

Community Unites to Salvage Tornado-Ravaged FSA Office

by Jim Meisenheimer, Public Affairs Specialist, Minn.

FSA employees are more used to providing disaster assistance than being on the receiving end, but some county office workers in Minnesota recently learned what it's like to experience a natural calamity first hand.

On March 29, at 6:30 p.m., a tornado packing winds of more than 206 mph ripped through rural Nicollet County. Rampaging along a path 60 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, it destroyed over \$175 million in goods and property and smashed the local FSA county office to rubble. And just for good measure, the twister also destroyed the nearby homes of County Executive Director Steve Luther and Program Assistant Peggy Lambert.



Nicollet County FSA Office tornado damage. Photo by Jim Meisenheimer.

“Curling saved our lives.”
—Steve Luther

Peggy Lambert was home with her husband Bill and their three young children when the storm hit. The family escaped injury by huddling under a heavy wooden table in the basement, but their entire house was blown away. After the tornado had gone, the only place they could find shelter from the wind and rain was the cab of a combine harvester. The family van and pickup were destroyed, trees smashed and uprooted, and the tops ripped off their full grain storage bins. Even the shed in which the combine had been parked was gone.

Steve Luther's house fared even worse: the force of the tornado collapsed his basement walls, which would have crushed anyone inside. Fortunately, Steve, his wife Pollie, and their sheepdog were in nearby Mankato sliding rocks on ice. They were curling — that quintessentially northern sport that perplexed millions during the recent Winter Olympics. Says Steve, “Curling saved our lives...we are thankful to be alive.” The only useful items the Luthers could find in the aftermath were some of their clothes. The dog was so upset it would not leave Steve's side for days after the storm.

The very next day, FSA personnel started the long, hard job of cleaning up. State Committee member Carl Johnson brought over his tractor-loader. He and Program Assistants Jean Hayer and Jan Thoele, whose homes were unscathed, salvaged the remaining files and maps. Carl and Jean crawled through the debris, found the American flag and hoisted it on a surviving tree stripped of bark a few feet from the office. They also found the office's advanced 36 computer system and printer and were later amazed to discover that they both worked!

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

FSA's Vision Statement — A Map to the Future

All of us who work for the government have seen substantial changes in the last few years. Reorganization, rightsizing, downsizing, and restructuring are now familiar terms. But along with these changes, we at FSA have a unique opportunity through the year 2002 and beyond to define and shape the ever-evolving services our farmers and ranchers need and want from us.

Towards this goal, I have developed a vision statement to guide FSA forward. This vision is based on talks I've had with customers, employees, Federal and state partner agencies, Congress, and the Administration. You might remember seeing FSA's vision statement in last month's newsletter. I want to share with all of you some thoughts on what it means to me. Again, the vision statement is:

A customer-driven model agency with a diverse and multi-talented workforce, empowered and accountable to deliver programs and services efficiently, and dedicated to promoting an economically viable and environmentally sound American agriculture.

FSA News

is published monthly in the interest of all FSA employees.

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Reporters: FSA employees.

Readers are encouraged to contribute stories, photos, and suggestions. Send materials to the Editorial Board at:

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I want to stress that it's not really the statement itself, but the concepts behind it that matter. So what does it all mean? Let's break it down:

- **A customer-driven:** FSA's focus, the bottom line in everything we do here, is always serving our primary customers, America's farmers and ranchers. The American taxpayer is also a customer. And you, the FSA employees, are my customers. We all need to strive to provide equitable, friendly, and efficient service to address our customers' changing needs.

- **model agency:** We want others to look to FSA as a prototype for how things should be done. FSA is and will be an effective, forward-looking leader.

- **with a diverse:** Our employees and customers should represent the diversity in the rich fabric of this country. We need to value and respect anyone who works in or with FSA.

- **and multi-talented workforce:** The biggest asset we have at FSA is our employees. In our constantly evolving society, we need to invest in the tools and training to ensure that we have a well-equipped workforce. And I support employee flexibility concerning job duties — the willingness to sometimes pick up work in areas not covered by our job descriptions. Increased cross-training will advance this goal.

