

# HUMAN RESOURCES - MAY 2009 QUARTERLY REPORT

## Spotlight on “Help During Challenging Times”



Pinellas County Government and its employees under the Unified Personnel System (UPS) are facing formidable challenges: the current recession, reduced tax revenues, the effects of Amendment I and the resultant pending reductions in force. This is the third consecutive year we have faced the possibility of staff reductions and the severity and scope of this year's impact are unprecedented.

Human Resources (HR) is responding to these challenges by partnering with our Appointing Authorities in a variety of ways. One of our major responsibilities is determining which classified employees will be laid off or displaced (bumped) using the formulas approved by the Personnel Board in March and the amended BTS plan approved in April. This is a formidable task, particularly for bumping among the various departments under the County Administrator. We have pledged to generate the list of impacted individuals two weeks after we are provided the position control numbers.

We are conducting informational sessions for directors and managers who must deliver bad news and we've expanded our support teams and training curriculum for impacted employees. HR has augmented both the scope of services and online accessibility of its Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We've also developed several new communication vehicles and enhanced existing publications to better serve all our employees during this difficult period.

### Employee Support

On April 23<sup>rd</sup> we conducted our initial training for the **Human Resource Transition Teams** assembled to assist employees at risk of being laid off and displaced. The teams will build on the successful efforts of last year's teams to partner with impacted employees throughout the transition process. We are committed to train each HR team member so they are adequately prepared to assist employees in transition.

Each employee facing separation will be assigned a personal contact who will help them deal with the loss of their present job and prepare for their next position. Team members share resources, help employees apply for benefits, and encourage them to avail themselves of training opportunities. Exempt employees facing separation are assigned specially trained team members, and other volunteers are tasked with responding to questions about the bumping process. The teams will continue to serve employees throughout the transition process and 90 days after separation.

### Expanded Benefits and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Resources:

- 90 day extension of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefits. Up to six free visits for employees and also their dependents, if enrolled in the health plan, for assessment and early intervention.
- Enhanced EAP online resources through Unipsych's parent company MHNet at [www.mhneteap.com](http://www.mhneteap.com). MHNet provides legal and financial information, a MHNet Coach, Care Library and Easeline Newsletter. The Life Hub is an in-depth interactive portal of EAP topics such as Stress, Health and Fitness, Parenting, Relationships, Career Skills, Leadership, Performance and Emotional Health.
- Federal Assistance to COBRA enrollees. COBRA enrollees who lose coverage as a result of layoff pay only 35% of the total premium and the federal government pays 65%. The county will allow COBRA enrollees a Special Enrollment option to move to the lower cost health plan as a step for more affordable continuation of coverage.
- Supplemental and optional dependent life insurance with The Hartford has portability, enabling employees with this coverage to continue life insurance, within certain limits and age restrictions.
- Group and individual sessions will be offered on benefits choices and resources, including how to do online FRS retirement estimates and retirement insurance options. Participants will learn the pros and cons of taking early retirement or delaying retirement.

**Preparing for Your Next Position** training curriculum is designed to assist impacted employees' transition to their next job assignment. We offer courses ranging from customer service skills and basic typing and computer basics to Essential and Intermediate Office 2003. We also provide workshops on resume writing and interviewing skills, as well as mock interviews with professional HR representatives from private industry who have volunteered their time. The calendar of HR training courses through November, 2009 is available at [TDAdmin@pinellascounty.org](mailto:TDAdmin@pinellascounty.org). We are also promoting the **2009 schedule** of no cost entrepreneurial classes offered by Pinellas County Economic Development. Employees will be granted administrative leave to attend classes as well as to interview for new employment opportunities.

| Monday    | Tuesday                             | Wednesday                           | Thursday                   | Friday                      | Sat/Sun                     |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| August 31 | September 1<br>8:00am Essential OHS | September 2<br>8:00am Essential OHS | 3                          | 4                           | 5                           |
| 6         | 7                                   | 8                                   | 9                          | 10                          | 11<br>8:00am Treasure Walk  |
| 12        | 13                                  | 14                                  | 15<br>8:00am Inter/Adv OHS | 16<br>8:00am Inter/Adv OHS  | 17<br>8:00am Inter/Adv OHS  |
| 18        | 19                                  | 20                                  | 21                         | 22<br>8:00am Basic Office 2 | 23<br>8:00am Basic Office 2 |
| 24        | 25                                  | 26                                  | 27                         | 28                          | 29                          |
| 30        | 31<br>8:00am Essential OHS          | October 1<br>8:00am Essential OHS   | 2                          | 3                           | 4                           |

