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PERSI

March 2013
- Consistency in Leadership
- IT Department Profile
- IRIS Update

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THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR CONSISTENCY

If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.

-- Loa Tzu, Chinese Philosopher

To many, ending up where you are heading would be terrible. PERSI sees it differently. We know change doesn't necessarily mean better, and certainly doing the same thing over and over because "that's how it's always been done" isn't smart. We simply believe there's value in consistency and sticking to time-honored principles and commitments.

During its nearly 50-year existence, a number of things have remained consistent at PERSI, but perhaps nothing more important than the head of the Retirement Board. Five different governors over the past 25 years have trusted Jody Olson to guide PERSI so it would end up where it was heading...to being one of the most well-respected, well-funded, and well-managed retirement systems in the country.

Leaders of both political parties have continually supported Chairman Olson because he remains consistent in his focus. The Retirement Board is not political and its strategy for PERSI's success does not change with each election. Instead, it adheres to core values, focuses on solid retirement principles, and relies on sound investment policies that pay off. Consistency is something members, retirees, and employers rely on and trust.

With the full support of Governor Otter, by unanimous vote state lawmakers recently entrusted PERSI once again to Chairman Olson's stewardship. Senator Cherie Buckner-Webb introduced the reappointment motion to the Senate by talking about Chairman Olson's background (Idaho native and graduate of University of Idaho)

and professional credentials (attorney and CPA). She noted, "Mr. Olson's dedication to public service is vast and admirable." Trustee Dr. J. Kirk Sullivan shared his support by saying, "Jody is a leader of the highest caliber. He is a proven leader who strives to maximize return to participants. His goal is to, wherever possible, make our retirees whole."

Jody Olson, Chairman PERSI Retirement Board

Chairman Olson has been steadfast in his dedication to PERSI. In 2000 when the fund experienced extraordinary earnings, he supported gain sharing as a solution to the overfunding. Following the 2008 recession, he led the discussions on how to ensure the health and stability of the fund despite losses. No one has such a long and diverse history with the retirement system. Learning from the past has allowed Chairman Olson to share insights with the other trustees as they face difficult decisions. Rest assured, whether it's a disability claim, cost-of-living adjustment, or a rate increase, few decisions affecting a member's life come easy.

Having a seasoned chairman who will go on record, take a stand, or make a decision with confidence is an advantage for PERSI. Having trustees who remain consistent in their attitudes, words, and actions and who have an unflinching commitment to PERSI members and retirees is an added bonus. Over the years, consistency has repeatedly won out when weighed against any potential benefits of change; as a result, PERSI has ended up where it was heading...a solid leader among public retirement systems.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AT PERSI

IT Manager Larry Sweat

The series on how PERSI is organized continues this month with a focus on the Information Technology (IT) department led by Larry Sweat. With eight staff and several contractors, this department is responsible for PERSI's architecture, hardware, software, computer networking, and much more.

The Team

Larry joined PERSI in 2007 as a technical writer; he then served as both a project coordinator and manager before taking on the role of IT Manager two years ago. His team – with 99 years of combined service at PERSI – includes:

- IT Development Supervisor Joy Fereday
- Sr. IT Programmer Analyst Ryan Evey
- Webmaster Stacy Parr
- Sr. IT Database Analyst Nancy Fauver
- IT Network Analyst Randy Graybeal
- Sr. IT Information Systems Tech Branden Kennah
- IT Information Systems Tech Kris Colt

Also part of the IT team is technical writer Tim Wolfrum, who is responsible for maintaining an in-house resource tool called the *Online Guide* and creating and updating forms among other things. Operating 24/7, these seasoned professionals keep PERSI operations running smoothly each day.

Projects

One of the key projects undertaken by the IT department in recent years (besides IRIS) was to ensure PERSI operations would continue even if there was a catastrophic event that might prevent the staff from getting to the office. As a result, an offsite operations plan was developed and tested to ensure PERSI would have continuous operations using a site outside the downtown Boise corridor.

This team has also played an integral role in the IRIS project from the beginning. They helped develop the RFP to identify qualified contractors, and provided valuable insights leading to the hiring of the firms with the right expertise to assist PERSI in making a seamless transition from our old system to the new one. They continue to work individually and collectively with contractors to ensure the success of the IRIS system now and in the future.

The highly regarded IT staff is relied on to keep the agency's technology needs current. They do an outstanding job.

Note: Larry Sweat was recognized by PERSI as the Leader of the Year for 2012.

As reported last month, the user training was successful and the feedback from employers proved invaluable. It was especially useful for the employer volunteers to be able to log on and use their own data during the training.

The Employers Service Center staff has also completed its training. They are now ready to answer questions from employers.

As part of a phased rollout, the first group of PETRA employers will go live on the IRIS system in about 10 weeks. Employer training will continue in phases, and systematically over the next 12 months all employers will be brought on board. That will complete Phase IV of the project.

Once Phase IV is complete, Phase V – the Pension Administration System used by PERSI – will start up. Meanwhile, PERSI will continue running the old system and IRIS simultaneously.

To date, 14 million records have migrated to the IRIS system as part of the lifecycle testing. The complete transition to IRIS will take another 2-2½ years to complete.