- **empowered and accountable:** It is common to hold people accountable for actions, while forgetting to empower them. Employees at the grassroots level, where customer interaction takes place, should have decision-making flexibility without having to wait for approval from the state office or headquarters. FSA can provide a much better and more timely product this way. At the same time, employees need to take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

- **to deliver programs and services efficiently:** In this time of budget cuts, we need to be even more careful about how we use our monetary and

human resources. We are challenged to provide effective service, often with fewer resources. Towards that goal, a common computing environment and advanced technology will make our jobs easier. Also, cross-training comes into play here — when employees are trained to work across the board, they can offer more effective support to our customers and to one another.

- **and dedicated:** I am fortunate to have inherited such a dedicated group of employees. I want to sustain and advance this dedication by continuing to foster a healthy, pleasant work environment. Quality of work is attained through employee commitment. I can help by keeping all employees well informed of agency changes that affect them and promoting training and advancement opportunities.

- **to promoting an economically viable and environmentally sound American agriculture:** We must ensure the prosperity of American agriculture. Our programs help farmers and ranchers provide us with a plentiful, low-cost food supply. We need to communicate to the public the value they're getting from the agricultural system that FSA supports. Along with this, we need to continue making environmental efforts a priority. Economics and conservation efforts are not competitive issues, but mutually compatible — to have long-term viable agriculture, we must have concern for the resources.

I keep this vision in mind as I go about my daily work. I hope you will try to do the same as we utilize our long-term strategic plan. We want to continue our successful partnership with our customers in keeping America's agricultural system viable and vibrant.



COMMUNITY

continued from front page

Like all FSA field employees, Jan Thoele spends a lot of hours in the county office. "It's almost like home, and when I first arrived I wondered, what do I save first?" she says. "The destruction was unbelievable; the office was like a pile of garbage." Nobody was hurt digging through the office debris, but later on someone found a large hole in the floor that could have caused a nasty fall to the floor below.

It wasn't just FSA employees who pitched in. Many people from NRCS, RD, County Extension Service, plus state agency employees from across the area helped the beleaguered Nicollet County FSA staff put their office back together. Students and their teachers from two schools in Faribault, Minn., without being asked, came by and cleared debris from the office site once salvageable records and equipment were removed.

It didn't take long to get back to business. State Executive Director

Wally Sparby stopped by the office two days after the storm. He found six FSA county executive directors from surrounding counties and members of NRCS, Cooperative Extension Service, the Soil & Water Conservation District, and the Minnesota Soil and Water District in a cold, driving rain preparing to do a county damage assessment report.

Meanwhile, Peggy Lambert and Steve Luther and their families are rebuilding their lives. They've gotten some help from members of the Minnesota FSA, NRCS, and RD state offices, who collected \$880. Minnesota Association of State and County Office Employees members collected \$3,320, and the Iowa ASCOE also pitched in with \$80.

As for the Nicollet county office, it's sharing space with the NRCS county office and the County Extension Service, whose buildings also suffered damage. They're housed in temporary quarters at the Minnesota State Regional Hospital.



Nicollet CED Steve Luther (left) and Minn. SED Wally Sparby survey destroyed Luther home.
Photo by Jim Meisenheimer

FSA's Printing Team Serves USDA

FSA's print-on-demand service stands ready to meet USDA's nationwide printing needs.

Electronic Distribution System (EDS) consists of 34 conveniently located sites for black-and-white printing of 100-135 copies per minute. These high speed digital printers also collate and staple. The system is electronically linked for instantaneous transmission of files to the closest site.

EDS is less costly than outside commercial sources since it reduces shipping and storage costs and customers print only what they need. And with rapid turnaround, EDS means no waiting for employees with short deadlines. George Aldaya, Deputy Administrator for Management, is impressed. "EDS simplifies printing and distribution with none of the usual delays and red tape."

The EDS nationwide operators are proud of their skilled, flexible service. When the Idaho state office recently changed locations, for instance, EDS operators from neighboring states picked up the workload. Similarly, the team made sure service continued uninterrupted during operator turnover in North Dakota. "EDS team members work together as if separated only by cubicles rather than states," says Ken Rachfal, EDS's Project Manager.

FSA already uses EDS for transmission and printing of Agency directives and the FSA newsletter. And, last year EDS serviced NRCS, RD, ES, and 30 other Federal agencies with more than 20 million copies. John Williams, Director, Management Services Division, says, "Contact us for high quality, fast, economical printing, delivered anywhere in the U.S. As an added advantage, a printing job with us supports USDA."

