



TRUST MATTERS

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OST - College Career Fairs

The Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) will be attending college career fairs throughout the year. Follow us on Facebook to find out if we'll be at your local university soon, at <http://www.facebook.com/special-trustee/events>

Drop by and find out more about OST!

A Message From The Special Trustee

As the temperatures slowly dip and the days grow shorter, I look back on the summer and reflect on my experiences visiting our field offices as time well spent. Not only did I get the chance to meet a lot of our Fiduciary Trust Officers, but also the people who make OST run every day. Without our staff members, calls would go unanswered, assets would be neglected, and facilities would go unrepaired. I take my responsibility to every Trust Beneficiary seriously and am working diligently to assure that each OST employee across the country provides outstanding service to our customers every day. The Office of the Special Trustee has been in existence for 20 years and accomplished a lot, but I know the next 20 years hold the promise of even greater service to Indian Country from our dedicated employees.

During my time away from DC I had the opportunity to connect with tribal leaders across the country, including Geoffrey Standingbear, Principal Chief of the Osage Nation as well as Nathan Gordon, Vice Chair for the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. These leaders shared valuable insights as we worked together to formulate a vision for OST that is more aligned with the future needs of tribes. Many issues were brought up including the financial education and future of Indian Country's youth, leadership within the community, access to OST services, as well as the financial well-being of tribes through Indian Country. While OST addresses some of the issues mentioned, it has a ripple affect that touches many other aspects of life that will only improve general quality of life overall.



Left to right during the Great Lakes Agency, Ashland visit: Valerie Greene, Laurie LePlavy, Michelle Davidson, Gail Pufall, Special Trustee Logan, Michelle Basina, Jewel VonFang Taber, and Joni Gierczic

This summer also saw the first meeting of the Special Trustee's Advisory Board. Drawn from all walks of life in Indian Country, the members of the board bring years of specialized experience to the table, all with the common goal of advising the Special Trustee on how to best serve all trust beneficiaries. At the first meeting, the Board selected their leadership team, formulated goals for next year, and received top-level briefings by members of OST's senior management. The board also toured the Masthead facility and was impressed and excited to see all the work being done to serve the agency's beneficiaries.

This fall and winter will bring me to more field sites where I hope to get more input from our staff, tribal and community leaders, and most importantly, the beneficiaries.

Workplace Improvement Team Celebrates Eight Year Anniversary

By Steve Carlisle

The Workplace Improvement Team (WIT) at OST is celebrating eight years of service making OST a great place to work. Studies indicate that an engaged workforce correlates to increased productivity, higher quality work product, less absenteeism, less turnover and a greater commitment to the goals of the organization. This employee-driven team understands that great beneficiary service depends on an engaged workforce.

“Eight years ago WIT started enhancing work environments and improving resources for the field staff in serving our beneficiaries. WIT members are good listeners and excellent helpers in making our beneficiaries experience the best!” – Gayla J. Bennett, Trust Accounts Manager, Great Plains Region

“I love my job and being a part of WIT. It’s encouraging to know that you can help make a difference. WIT helps our employees to be engaged and happy, and a satisfied employee will be more motivated and productive to better serve our beneficiaries.” – Katrina Brown, Accounting Technician, Chickasaw Agency

Congratulations to the Workplace Improvement Team for eight years of outstanding service.

Contracting & Compacting Update

By Robert Becenti

The Office of External Affairs has been delegated authority to administer OST’s P.L. 93-638 program activities, and has been busy this summer reviewing a number of draft tribal agreements and funding documents for the upcoming fiscal and calendar year 2016. The office has participated in a number of negotiation meetings with tribes that contract or compact with either the Real Estate Appraisal Services program or the Beneficiary Processes Program, operated out of OST’s Field Operations. At present, these are the only two programs eligible to contract or compact, although the office will be working during FY2016 to identify other potential OST contractible or compactible programs.

Currently, thirty-six tribes contract or compact, either

the Real Estate Appraisal Services Program or the Beneficiary Processes Program. The Morongo Band of Mission Indians is the most recent tribe to compact the Appraisals program and other tribes are considering contracting or compacting the program as well.

Overseeing the number of tribal agreements in place can be time-consuming, but the work is worth it to provide tribes the necessary support in their self-determination efforts.

To learn more about OST’s effort to assist tribes in contracting and compacting, please contact Robert Becenti at Roberson_Becenti@ost.doi.gov or (505) 816-1413.

Improve Credit With On-Time Rental Payments

By Brian Ross

Home ownership has long been a part of the American Dream. But for many Americans with poor or no credit, the dream remains elusive.

Potential borrowers face a Catch-22. In order to obtain credit, you have to present a solid credit history. In order to establish a solid credit history you have to manage credit responsibly.

This reality has forced many families with little choice than to pay rent for their housing needs.

Housing typically represents the largest portion of the family budget. But renters have not traditionally received credit for paying the rent on time. One exception is where borrowers with less than stellar credit can provide potential lenders with proof of their on-time payments to help qualify for a home loan. But this often results in paying higher interest rates when such additional documentation is required in lieu of a stronger FICO score.

RentReporting.com may offer a solution. The Pasadena, CA based company is an example of rental reporting firms that work with your landlord to report the rental payment history to credit reporting agencies. On-time payments can lead to credit establishment and/or improved FICO scores. They can even reflect the prior two years of rental payments - if you choose.

