

# The RUS Cultural Transformation Newsletter

Issue 10      October 2012

Cultural Transformation  
& Goings-On at the  
Rural Utilities Service



## Around RUS

**A BIG Shout-out** to all the RUS Staff that have worked tirelessly to get all the money **obligated** by the end of the **Fiscal Year!**  
**THANK YOU** for your service.

Acting Administrator John Padalino has named **Jacki Ponti** to be Acting **Chief of Staff**, taking the place of Jim Newby. She will continue to serve as Assistant Administrator for WEP.

Acting Administrator **John Padalino** spoke at **NRWA's Water Pro Conference** on **September 25**, introducing his new role at RUS.

Acting Administrator **John Padalino** spoke to **CFC** members on **September 26**, introducing himself in his new RUS role.

Acting Administrator **John Padalino** was introduced by Undersecretary **Dallas Tonsager** at an **NRECA** regional meeting on **October 3**.

### Special Emphasis Observations

**Sept: 15-Oct 15:** Hispanic Heritage

**Oct** Disability Employment Awareness

**Oct** Domestic Violence Awareness

### Notable Dates

**Oct 1:** Habitat Day

**Oct 8:** Columbus Day

**Oct 16:** Boss's Day

**Oct 31:** Halloween

## A Message from Asst. Admin Jacki Ponti-Lazaruk

Colleagues,

Over the past month, from September 15<sup>th</sup> through October 15<sup>th</sup>, the federal family has celebrated National Hispanic Heritage Month. Hispanic Americans are the fastest growing minority group in the United States. This growth is changing the face of rural America, and expanding the need for infrastructure to support the growth of rural Hispanic communities. This is nowhere more apparent than in the *colonias*, the communities along the U.S-Mexico border (in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas) that lack the basic infrastructure needed to support their livelihood and development, including safe drinking (potable) water and adequate sewage systems. Recognizing the potential human and environmental health risk associated with inadequate (and throughout the *colonias* – often nonexistent) water and waste systems, many federal agencies, including RD, have initiatives that specifically focus on development of the *colonias*.

The Water & Waste Program (the Program) provides financing to communities facing significant health risks resulting from deficient water & waste disposal infrastructure. Since 1993, the Program has recognized the prevalence of these risks in the *colonias*, and has had congressionally appropriated financing to directly target the region. Throughout this time, the Program has provided more than \$425 million in grant financing for over 500 water and wastewater projects throughout the region. The Program has continued its ongoing commitment to the Hispanic Americans living in *colonias* in FY2012, providing \$24,927,620 of grant financing for 17 projects.

Beyond these project-level achievements, the Program has also made significant progress to better serve the *colonias* region by amending the funding process to further prioritize those communities in greatest need. The new rule, which became effective on August 23, 2012, scales the assignment of priority points based on an assessment of existing infrastructure and the significance of health risk. The intent is to ensure that in these times of limited budgets, those communities experiencing the greatest threat to public health will be those that receive the financing.

I am particularly proud of my staff in their support of this rule, given that the final rule was published during my absence caring for my daughter, Abigail, who is now a happy and healthy 4 month old. Being a new mom has made me more appreciative of RUS's ability to effect change in the lives of families in rural communities where the need is great, like it is in the *colonias*. It brings to mind the Avenue B & C Colonia project in Yuma, AZ that RUS funded through the Recovery Act in 2009. The *colonia* of approximately 1,000 homes, consisting of mostly trailers and modest houses, has a core of longtime residents for whom it is not only home, but also a beloved community. Gayle Castricone, a resident who had raised her children in the community, spent several years gathering petition signatures from her

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Construction crew members work on a trench at Avenue B&C Colonia.



RD Deputy Under Secretary Judy Canales gave the keynote address to the [2012 Fiber-to-the-Home Conference and Expo](#) in Dallas, Texas on September 25th. As a USDA Official she endorsed a "Fiber-Rich Diet" and said that the Department is "all in" on the vision of a connected America.