For more information about EDS services and site locations, contact Ken Rachfal, at (202) 690-3406, or e-mail him at Ken_Rachfal@wdc.fsa.usda.gov.

Fact Finder Office Cranks Up

Since August 1997, FSA's Civil Rights and Small Business Utilization Staff (CR&SBUS) has responded to more than 120 program discrimination complaints. The staff performs an in-depth fact-finding inquiry into each case. To help eliminate a recent complaint backlog, 62 state and county employees with farm loan experience volunteered to assist with fact finding. In January 1998 the Agency established a permanent structure, the field's Program Complaint Branch, for rapid response to complaints.

The Program Complaint Branch became operational on March 16. The office, also known as the Fact Finding Office, is located in Montgomery, Ala. and reports to the Director of CR&SBUS.

The office was put together in a remarkably short time. The first candidates for fact-finding positions were interviewed, selected, moved, and on the job in Montgomery in three weeks.

Just one week later, the new employees were trained and ready to go into the field to investigate alleged discrimination cases.

The Fact Finders are deployed nationwide to research program complaint cases. The information they gather is used by the headquarters CR&SBU staff to prepare an Agency response, which is sent to the Department's Office of Civil Rights. The Civil Rights office determines whether discrimination occurred. David Winningham, Acting Director of CR&SBUS in Washington, D.C. is invested by Administrator Kelly with full authority to get farm program cases and Equal Employment Opportunity complaints resolved quickly, accurately, and fairly.

The new system replaces previous procedures under which State Civil Rights Coordinators made preliminary inquiries into discrimination complaints. Under the old system, each state office assigned an employee the position as a collateral duty. Civil

Rights Coordinators reported to their State Executive Directors, who in turn reported to CR&SBUS. Fact-finding inquiries are now completely independent of state offices, and Fact Finders work on discrimination cases full-time.

As of May 13, the office staff had received 26 cases, 23 of which had been assigned and eight completed and forwarded to headquarters CR&SBU staff to be analyzed.

Winningham says he is grateful to the many people who helped the team get on its feet in such a short time, including members of Human Resources, Management Services, and Financial Management Divisions. State offices helped by releasing some of their top performers to new jobs during busy sign-up periods, and the Alabama state office made sure the office got its desks and equipment on time.

"We're going to live up to their trust," Winningham pledges. "We're going to do everything possible to assure justice for farmers and FSA employees."

Kansas State University Awards Farm Programs Branch Chief

by Dawn R. Kral

Rebecca Davis, in Washington, D.C. headquarter's Production Emergencies and Compliance Division's Compliance Branch, was honored by her alma mater, Kansas State University (KSU). The award was for "outstanding contributions to agriculture" in her work at USDA. The ceremony was held April 24 at KSU's thirty-fifth annual agricultural banquet.

Each year, KSU honors alumni who have excelled in careers related to their academic fields. KSU students chose Davis from a list of 20 alumni submitted by agricultural economics professors. She is the first female recipient and one of the youngest in the award's history.

Agriculture has always been part of Davis' life. She grew up on a family farm near Williamsburg, Kan., driving



Rebecca Davis
Photo by Eric Parsons

a tractor and helping her father with the cattle, hogs, and soybeans. In college, Davis studied agricultural economics so as "not to get too far from farming."

After earning her bachelor's degree, Davis became an FCIC field underwriter in Topeka. She then moved on to Kansas City as an agricultural statistician, and later as a crop insurance policy writer. She received her Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter designation in 1990 and, in 1992, accepted a National Office position.

"The best part of my job is my excellent staff," Davis says. "Their professionalism reflects on the entire Division." She advises those wanting to advance in their Federal careers to "get as much training as possible and be willing to go where the jobs are."

HOLLYWOOD

Beckons!

You never know what hidden talents our employees have. Two FSA'ers, Jeff Kerby, Public Affairs Staff, and Tom Kalil, Farm Credit, worked as extras in the recently released disaster movie "Deep Impact" about a comet hitting the earth.

Jeff's daughter, Lavelle, is the one with stars in her eyes who started the whole thing. She read about a casting call and begged her dad to take her. Well, he did, and he got chosen and she didn't. There was one unhappy teenager for a while, but Jeff says she's finally forgiven him.