RentReporting.com charges \$9.95/month for their base service. The cost is something consumers will have to weigh compared to the cost of renting or paying higher interest rates due to poor credit. Another firm offering similar services is RentalKharma.com.

Given that the greatest factor impacting your credit score is a history of on-time payments, being credited for your positive rental payment history may be worth exploring.

For more information, contact Brian Ross at Brian_Ross@ost.doi.gov

OST Receives Whistleblower Certification

By Steve Carlisle

On July 15 of this year, OST became the only agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior and one of only 30 agencies in federal government to receive certification from the Office of Special Counsel under the Whistleblower Enhancement Act. This means that all of OST's employees are fully aware of their rights to disclose a perceived violation of law without fear of reprisal, and that supervisors fully understand the laws prohibiting retaliation against whistleblowers. The goal: to quickly identify fraud, waste and abuse.

Earning this certification is an important part of OST's commitment to beneficiaries to ensure that all employees and supervisors will report violations of law without fear of retaliation. "We are justifiably



Above: This summer, Laurie Larson-Jackson visited the Special Trustee to celebrate OST receiving its certificate of compliance from the Office of Special Counsel for being one of 30 Federal agencies to comply with the legislation, as well as the first

proud of this achievement," said Special Trustee Logan. "It is at the very heart of our fiduciary trust responsibilities to identify – and eliminate – fraud, waste and abuse, and now our employees are empowered to report possible violations promptly."

Over the span of two months this past spring, every OST supervisor and manager received training conducted by Laurie Larson-Jackson, Associate Inspector General for Whistleblower Protection in DOI's Office of the Inspector General. Additionally, line employees attended workshops and a wide variety of informational materials were distributed throughout the agency. The Office of Special Counsel then certified that OST met all of the requirements under the President's mandate.

Trust Beneficiary Call Center Receives First DOI Award For Outstanding Customer Service

By Steve Carlisle

The Secretary's Customer Service Award recognizes, promotes and rewards service excellence, professionalism and outstanding Federal employees and partners that directly impact external customers. Through these awards the Department seeks to acknowledge exemplary efforts by individuals and initiatives delivering services to American citizens.

The Trust Beneficiary Call Center (TBCC) was selected to receive the first of these awards. As described in the award citation, "The TBCC provides American Indian trust beneficiaries with an easily accessible point of contact for answering questions about their trust assets and handling requests for account updates and disbursements. Over the past three years, the TBCC has responded to an average of 184,000 beneficiary contacts per year and has an overall first line resolution rate of 97%. This high rate is an important indicator of the superb quality of customer service. Established in 2004, the TBCC responded to the one millionth beneficiary call on March 12, 2012. The TBCC operates six days a week from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has operators trained in excellent customer service techniques to answer a broad spectrum of questions about trust assets as well as questions about the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations."

Social Media Update

Are you on Facebook posting pictures of your favorite cat, Mr. Lumpy? Do you tweet rhapsodic about your food truck turkey burger you had at lunch? Maybe you're more of an observer, looking to social media for the most up-to-date community, regional, and national news and information. Well, good news, the Office of the Special Trustee now has an official Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Find us here:

Website: <http://www.doi.gov/ost>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/specialtrustee>

Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/special_trustee

We'll be posting updates from the field, local event information, Indian Country news, updates on the Land Buy Back Program, information on the Special Trustee's travel to the field, and anything else that YOU want to see. So drop us a note at OST_feedback@ost.doi.gov and let us know what you'd like to see, how you think we're doing, what events you'd like to see OST attend, as well as stories of the way OST has impacted you, a friend, or a family member, and pictures of you working with OST.

We'd also like to expand our social media presence, so let us know where you are! Would you like to see us blog? Maybe Periscope our next outreach event? Social media isn't quite as productive or enjoyable if there's only one person talking, so give us feedback and talk back. Keep your eyes here for more updates and see you in the next issue of Trust Matters.



Summer & Fall Outreach Highlights

By Jackie Arviso

October 18-23, 2015 - National Congress of American Indians Annual Conference & Marketplace, San Diego, CA

OST greeted over 400 visitors at the 72nd Annual NCAI Conference & Marketplace. The visitors included Individual Indian Money (IIM) account-holders, tribal members, and the general public who inquired about the services provided by OST. Questions covered various topics, such as: Cobell Settlement payments, Whereabouts Unknown Account holders List, Land Buy Back Program (LBBP), financial education, and the Indian scholarship fund. Having OST staff and senior leadership on-site at the event was a great networking opportunity that provided visitors with direct access to staff experts who could answer their inquiries immediately. The OST booth was well represented by staff from Field Operations and the Office of External Affairs.

September 11-13, 2015 – Indian Summerfest, Milwaukee, WI

The Great Lakes Field Office and OEA attended the fest to share information about OST, the Land Buy Back Program, and all the services available to beneficiaries. Indian Summerfest was started to educate, preserve and promote American Indian cultures; showcase the diversity that exists within tribal cultures; provide economic opportunities to the people and strengthen communication and understanding. Find out more about the event by emailing indian-summer@wi.rr.com

Cobell Payments

On December 8, 2010, the President signed legislation approving the Cobell settlement. By November 6, 2012, all pending appeals ended. Plaintiffs' Claims Administrator, Garden City Group (GCG), began issuing Cobell Trust Administration Class (Stage 2) payments on September 15, 2014, following the District Court's September 11, 2014, approval of plaintiffs' Motion to begin distribution. For information about payments, contact GCG at 1-888-961-6109 or info@IndianTrust.com.