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neighbors to try to get some help in fixing the chronic sewage problems that plagued her *colonia*. She was motivated by her desire to ensure that her grandchildren would be able to grow up in a neighborhood where a modern, public sewer system made playing in the yard safe and healthy. One mom got the ball rolling on this now completed project that will benefit the *colonia* for years to come! I am honored to continue working on behalf of families in the *colonias*, and across Rural America, without access to clean water & sanitation. It is our hope that through the continued efforts of the Water & Waste Program, in collaboration with the many other federal, state and local agencies who have recognized the need to develop this vital infrastructure, we may give each American, regardless of race, the opportunity to grow and develop in safe and healthy communities.



Larry Bagby at his home that now has a safe sanitation system thanks to the Recovery Act and USDA.

### Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month!

From September 15th–October 15th, the USDA and the entire federal family has recognized National Hispanic Heritage Month. The month celebrates the culture and traditions of those who trace their roots to Spain, Mexico and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South America and the Caribbean. This year's theme is "Embracing the Fierce Urgency of Now." Events were held throughout the entire month by agencies in the USDA. This year's kick off was hosted on September 20th and featured remarks by Ramona Romero, Ed Avalos, Catherine Woteki, RD's Judy Canales and Lisa Pino. An event was held by the Hispanic American Cultural Effort (HACE) on October 3rd, that offered free dance lessons and sampling of traditional Hispanic foods.



### Jim Newby Retires!

On Thursday, September 27th, our Chief of Staff, Jim Newby, retired. At a retirement celebration held on the 5th floor, staff from all of RUS' national office came to wish Jim Newby a happy retirement and offer a few parting words. Undersecretary Tonsager presented Jim Newby with a small plaque and a personalized letter from President Obama thanking Jim for his service. In addition, Electric Program Assistant Administrator Nivin Elghary called Jim Newby a patient and supportive mentor, and Acting Administrator Padalino spoke about Jim's leadership and the model it provided for all. Jim also shared stories from throughout his career and many others joked that he would be back.



### Adelstein Bids Emotional, Musical Goodbye

After 3 years heading up RUS and 25 total years of Federal service, RUS Administrator Jonathan Adelstein bid farewell to RUS and USDA Colleagues with a heartfelt goodbye at his party on September 18th. Sam Morgan of the Telecom Program and Senior Advisor Chris McLean helped Jonathan cap off his speech by joining him for a few last songs together. Under Secretary Tonsager, Deputy Undersecretary O'Brien, Incoming Acting Administrator Padalino, and AA Jacki Ponti all gave farewell remarks. Party photos are in: S:\RUS\SharedFiles\000Content Library\Newsletter\Oct.



### A New Approach For WEP Webinars

Ben Shuman, PE, Senior Environmental Engineer, presented a webinar for State Office Engineers and other field staff on Wednesday, September 26th on requirements related to open and free competition applicable to procurement to approximately 60 participants. There is a high level of need for training and limited funding available for face-to-face conferences, so WEP staff are being creative to find ways to attempt create a classroom style of using web-based technologies. With support from Artina Swiley in the RD Training Division, the webinar used MS LiveMeeting software; all audio transmitted using Voice Over Internet Protocol and video (such as slides and documents) transmitted using LiveMeeting. Students, gathered in conference rooms or at their desks, were able to un-mute their microphones and speak directly with Mr. Shuman, which allowed for a classroom feel, but also had the option of typing questions into the computer. Because of the support of Ms. Swiley, credit for the training will be given to participants through AgLearn in an attempt to support training needs across the program.



### Stan Krinis, Electric Program Engineer, Retires

Stamatis, known as Stan to his colleagues, retired in September after 15 years of service with RUS, 10 years with the US Army Corps of Engineers, and 2 years with the US Navy. Stan worked as an Electrical Engineer with the Northern Region Division. In addition to his responsibilities with the Northern Engineering Branch, Stan worked on the technical standards committee "A", which reviews and maintains the RUS List of materials and Equipment. His leadership, sincerity and dedication have made him an extremely valuable addition to the Electric Program; he will be greatly missed.



It's **CFC** season! From now until December 15, RUS will be asked to raise **\$35,929.52**. To get involved, volunteer as a key worker, or to make your contribution now, please contact **RUS Coordinator Nita Contreras** at [nita.contreras@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:nita.contreras@wdc.usda.gov).

