



Missouri State Employees of the Month

January 2007, State Employee of the Month

Sherry Reeves – Department of Higher Education



Governor Matt Blunt with Sherry Reeves,
January State Employee of the Month

Sherry Reeves has served as a public servant to the citizens of Missouri for more than 20 years working in two state departments and in the Missouri legislature. Her positive and proactive approach has resulted in saving the state money and improved processes.

In her position of Accountant, she most recently displayed her commitment to process improvement during the Information Technology consolidation. Ms. Reeves was determining which telecommunication lines needed to be transferred when she noticed inconsistencies with the listing of the agency's telephone and other telecommunication lines and the monthly telecom bill. By comparing office blueprints of telecommunication lines and performing reconciliation she determined the agency was being billed for 7 phone lines that did not have service. She further recommended the agency disconnect 31 lines that were either vacant or that were modem lines no longer needed and the removal of unnecessary voice mail on several other lines.

As a result of her initiative and findings Sherry was able to save the state over \$10,000 per year in telecommunication costs. This is a 15% reduction in telecommunications costs for the Department of Higher Education.

Ms. Reeves is to be commended for her dedication to conserving resources for the Department of Higher Education and the citizens of Missouri.

February 2007, State Employee of the Month

Johanna Schwieter – Department of Social Services



Governor Matt Blunt with Johanna
Schwieter, February State Employee of the
Month

Johanna Schwieter, a Social Service Worker for the Department of Social Services, works with families in the Macon, Missouri area. Last fall while on a visit to the Macon Head Start program to check on the progress of a child in her care, Ms. Schwieter received information from the teacher that the family of this child was using a kerosene heater to warm their home. Knowing that kerosene heaters can often cause problems Johanna made the decision to visit the home of this family to check on their safety. When arriving at the family home she knocked on the door several times without receiving an answer. Smelling the odor of the kerosene heater she became concerned about the absence of someone coming to open the front door and called local law enforcement, reported her concerns then continued to try to receive a response from someone in the home. When the authorities arrived they also were unable to get a response, and were preparing to force open the door when the mother of the family finally opened the door and reported feeling ill. Examination by EMT's revealed she had been unconscious for an undetermined length of time and was displaying symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning which required her to be transported to the hospital where she received treatment.

The home was filled with the fumes and, had Ms. Schwieter not followed up on the instinct to check on this family, all the members of the family may have suffered severe health issues. Since the occurrence of this incident Johanna has worked with the family to ensure that the main heating source is working properly thus eliminating the need for kerosene heat. This exceptional commitment of service to a client was performed at 4:00 pm on a Friday with the drive to LaPlata from Macon taking approximately 25 minutes. Johanna could have accepted the information from the Head Start Provider and returned to work to leave on time for the day, but by going the extra mile, literally, she may have saved the lives of this family. Johanna is a valuable asset to the Department of Social Services and the citizens of Missouri and is to be commended for her outstanding dedication to service.

March 2007, State Employee of the Month **Howard Carter – Office of Administration**



Governor Matt Blunt with Howard Carter,
March State Employee of the Month

As the Director of Data Centers, Mr. Carter is responsible for overseeing the operation of the State Data Center, e-mail servers, the mainframe environment, manages staff, sets strategic direction, and assures the availability of applications that handle critical functions. Over the last several months Howard went above the call of duty and took on a task that ultimately will save the state of Missouri tens of millions of dollars in future years. This March, a seven year agreement with a software company providing a key function for the state's mainframe was set to expire. This service is vital to operations and, in March of 2006 the State Data Center began negotiations for a new contract. A team worked with the vendor with Howard's role as an advisor, with little or no interaction with the team. In mid 2006 discussion stalled when the vendor held firm to a nearly three million dollar a year price for the services needed. The only option to signing this agreement was a costly migration from the current environment to a newer technology, with an estimated price of \$38 million over a 4 to 6 year period, or turn off the service and risk system failure, which would have been disastrous. The team's recommendation was to pursue legal action against the vendor and they abandoned the negotiation process.

