

Fall 04

# Finance Corner



SUNY  
**DOWNSTATE**  
Medical Center

## FINANCE DIVISION

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**FINANCE CORNER** is published by the FINANCE DIVISION,  
SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

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Finance Division wishes  
**David I. Robinson, Ph.D.**  
a well-deserved retirement  
and happiness in the  
years ahead.



## CUSTOMER SERVICE: an interview with Mr. Ron Brown, Director of Disbursements, Finance Division.



Mr. Ron Brown, who is in charge of the Payroll and Accounts Payable offices, is a strong advocate of providing good customer service. Lawrence Lam (L) sat down with Ron (R) for a chat on the subject.

**L:** How important it is to have good customer service?

**R:** Payroll and Accounts Payable staff not only represent their departments, they also represent our management, the hospital, the State University, etc. Be it for employees contacting us or vendors calling Downstate, ours may be the only contact with Downstate they have and they may base their opinions of the institution on the services they receive. Good customer service will have a positive effect on the way we do business with our vendors and their willingness to do business with us.

**L:** What have you done so far to improve customer service in Accounts Payable?

**R:** I have restructured the office by reassigning responsibilities and implementing cross training to the entire Accounts Payable team. Each team member will ensure that payments to his/her assigned vendors are processed on a timely basis. By understanding the full payment processing cycle and being held accountable for their actions, team members will earn their respect and take pride in their work. They are now empowered to make significant decisions related to vendor accounts and to take appropriate actions to reach resolution, when needed.

**L:** How do you motivate your staff to provide better customer service?

**R:** In addition to acknowledgement from senior staff, employees need to be able to find satisfaction within themselves for doing a good job. I take an interest in investing in each team member's professional growth, offering support and constructive criticism when needed, and expressing my belief in the unique personalities and expertise they bring. Mr. Hammond was supportive of these efforts, encouraging me to establish Lotus Notes accounts for each team member and to obtain business cards for team members to be used in their liaison with the vendors.

**L:** What kind of obstacles have you encountered so far?

**R:** Initially there was some skepticism; some people were more resistant to changes than others. But it quickly became apparent how beneficial working together was, and how far basic

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## CUSTOMER SERVICE

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courtesies and mutual respect could take us. Once they saw how providing good customer service could improve both the work environment and individual's self-respect, they rapidly became receptive and cooperative.

**L:** Are there any significant benefits to Downstate for improving customer service?

**R:** Other than creating a better image of Downstate Medical Center among the vendors doing business with us, good customer service ensures that most vendor invoices are paid within 30 days which will translate into decreased interest payments. And by maintaining a good payment relationship with the vendors, they may be more willing to work with us, providing better pricing and extending us larger amounts of credit. In the long run, these will save the institution money.

**L:** What are your next steps?

**R:** There is always room for improvement, so this process is on-going. Right now I am striving to understand the issues, concerns and expectations of our Payroll staff. I have to determine how best to restructure the Payroll process, reallocate responsibilities and put into practice some of the changes which have led Accounts Payable to some very positive results. I welcome department heads and administrators to provide feedback on their experience of the changes we have made so far, as well as to make suggestions for ways to continue to improve our services.

## A NOTE ON PROPERTY CONTROL

by MAXINE BENNETT

The Property Control Office has been quite busy in the last eleven months conducting two separate inventories. The original inventory conducted internally entailed only Research Foundation assets; it was quite a challenge for me, my assistant and the temporary staff of the Property Control Office. However, the experience was invaluable as we came across a lot of interesting research projects while we inventoried the laboratories and offices in the Basic Science Building. For example, the Neurodynamics unit of the Department of Psychiatry studied brain waves and how they were affected by alcoholism, and the many cancer and AIDS researches being conducted at Downstate. We also visited Dr. Robert Furchgott's laboratory and office and learned more about his Nobel Prize winning research.

## MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Dear Finance Staff,

*As you know, Downstate Medical Center is in the middle of a SEFA (State Employees Federated Appeal) campaign aiming to raise \$175,000 this year. I urge all of you to give from your heart.*

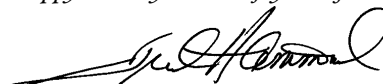
***Making your mark** this year is very important. Make your contribution to the SEFA campaign, it doesn't matter how much, just become part of a wonderful tradition of giving and sharing.*

*I know we all donate to a variety of charities, however, giving through SEFA to any of the 800 charities represented in the program makes a difference in that it allows us to do more with less. Not everyone can make a one-time \$100 donation, but most of us can pledge \$5 per paycheck for a year through direct payroll deduction. This will result in a \$130 contribution to help address many worthwhile needs!*

*As we approach the end of a year, we reflect on what we have done for our family and for our community; how have we helped to make this world a better place to live. Not too long ago four hurricanes hit the Caribbean Islands and Florida, the Red Cross and other relief organizations supplied much needed help. These charities need our support to continue their good work.*

*Downstate's SEFA campaign is a coordinated effort of employees to raise funds for the 800 charitable organizations it represents. Let us **give from our heart** to those who are less fortunate. Let us **make our mark** by giving as much as we can afford.*

*Happy holidays and enjoy a safe and healthy new year!*



Frederick J. Hammond, Jr.

With the arrival of the our new Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Mr. Frederick Hammond, funding was secured to recruit an independent inventory consulting team to conduct a complete inventory of all Downstate assets. This inventory was completed in May and we have begun the task of updating our Property Control database to more accurately reflect the assets of our facility. With this in mind, any departments that have not returned their "Unfound Asset Reports" are requested to please return them to Box 82 as soon as possible. We are continuously updating our database and welcome all the information you can provide.

The Property Control Office plans to develop a cyclical inventory system so that in a one year cycle, the entire Downstate facility is inventoried. This process requires the cooperation of every department in the institution.

# WHAT ARE WE DOING?

- State Budget** - The fiscal year (FY) 2004/05 State budget was approved by the Legislature in August, 2004, and it included \$1.9 billion for the State University, consisting of \$948 million in State taxpayer support (including a \$50 million increase, to be distributed over a three-year period) and \$1 billion in State University income. The SUNY Board of Trustees approved a tuition increase in September, 2004, for non-resident and professional students. Downstate's internal budget process is being completed and the FY 2004/05 budgets will be distributed. For your information, the Department of the Budget currently projects a \$670 million deficit in New York State in FY 2004/05, a \$5-6 billion deficit in FY 2005/06, and a \$7+ billion deficit in FY 2006/07, which Downstate needs to address.
- Central Travel Account (CTA)** - The Office of General Services and the Governor's Office of Employee Relations awarded Citibank the contract to administer the State's travel credit cards, effective September 1, 2004. The American Express BTA card program was phased out and replaced by the Citibank Central Travel Account program. The new program offers an online card management tool CitiDirect that allows round-the-clock access to account information. All State departments must use their CTA to purchase air and rail tickets through the designated travel agencies Austin Travel (800-645-7466) or Carlson Wagonlit Travel (800-666-2929). For additional information on statewide travel, please visit the Office of General Services website at <http://www.ogs.state.ny.us/travel/>.
- Physical Inventory** - Downstate recently completed an institution-wide inventory of all assets. The threshold for accounting of equipment purchased through the Research Foundation was maintained at \$5,000 but those purchased through the State was increased to \$1,500. We thank all the principal investigators, department administrators and Finance Division personnel who made this project a success. All departments are asked to work closely with the Property Control Office to maintain accurate and comprehensive property records.
- Facilities and Administration (F&A) Rates for Sponsored Programs** - The Research Foundation was able to reach an agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services on the new F&A rates through June 30, 2008. Our ability to assemble a defensible cost report contributed to this successful negotiation. The new rates are: FY 04-05 at 53%, FY 05-07 at 54% and FY 07-08 at 56%.
- Finance Division Employee Award** - The Finance Division received 7 nominees for this award and a five-member selection committee is working hard to find a winner or winners. We wish to congratulate all the nominees as they are each an exceptional employee in their own way to be nominated by their peers. It is a great honor to be nominated and we wish them good luck. Here are the nominees: Kasheen Currin (Central Receiving), Rose Marie Hinds (Contracts & Procurement Management), Chandradat Johnnie (Mail Services), Robert Losonsky (Information Services), Vijai Persaud (Research Administration), Hazel Williams (Bursar's Office) and Stephen Williams (Central Receiving). The winner(s) of the Finance Division Employee Award will be announced at the Finance Holiday Party.