Tom and Jeff were hoping to be in a close-up with the stars, Vanessa Redgrave, Morgan Freeman, and Robert Duvall, but that was not to be. Jeff did get to work closely in a critical scene with Elijah Wood, and they talked about the broiling heat and humidity. Tom, however, was able to make some suggestions to director Mimi Leder, who apparently thought he worked for her on the camera crew, regarding shooting techniques and camera angles that she ultimately used, until he was shooed back into his "extra" role. Maybe a directing career is next, Tom?

The first location shoot was on July 16, 1997 in Manassas, Va. A newly completed freeway segment, not yet opened to traffic, provided the setting for a vast, chaotic scene as desperate East Coast residents flee the mile-high

tidal wave the comet's impact will produce — only to get caught in a traffic jam at the end of the world.

To film this sequence, over 2,100 extras were enlisted, along with more than 1,870 vehicles — cars, trucks, boats, and campers — spread out eight abreast, on both sides of the freeway, for over a mile and a half. The soaring July heat on the blacktop added to the discomfort, but by the second day there was definitely a



Deep Impact extras flee from pretend giant wave.

good-natured, picnic spirit. The production crews and director expressed amazement at how realistically the extras were able to simulate a traffic jam of such magnitude. Jeff and Tom, veterans of RUSH HOURS in Washington, D.C., just smiled knowingly.

Tom's wife and three daughters were in the scenes too, and Tom set up various scenarios, hoping to put all of the family in the camera's eye. He piled big toys on the top of his van to make it stand out (with his youngest daughter in the middle) and had his long-haired older daughters hang out of the van to catch the camera director's eye. It worked, and special shots were taken of his family. We'll soon see if the Kalils made it past the editor's cutting table.

The second location shoot was in Rosslyn, Va. Jeff and Tom were there as well. Jeff spent the day roasting in his car (in sauna-like temperatures) as he worked his way through a downtown traffic jam trying to flee the "doomed" city. Tom and his family were part of the crowd scene where they fought past unruly lines of panicked people seeking Red Cross supplies, and ran between cars in the street while trying to get into a fall-out shelter before the comet hits. Sadly, however, none of the Rosslyn scenes were used due to a change in script.

So when you see the movie and that big highway scene comes up, look for our two STARS!

News Radio

FSA's Public Affairs Staff now provides news stories for radio broadcast to the National Farm Broadcast Service (NFBS).

Since 1992, this service of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters has reported news and information to farmers across the U.S. using the latest satellite and computer technology. NFBS offers high quality audio distribution of interviews, packaged stories, and sound bites. The network provides simultaneous transmission to broadcasters

in a matter of minutes, so news is timely. And screen display of press releases and story scripts for broadcasters ensures accuracy.

NFBS is the largest news gathering organization in the country with nearly 200 professional farm broadcasters. Broadcasters' response to retrieving and using FSA news is excellent. Eighty percent of them access the system each day and view the FSA/NRCS page. Over seventy percent say they use the FSA information in their broadcasts.

EARTHWORM FACTS:

- A ton of earthworms supplies \$35 worth of fertility and \$4,000 worth of natural tillage.
- Tropical earthworm species can grow to six feet long, while earthworms in the U.S. can grow to about eight inches.
- Almost 800 earthworms can occupy one square yard of soil. However, most fields in the U.S. have 100 to 400 worms per square yard.

— *The Soil and Water Conservation Society*

A Green Thumbs Up for a Youth Loan Borrower

Fourteen-year-old high school freshman Holly Norman certainly has a full plate. Along with maintaining a 4.0 grade point average and keeping up with FFA, choir, band, and household chores, she also owns a business.

Holly, a Humansville, Mo. native, has always been fascinated with growing plants and flowers. She decided to take her love of gardening a giant step further with a greenhouse business. But, being underaged, she couldn't get financing from a commercial institution. Her FFA instructor, Ed Vest, remembering a discussion with FSA Polk County office staff on the rural youth loan program, suggested she contact FSA.

In November 1997, Holly, her father, and her FFA instructor met with Ron Meador, Polk County's CED, to discuss the program and its qualifications. According to program requirements, Holly wrote a narrative on her plan of operation. Meador was impressed with Holly's paper. "It was well thought out — she outlined her goals, marketing plan, and the records she intended to keep."