It was at this point Mr. Carter stepped in; resurrected discussion and resumed negotiations with the vendor in an attempt to bring costs back down. This extra responsibility meant Howard often worked beyond normal hours and additionally spent many nights and weekends talking with the vendor's negotiators. Howard worked closely with the state's Chief Information Officer and the vendors leadership to find a mutually beneficial solution, and after a bold meeting with the state's and vendor's executives, was able to combine timing and strategic thinking to work out a multi-year deal that is nearly \$15 million less than the original proposal and about \$6 million less than the previous best offer. Not only is this a huge cost saving for the state, but it is a reduction in the current payments to the vendor. Howard's outstanding efforts to pick up when others had quit, and his tenacity in the face of adversity, make him a role model for others to exemplify. The state of Missouri and all of its citizens are well served by Mr. Carter.

April 2007, State Employee of the Month **Joseph LaBella – Department of Social Services**



Governor Matt Blunt with Joseph LaBella,
April State Employee of the Month

Joseph LaBella, an Assistant Deputy Director with the Department of Social Services Family Support Division, performs a wide variety of complex and demanding tasks. In addition to his regular duties Mr. LaBella took on the role as project leader for implementation of the Securite Card, a prepaid debit card that provides a safer, quicker, and less costly way to receive child support payments. Through the efforts of this project team and partner agencies, the state will save an estimated \$2 million dollars per year by issuing child support payments electronically. Throughout the project, Joe provided coordination between the Department of Social Services Division of Budget and Finance, Office of Administration's Information Technology and Services Division, the Department of Revenue, the Family Support Payment Center contractor, and its three sub-contractors. Not only did Mr. LaBella maintain his day-to-day job responsibilities, he was also instrumental in the development of a Request for Proposal to the issuance of over 87,000 Securite Cards nationwide.

This two-year project required a massive amount of research, planning development, testing, coordination and monitoring, and Joe oversaw each detail and continues to follow up and monitor all contacts related to the Securite Card. His tireless efforts ensured that the state's transition to electronic child support payments was smooth as possible for the public.

Joseph LaBella's commitment to quality makes him an exceptional employee and role model for others to emulate. He is an asset to the Department of Social Services and the citizens of Missouri.

May 2007, State Employee of the Month
Karon Schmidt – Department of Public Safety



Governor Matt Blunt with Karon Schmidt,
May State Employee of the Month

Karon Schmidt encounters life and death situations with elderly clients on a regular basis but seldom would expect to encounter a life threatening situation with a fellow co-worker. Ms. Schmidt was eating lunch in the facility dining room. All at the table were joking and enjoying the lunch break when one of the staff at the table began choking on a piece of meat from her lunch. The employee grabbed Karon's arm then put her hand up to her throat and she was struggling to breathe. Ms. Schmidt immediately jumped up, put her arms around the woman, and began the Heimlich maneuver. The employee collapsed against the table, was still not breathing and her face started to become blue. Karon administered two quick back thrusts, dislodging the piece of food, and the woman was again able to breathe. She thanked Karon for saving her life. Ms. Schmidt's quick thinking in an emergency undoubtedly saved the life of her fellow co-worker.

Karon is a leader for other nursing assistants in many ways, serves on the National Association of Geriatric Assistants leadership team, and routinely models professionalism to her peers. Her love of her work and compassion for all around her make her an invaluable employee and an asset to the Department of Public Safety.

June 2007, State Employee of the Month
Sgt. Brian Kempker – Department of Public Safety



Governor Matt Blunt with Sgt. Brian
Kempker, June State Employee of the Month

Earlier this year Missouri Capitol Police were contacted regarding the possibility of illegal immigrants working in state owned buildings throughout Jefferson City through the services of a contracted agent. The report was assigned to Sergeant Brian Kempker who made a thorough investigation through the Missouri Information Analysis Center. Upon confirmation that the information provided in the report was correct, Sergeant Kempker contacted the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency for their assistance in rectifying the situation quickly and effectively. Realizing he was not familiar with violations of federal law at this level, Sergeant Kempker sought out and received education from the appropriate sources which enabled him to be diligent and thorough throughout the investigation.