We are also committed to training management. On March 12<sup>th</sup> and April 10<sup>th</sup> we offered 4 hour sessions to the Directors under the County Administrator on **How to Deliver Bad News**. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representatives, the County Attorney, the Director of Human Rights, and HR staff provided scripts for informing laid off and bumped employees. We also provided sample letters and presented scenarios for dealing with potential reactions they may face. Directors shared their experiences of last year in notifying laid off employees and preparing staff for new employees bumped to their departments. We offered a similar program on April 23<sup>rd</sup> for a management team from Business Technology Services, and the training is available to all Appointing Authorities.

**New Communication Vehicles**

**[Help During Challenging Times](#)**, our comprehensive online resource catalog, was posted to our external and internal websites April 17, 2009. It provides a variety of benefits information, employment, stress management, financial and money management resources and links that will be extremely helpful to employees who are losing their jobs. It will also assist others who may have family members facing economic uncertainty. We expect to continually expand this website as new resources become available.

**[Ask Peggy On-line](#) – Budget Q and A** is designed to disseminate information about budget and staffing reductions in a timely manner. Employees are encouraged to direct questions to our Director, Peggy Rowe, electronically, via the Employee Communications Info Line, or via interoffice mail. Each employee receives a personal response, and questions of general interest have been published in *Ask Peggy On-line* editions of 2-2, 2-9, 2-20, 3-2, 3-20, 3-24 and 4-13. We expect to publish *Ask Peggy On-line* throughout this fiscal year as employees continue to share their questions and concerns.

***Peggy Rowe Budget and Employment Videos*** were posted on our home page on January 14 and March 11, 2009. These videos provide a way for Peggy to communicate more personally about major developments in the current staff reduction process. We anticipate future videos as the transition continues, and plan to utilize videos to disseminate information about resources and training opportunities we will make available to all affected employees.

***Ask Peggy On-line - Budget Q and A*** and ***Peggy Rowe Videos***, as well as a host of resources, are linked to the *County Administrator Update to Employees* Intranet home page icon.

Our new **Budget and Staffing** webpage archives all *Ask Peggy On-line - Budget Q and A* editions and Peggy Rowe Budget and Employment videos, Frequently Asked Questions, and a list of various resources.

### **Assistance with Budgeting Process**

Human Resources is closely involved with County Administration in formulating the budget for FY2010. Gene Pressoir, our Assistant Director, serves on the **Cost Cutting Team**. Working with directors from the County Administrator's office, the Assistant Director of BTS, and the Managing Assistant County Attorney, they have selected and pursued more than a dozen cost cutting and saving opportunities identified by employees that have the potential to reduce costs by millions of dollars each year. These ideas are currently under analysis and evaluation by county administration.

### **Publications**

**The Pen** is our 8 page employee newsletter published monthly and distributed to all employees under the UPS and retirees who request it. The monthly publication cost has been reduced from \$1,613 to \$768.50 from 2007-2009, a savings of \$844.50 per month. *The Pen* now features information on stress reduction in each issue, and we are framing our regular articles and features around the current budget environment. When we profile various departments we discuss how budget cuts have affected their operations.

Accurate information is more important than ever, so in March, 2009, we launched our "Myth Busters" dealing with common misconceptions about Personnel Rules. "Ask Peggy" provides another opportunity to answer employees' questions and reduce the general level of anxiety.

**The Pen Extra**, published monthly in an electronic format, is designed to promote a sense of community among all UPS employees. It is extremely low cost and relies heavily on employee submissions. Popular features include guest columns, wedding and birth photos, classified ads, and recognition of employee accomplishments. Employee submissions have increased in the past several months, and it appears this publication serves a genuine need for employees to be able to connect with each other.

In summary, Human Resources recognizes our number one priority is supporting the employees of the Unified Personnel System during this challenging time, and we are committed to dedicating our time and resources to this mission.