By December, Holly had her loan. She immediately began work on her business, naming it Little Bit of Garden.

With her family's help, Holly cleared an empty lot next to her home and built



Holly Norman at Little Bit of Garden

two greenhouses measuring 20 by 24 and 17 by 22 feet. She stocked them with a wide variety of landscaping, vegetable, bedding, and houseplants. Her greenhouses offer gardeners healthy plants at reasonable prices. "Little Bit of Garden is attractive, neat, and organized. Holly's doing a great job," says Meador.

Along the way, FSA gave Holly business advice, helped her create a record system and set up a budget, which "she really sticks to," Meador says. And Ted Rovenstine, a past FFA member, helped Holly design the greenhouses, purchase supplies, and guide her through each phase of her business. Her parents offered plenty of support and encouragement.

Holly tends to her greenhouses every day, working after school and on the weekends. And although Holly's



Little Bit of Garden

mother runs the greenhouses during school hours, Holly knows that the responsibility for her business and loan repayment is hers, not her parents. Right now, any profit she makes goes toward repaying the loan, fifty percent of which went into building the greenhouses, the remainder purchasing plants and supplies.

Meador foresees only success for Holly's business. "She's an impressive young lady. She did it all of her own initiative and manages it herself." Holly's community is proud of her too — the local Humansville newspaper even wrote an article about it, spurring great community interest. People come from miles around to support Holly and her business.

Holly is so concerned for Little Bit of Garden, she's rigged a temperature sensitive alarm system between the greenhouses and her bedroom. The alarm is set to go off by her bedside if the temperature in the greenhouses should drop too far.

THEY'RE GETTING YOUNGER EVERY DAY...



On April 23, 1998, Kansas state FSA office employees observed "Take Our Children to Work Day" by introducing their kids to the world of FSA. Marcus French (left photo), age 12, son of Jackie Graves, helped his mother in the mail room and print shop. Sharon Thoman's daughter, Ashleigh, age 11, helped the Farm Programs and Appeals Division and even taught her mom something — how to use the Internet.



February 14, 1998



Farm Service Agency's Civil Rights Policy Statement

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Farm and Foreign
Agricultural
Services

Farm Service
Agency

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW
Stop 0506
Washington, DC
20250-0506

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide assistance to every individual who requests access to all programs administered by this Agency without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation. This is policy, and it is the law.

FSA will provide all individuals equal employment opportunities without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation. This, too, is policy, and this, too, is the law.

We are charged with upholding the highest standards of professionalism, and we will. We will demonstrate our worthiness of the trust that the public has placed in each of us to carry out our duties and responsibilities. We will not tolerate discrimination in any form in the delivery of our programs or in our employment practices. We will not tolerate reprisal or retaliation of any kind against customers or employees who have sought to redress a grievance arising from a violation of their rights.

This is FSA's policy statement, not just mine. I agree with it, embrace it, and I will enforce it. My performance in civil rights is to be held to the exact same high standard as is the performance of every one of the employees of this Agency. Discrimination in employment practices and in program delivery simply will not be tolerated.

In the course of doing our business, we will reach out to all our customers, both internal and external, to serve their needs. Groups and individuals who have not participated in FSA's programs to the degree to which they are eligible will be afforded that opportunity. It is the responsibility of each of us to ensure that our actions clearly and actively demonstrate that we are each part of an organization that is inclusive—not exclusive—in the performance of our duties.

We will treat our customers and our coworkers with fairness and civility on a daily basis. There is no room in Federal service—or in any public service—for anything less than a total commitment. We will show dignity and respect to those whom we serve, along with those with whom we share our public trust, in the performance of our duties.

Each of us is ultimately responsible for our immediate adherence to this policy. Each employee at every level—from the top down—will be held personally accountable for his or her actions. Compliance with this policy is required and is a condition of employment with FSA.

Each of us—individually and collectively—can and will make a difference in how we serve our Nation, and we will treat all our customers equally, with dignity and respect.