Confidentiality was paramount to the success of the investigation and Brian successfully coordinated the efforts of the federal agents well as Office of Administration supervisors ensuring operational integrity remained intact. On the evening of March 6th, Sergeant Kempker directed the efforts of Office of Administration personnel and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to covertly gather together 24 suspected illegal aliens into one area for an administrative arrest and transportation to naturalization hearings in Kansas City. Sergeant Kempker's ability to correctly identify the personnel to bring to the inside of the operation, and adequately educate them on the high level of sensitivity necessary, resulted in the success of the investigation. Additionally, by organizing a time when all suspected aliens could be gathered together at one time saved the state thousands of dollars in overtime money which would have been spent on numerous follow-up and suspect location investigations.

Sergeant Brian Kempker is not only a valuable asset to the Department of Public Safety, but also to the citizens of Missouri.

July 2007, State Employee of the Month
Samantha Cook – Department of Social Services



Governor Matt Blunt with Samantha Cook, July State Employee of the Month

Ms. Cook, a Medicaid Specialist, often goes above and beyond her assigned scope of responsibility. On a yearly basis Ms. Cook assumes accountability for the Health Care Procedure Coding System involving the download of over 1,200 new procedure code combinations and approximately 2,000 procedure code combination changes or deletions. This intensive download is received from Medicare at the end of October and completed with live downloads by the 1st week of January. Samantha coordinates this with Program Operations and programmers at Infocrossing to assure the process goes smoothly and accurately and continually seeks ways to improve the process for the following year.

Additionally, Ms. Cook works intently with the Transplant Program. In Fiscal Year 2006 inpatient transplant services alone totaled close to \$6 million dollars for about 65 recipients. Samantha laid the ground work for the current transplant database which manages recipient transplant tracking. Each transplant can have anywhere between 2 and 30 claims that is tracked by the database. The current manual system entails the tracking of between 25 to 175 claims per month; which must be looked at one at a time, line by line for correct payment processing. All edits the system currently performs must be done by a Transplant Unit employee, with some claims containing up to 66 lines of information to be individually priced and edited.

Although no longer directly working in the Transplant Program Unit, Samantha has continued to work closely with staff to develop an electronic system and attends meetings at Infocrossing with Clinical Services and Program Operations employees to aid in the decision making of new system updates and changes for the Transplant Project and other ongoing programs. After 20 years of the Missouri Medicaid Transplant Program functioning manually, system changes have been submitted for production which will ensure this lengthy, detailed process will become a thing of the past. Samantha's dedication to continually provide nothing less than the best makes her an employee to emulate; and the Department of Social Services and the citizens of Missouri are well served by her tenacity and professionalism.

August 2007, State Employee of the Month
Frank Cunningham – Department of Natural Resources



Governor Matt Blunt (far left) with Frank Cunningham (far right), August State Employee of the Month

Frank Cunningham, an Energy Engineer II with the Department of Natural Resources' Energy Center, strives to find solutions to find energy saving opportunities for facilities managed by the Division of State Parks. In 2006 when the new Curatorial Building at Rock Bridge Memorial State Park opened the utility bills were much higher than expected. After researching the building and its operating systems, Frank identified a problem with the heating ventilation and air conditioning system. He began extensive research on the system, lights, etc., and worked with Liebert Company to resolve the issues. His hard work resulted in attaining their agreement to properly reconfigure the units so they turn off without sacrificing the comfort of the building's occupants or visitors. Mr. Cunningham also attended numerous meetings with the Division of State Parks' Planning and Development Program Director, and Transportation executives to reach agreement of sharing the costs of implementing his suggested changes. His successful negotiations resulted in the execution of his suggestions which led to the lowering the kilowatt usage from 275 per day to 55 per day – a reduction of 80 percent and a saving of several hundred dollars per month in heating and cooling costs for the Division of State Parks.