**CORRECTION:** We apologize for the confusion in printing Dilip Nath's name with Dipa Nath's birthday in the Summer 04 issue of the newsletter. Dipa Nath's birthday is on August 8 while Dilip Nath's is on March 26.

(We welcome your comments and suggestions, as well as information about errors that call for correction. Please write to Finance Corner at [finance@downstate.edu](mailto:finance@downstate.edu) or call Lawrence Lam at extension 3176.)

## DEPARTMENTAL BREAKFASTS

As a means to promote staff relations, Mr. Hammond has been holding informal breakfast meetings with various Finance departments. These meetings are good communication opportunities and generate very good response. They provide a friendly venue for Finance staff to meet Mr. Hammond to talk about his vision and direction. Catherine Songster of Contracts said, "Mr. Hammond introduced himself first, sort of set the tone, and then everyone said something about himself/herself. He came across as a warm person. The breakfast was a good way to get to know one another."



PAYROLL



ACCOUNTS PAYABLE



BURSAR'S OFFICE



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT,  
AND HSCB FOUNDATION

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Congratulations to Fred Hammond** - who was elected as the Treasurer of the Board of Managers of the Flatbush YMCA.

**Congratulations to Bert Robles** - Bert joined Downstate as the Executive IT Advisor to the Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer in August and was appointed Chief Information Officer on November 1st. He is located at Room 1-30 of the Basic Science Building and can be reached at extension 2335.

**Congratulations to Ron Brown** - who has been promoted to Director of Disbursements, managing the day to day operations of the Accounts Payable and Payroll offices. He is located at ADMFAC 106 and his extension is 1990.

**MAKE THE TEAM - join the production team of this newsletter. Call Lawrence at x 3176.**

Any suggestions, ideas, requests, announcements, etc., please write to us at Box 65 or contact us by email at: [finance@downstate.edu](mailto:finance@downstate.edu)

### Birthdays:

Doris Connagan	Sept. 1	Nancy Marin	Nov. 2	Cezar Legasto	Dec. 2
Edith Johnson	Sept. 1	Palesa Reynolds	Nov. 14	Melinda Castillo	Dec. 7
Donald Minick	Sept. 2	Israel (Izzy) Chait	Nov. 19	Anthony Pagnoni	Dec. 13
Ellen Loo-Nichols	Sept. 11	Patricia Williams	Nov. 19	Jeffrey Lee	Dec. 14
Albert Resquites	Oct. 17	Zeecy Kurtz	Nov. 23	Juan Estrella	Dec. 16
Maxine Bennett	Oct. 18	Frank Luo	Nov. 25	Robert Williams	Dec. 18
Stacey Nieves	Oct. 29	Gideon Dunkley	Nov. 26	Stuart Clenman	Dec. 22
		Maria Rosa	Nov. 26	Lawrence Lam	Dec. 24
		Varghese Joseph	Nov. 30		

**Wedding anniversary:** Chandradat Johnnie Sept. 12 (31 years)      Juan Estrella Dec. 7 (11 years)  
Varghese Joseph Oct. 10 (6 years)

**Milestones:** Celebrating 10 years of service at Downstate - Melinda Castillo  
Celebrating 15 years of service at Downstate - Elizabeth George, Betty Sims  
Celebrating 20 years of service at Downstate - David Csmereka, Mercedes Strier  
Veronica DeGroot, Yvonne Shaw

(Editor's Note: This list may not be complete. We can only print what is submitted.)