Keith Kelly
ADMINISTRATOR

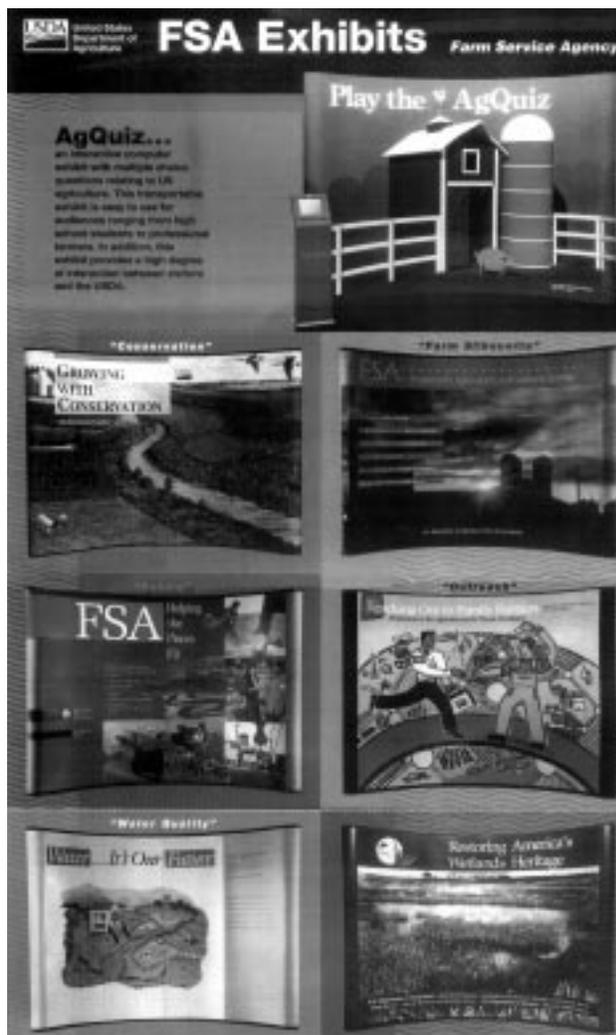
USDA is an Equal Opportunity Employer

The World of FSA Exhibits

Most everyone in FSA has seen an agency exhibit display at a county fair, exposition, or other agriculture-related event. And many of you have ordered these well-traveled displays for your specific events.

This year, FSA's Public Affairs Staff has processed 353 requests to keep those 74 exhibits we have flying around the country to be displayed at as many events as we can schedule. As you might expect, the summer is our peak time with July and August already booked. The good news is we've ordered 15 NEW exhibits (not new designs, just more of what we have), which we hope will be ready in late June, so you may be able to still get a display for your local event.

As always, orders must be at least two weeks before the event. We have several astute Communication Coordinators who have figured out the best way to order: in December or January, send in your order for the upcoming YEAR. Yes, it is more work for the CCs at the time, but it pays off when you are the first or second in line for ordering, and yes, we do go by the date the orders are received when processing requests.



Our most popular exhibit continues to be our “talking” cow on the AgQuiz. We wish we had 20 more of “Bessie,” but they’re expensive and we have only four. These can be used only for LARGE trade shows, state fairs, and conventions — you need to get your requests in extra early for the “moo” to be available in your locale.

If you don't have the 8 1/2" x 14" colored FSA Exhibits card, contact your state office.

FOOD FACT:

Onions contain a mild antibiotic that fights infections, soothes burns, tames bee stings, and relieves the itch of athlete's foot.

— American Farm Bureau

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
May 30–June 6	Russia	Vicki Hicks, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, at US/Russia meeting on Emergency Preparedness
June 6	Birmingham, Ala.	Eddie Moore, Chief, Strategic Planning, Policy & Operations Staff, to attend NASCOE Southeast Area Rally
June 10	Washington, D.C.	USDA Honor Awards Ceremony
June 17–20	Newport, R.I.	Vicki Hicks to attend Cotton Warehouse Association of America meeting
June 18–21	West Lafayette, Ind.	Robert Soukup, Director, Midwest Area, to attend IASCOE and Midwest Area Rally
June 26–28	Hot Spring, Ark.	Robert Springer, Acting Executive Director for State Operations, to address Arkansas Association of County Office Employees
June 29–July 1	Indianapolis, Ind.	Administrator Kelly to attend National Association of Credit Specialists/National Association of Support Employees Annual Convention

Note: Some events/dates are tentative and are subject to change.