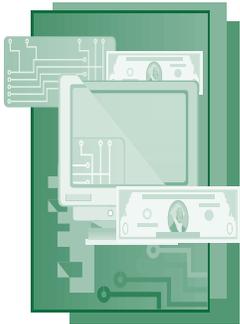
The Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) has a special relationship with Haskell. OST staff members at the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR) present guest lectures on records management course work at Haskell. Some students have the opportunity to apply their records management training as interns at AIRR.

As Haskell's 125th anniversary approaches, OST expects to support and participate in planned events. Contact Priscilla Hovland, Haskell's Director of Endowments, (785-749-8418) for information about preparations for the anniversary.

Debit Card Pilot Being Evaluated

In December 2007, the Office of the Special Trustee (OST) began a pilot program to offer the convenience and security of debit cards to Individual Indian Money (IIM) account holders. Transferring IIM funds electronically to a debit card eliminates the risks and costs associated with checks. The pilot program generated significant interest. As of July, more than 2200 beneficiaries had requested enrollment information and 742 debit cards had been issued. The program is being evaluated for improvements and will be implemented nationwide this fall.

Any IIM account holder may sign up for a debit card to receive disbursements from their IIM accounts. For additional information, contact the Trust Beneficiary Call Center (TBCC), toll free, at 1-888-678-6836, or your local OST office. The TBCC operates six days a week, Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to noon, Mountain Time.



Bar Coded Trust Records

Bar codes, those varying-width parallel black lines with numbers under them that appear on just about every item you purchase, are used to identify products. With implementation of the Secure Trust Accounting Records System (STARS), bar codes are being used by the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) to track the daily flow of documents that support trust transactions.

The accounting floor is where this all happens. Transactions, for example a probate distribution or disbursement from an account, are referred to as “records” when they are entered into STARS by the Control Room Team. Each record is bar coded. About a dozen teams (e.g., Liabilities, Collections, Probate) on the accounting room floor may act upon a record as it is processed through the system.

The three main improvements STARS provides are accountability of records, error tracking, and reconciliation. Accountability means any record can be pinpointed anywhere in the process, using its bar code.

Error tracking is significantly improved because STARS provides continuous feedback on errors. When

inconsistency is recognized by the system, it flags the record. The history of a record, where it has been and who touched it, is available through the system, which enables tracking.

Reconciliation at the end of the day compares records in the STARS control log to the transactions entered in the Trust Funds Accounting System (TFAS). Using STARS, the reconciliation process at the end of the day takes minutes rather than hours.

Since STARS is integrated into the Trust Portal intranet, STARS can be accessed by designated OST personnel. Questions that used to be directed to team members on the accounting floor can now be answered by personnel accessing STARS directly. This improves efficiency and saves time.

STARS is currently running parallel with the previous control log database system. When final testing is completed, it will move to full production!

Chickasaw, OST, BIA Offices Co-Located



Left to right: Cheri Gordon (Chickasaw Nation), Katie Case (Chickasaw Nation), Thomas John (Chickasaw Nation), Traile Glory (BIA), Jeanette Hannah (BIA), Chickasaw Nation Governor Anoatubby, Mel Burch (OST), Donna Erwin (OST), Judy Goforth Parker (Chickasaw Nation), Rita Loder (Chickasaw Nation), Patricia Appl (OST)

Members of the Chickasaw Nation are finding it easier to take care of personal and tribal business. The Chickasaw Nation dedicated its new Tribal Government Services Building in Ada, Oklahoma, on May 28, 2008. The building also houses Bureau of Indian Affairs and Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians staff.

This version of one-stop shopping is really a time saver for visitors. One half of the building is for the tribal government, the other half is for the BIA, and nestled between them is a strip of OST offices. Patricia Appl, OST's Fiduciary Trust Officer (FTO) with the Chickasaw Agency, is pleased to be in a location so accessible to Indian trust beneficiaries.

Deputy Chief Appraiser Position Filled

There's a new deputy in town, Deputy Chief Appraiser Eldred Lesansee, that is. Formerly one of the regional appraisers within the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST), Office of Appraisal Services (OAS), Lesansee has taken on this new leadership role. His position, created at the beginning of fiscal year 2008, is to provide management and oversight in support of the Fiduciary Trust Model and trust reform efforts as they apply to appraisals.



Lesansee is a member of the Pueblo of Zuni. He grew up in Zuni, New Mexico, with a love of nature and a desire to be a good steward of the environment. He started his career with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and soon became an appraiser trainee with BIA's Chief Appraiser. After several years, he moved to the Bureau of Land Management as an appraiser. In 1994, he came back to the BIA as the Albuquerque Area Chief Appraiser; the position was later renamed Regional Appraiser. In 2006 he was promoted to Regional Supervisory Appraiser.

In addition to his undergraduate degree with dual majors in real estate, and trust and real property management, Lesansee has completed real estate and appraisal courses throughout his career. He is a Certified General Appraiser and holds a Master Senior Appraiser (MSA) and a Master Farm and Land Appraiser (MFLA) designation from the National Association of Master Appraisers. Lesansee is an active member of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers.

The Deputy Chief Appraiser works with Chief Appraiser Georgia "Kay" Martin, who heads the Appraisal Services Directorate (ASD) with the Department of the Interior's National Business Center. Since Lesansee works out of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Martin from Washington, DC, he is pleased to have Internet and email connectivity to simplify their communication efforts. Lesansee says, "I appreciate the support I have received from the leadership and staff of the BIA, OST, ASD, American Indian Tribes and Native Alaskan Corporations and Consortiums, and the OAS team. I continue to find people at all levels of the Indian Affairs business processes who are committed to providing quality and timely services while maintaining ethical standards and successful personal lives."

"Can we improve our business by looking at processes that are redundant and that limit the efficiency and effectiveness of the program?" is a question Lesansee brought to his new position. He anticipates the development of a specific OAS Indian lands valuation policy manual that will become part of the Departmental Manual. He believes an appraisal trainee program that "grows" qualified people from inside the organization may help offset the number of people retiring from the appraisal field. Lesansee said, "OAS appraisers have a common goal of providing quality and timely services that meet the needs of the clients. We have a commitment to improvement and look to innovation to meet that challenge. We are professional appraisers who uphold objectivity and high ethical standards."

For additional information about OAS and appraisal services, call 505-816-1602.

Pictured top: Eldred Lesansee. Pictured bottom, left to right: Lesansee at lake in Alaska; Lesansee and Regional Appraiser Jenness Burns fly to site in Alaska; Lesansee, pilot, and Chief Appraiser Martin at appraisal site in Alaska.