Frank also identified energy efficiency operations that cut energy use by more than 50 percent at the Benton Home State Historic Site in Kansas City and found energy saving opportunities at Roaring River State Park and will help the Division of State Parks design new and replacement cabins at Meramec State Park. The improvements Frank helped make will continue to save the division money for many years to come and will ensure good stewardship of public monies. By improving energy efficiency, Frank has also reduced the emissions associated with powering buildings thus reducing the impact on the environment. Frank is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when an employee uses their expertise to support other divisions in their endeavors and is a valued employee of the Department of Natural Resources.

September 2007, State Employee of the Month

Helen Whitsitt – Department of Health and Senior Services



Governor Matt Blunt and Helen Whitsitt-September State Employee of the Month

In her day-to-day responsibilities as a Social Services Work II with the Department of Health and Senior Services, Helen continually strives to ensure the safety and well being of Missouri's citizens. One of her most notable interventions happened this past year. Ms. Whitsitt received numerous hotline calls regarding an elderly couple who could not protect their interests. The couple's daughter had taken them out of nursing home care with the promise to care for them at her home. In reality the daughter did not feed them properly nor provide the care and medications needed to sustain their health. Helen became involved and assisted the couple in finding the best living arrangements possible to meet their high care needs, which resulted in moving them to a residential care and nursing facility.

Unknown to Ms. Whitsitt was that while the daughter had custody of her parents she would have her parents sign their names to blank checks which she claimed were to be used to pay for the couple's monthly bills, but in reality were used to pay for her own personal expenses. This resulted in many of the checks not clearing the bank, creating a criminal record for this couple; who had no idea that their daughter was using their account for her own needs. The couple was subsequently arrested, taken to jail from the nursing home for writing numerous bad checks and they faced criminal charges in 4 different counties. It was at this point that Helen took on the monumental and time consuming task to save this couple from prosecution for crimes they did not commit and for protection from their abusive daughter. Helen gathered statements from physicians regarding the couple's lack of decision making capabilities, and contacted the Public Administrator, who was willing to file for legal guardianship/conservatory. At this juncture one very serious problem arose. The law does not allow for guardianship/conservatory proceedings to occur when there are pending criminal charges. Ms. Whitsitt contacted all prosecutors, enlisted the help of the General Counsel and the couple's court-appointed attorney. One-by-one Helen was able to get charges dropped, and guardianship and conservatorship was granted to the Public Administrator who will protect their interests, both financially and physically. This entire process took almost a year to complete and Helen did this while still maintaining her high workload, and also continued to respond to many other hotline calls and clients with emergent needs.

Helen's commitment and dedication to protect Missouri citizens who are limited in their ability to care for and defend themselves makes her an invaluable asset to the Department of Health and Senior Services and to all of the residents of Missouri.

October 2007, State Employee of the Month

Laura Hendrickson – Department of Natural Resources



Governor Matt Blunt and Laura Hendrickson, October State Employee of the Month (photo courtesy Scott Myers-DNR)

Earlier this year, Ms. Hendrickson took a day of vacation from her hectic schedule as a Natural Resource Manager with the Department of Natural Resources, State Parks to enjoy some personal time with her family. Laura, along with her children planned to attend a local movie theater but, as it was a beautiful summer day, made the decision at the last minute to go to the Pittsburg area swim beach at Pomme de Terre State Park.

Shortly after arriving at the beach Ms. Hendrickson observed a young man swimming toward the rope line in about 8 to 9 foot of water with one of his young children on his back. The child was wearing a floatation device, but the young man was not. Laura saw him begin to struggle; apparently having some difficulty in the water and immediately called for someone to call 911 as she went to his assistance. Along with another bystander, she swam toward him and convinced him to release the child, but as he did so he disappeared under the water's surface. Another individual assisted the child from the water while Ms. Hendrickson began rescue diving and after four (4) attempts located this young man on the bottom of the lake. Assisted by the other would-be-rescuer, Laura was able to get the victim back to the shoreline where CPR was immediately administered until Hickory County first responders arrived and provided oxygen. The man was transported by Life Flight to St. John's Regional Hospital and made a complete recovery.

Ms. Hendrickson's quick thinking and unselfish actions saved a life that day. Not only is Laura an invaluable asset to the Department of Natural Resources, she is also a shining example of someone we should all strive to emulate.

November 2007, State Employee of the Month Thomas DeLeon – Office of Administration



Governor Matt Blunt and Thomas DeLeon – November State Employee of the Month

Employed with the Office of Administration's Information Technology Services Division, housed within the Department of Natural Resources' Southwest Regional Office, Mr. DeLeon often goes beyond his regular job duties as a Computer Information Technologist III. Tom responds quickly to all requests for but following the devastating ice storm that swept across Missouri this past January Mr. DeLeon went above and beyond the call of duty.

At the request of the Governor's office, and in consultation with the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), special state agency Disaster Assistance and Response Teams (D.A.R.T.) were organized to assist local governments with storm response efforts. The southwestern portion of Missouri was one of the hardest hit areas of the state and the ice storm left thousands of Missouri citizens without power to heat their homes. Immediate intervention was needed Tom stepped in and, in just few hours, organized and completed the command center set-up for a D.A.R.T. at the Department of Natural Resources' Southwest Regional office.

Mr. DeLeon worked to establish emergency power via the Environmental Emergency Response truck generator which provided power for lights and communication for the team. The team comprised of individuals from the American Red Cross, SEMA, and several state agencies, quickly assumed the role of being "troubleshooters" that could be depended on to quickly deploy to an area to ascertain "on the ground" facts and resources needed.

Throughout the event Tom diligently provided IT support, ran 18 phone lines, and set up wireless computer access for incoming D.A.R.T. members. He did all this while still continuing to support the Southwest Regional Office staff with their daily computer needs.

Deployed Missouri National Guard members at the scene commented that it was unusual to have such organized and elaborate communications at this type of event, and that that they were appreciative of Mr. DeLeon's dedication and service. Thomas DeLeon is an asset to the Office of Administration and the citizens of Missouri.

December 2007, State Employee of the Month Patrolman Fred Guthrie – Department of Public Safety



Governor Matt Blunt and Patrolman Fred Guthrie – December State Employee of the Month

As a Water Patrol Officer for the Department of Public Safety's Missouri Water Patrol; Patrolman Guthrie continually remains alert for potential hazards and emergencies; enforces watercraft, motor vehicle, and criminal laws to keep Missouri waterways safe for its citizen's use and enjoyment. However last summer Patrolman Guthrie went above and beyond the call of duty when a severe thunderstorm struck Smithville Lake. The storm, containing dangerous lightning, heavy rain, and winds in excess of 60 miles per hour, caused waves up to 6 feet in height swamping and capsizing boats near the Route W Bridge.

Patrolman Guthrie received information regarding several boats in the water and started toward the area to investigate. When he rounded a bend in the Little Platte arm of the lake the full force of the wind and waves hit his patrol boat and, as his boat was not designed for such conditions, made the decision to return to his marina. A few moments later a Clay County Park Ranger radioed Patrolman Guthrie to inform him of a woman clinging to a buoy without a life preserver near the bridge; without thought for his own safety he turned back into the storm and made his way to the W Bridge.

A woman from Holt, Missouri had been thrown into the water and had drifted to a buoy where she was clinging for life. Patrolman Guthrie bravely negotiated several miles of very rough water and by the time he reached the woman she virtually had no strength remaining and needed his assistance in accessing the boat. Patrolman Guthrie made the hazardous trip back to the shore where the woman received medical assistance, then returned to the area where other boats had capsized and remained until all victims had been found.

Patrolman Guthrie's personal selfless actions of that day embody the Water Patrol's Emblem which states: ***Service, Safety, and Protection.***