



PERSpectives



Third Quarter 2006

Public Employee Retirement System of Idaho

PERSI WEB DOMAIN AND EMAIL ADDRESSES CHANGE

Effective October 10, 2006, the PERSI Web site domain will change to www.persi.idaho.gov. Email addresses for PERSI staff will change to firstname.lastname@persi.idaho.gov. There will be a transition period during which PERSI staff will be able to receive email using their new and old email addresses. For a time, the PERSI Web site will also be accessible using both the old and the new domain. Eventually, however, the old domain and email addresses will disappear, so it's a good idea to start using the new domain and email addresses after October 9th.

PERSI ANSWER CENTER CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY

It's hard to believe the PERSI Answer Center (PAC) has been operational for a year. It was last September when PERSI rolled out the first phase of its multi-phased reorganization project. Since then, PAC has undergone many changes. PERSI is pleased to share a few highlights with you.

The Contact Center

New and existing staff have come together as a team to provide phone support to members:

Judy Aitken: PAC Manager. Judy has 13 years with PERSI and 40 years of state service. She has extensive knowledge of Idaho Code, PERSI operations, and the pension issues important to employers, members, and retirees.

Kimberlee Hall: PAC Supervisor. Kim came to PERSI in April 2006 after spending 16 years with First Health in customer service and call center operations. She brings not only many years of experience, but also strong leadership and a good sense of humor to her role.

Denice Desilet: Formerly PERSI's receptionist, Denice's experience dealing with people, coupled with her easy-going personality and an eagerness to learn, made her a perfect fit for PAC.

Alicia Harper: Has been with PERSI nearly a year. She has more than 10 years' customer service and call center experience. Besides educating

herself on PERSI, she is working on her bachelor's degree.

Kattianna Rouse: The newest member of PAC, brings a fresh perspective and 12 years of customer service experience to her PAC role.

Gerry Sjol: As a long-time PERSI employee, Gerry is a seasoned pro when it comes to customer service. She has the patience, understanding, and knowledge to effectively handle member calls.

Preparing to Answer Questions

With the goal of having the contact center staff answer 90 percent of caller questions without transferring calls to someone else, PERSI focused on ways to turn an existing group of subject matter experts (specialists) into generalists with a wider knowledge of PERSI benefits. To assist with this effort, PERSI formed an education work team to identify needs and begin developing training modules. By setting up the PAC team for success using a comprehensive training program, PERSI expects members to get accurate and timely information from knowledgeable and courteous staff.

Before going operational, the PAC team underwent several weeks of training so they would be ready to

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Life Insurance.....2

Insights

WHAT'S YOUR POLICY? - making life insurance decisions-

Life insurance is meant to replace income that will be lost when you die. Whether you're interested in term, permanent, whole, variable, or universal life insurance, selecting a policy can be daunting. Understanding the pros and cons of each type may prove useful when you get ready to buy a policy.

Term Life is temporary insurance that provides coverage for a specified length of time and pays a death benefit only if you die during the term when the policy is in force. It does not build a cash value, and is generally offered in 5-year increments. Pros: Affordable and can usually be exchanged for a permanent life insurance policy at any time while the policy is in force. Cons: Doesn't build a cash value, must be renewed when the term ends if you want to keep the policy, and when you reach age 70, you may not be allowed to renew your policy at all. *Because term insurance can be purchased in large amounts for a relatively small initial premium, it is well suited for short-range goals such as paying off an auto loan or providing extra life insurance protection during your child-raising years.*

Permanent Life provides death protection for as long as you live and pay the premiums. It builds a cash value, which you can borrow against or withdraw. Pros: Provides coverage as long as premiums are paid, premiums are fixed and don't increase as you age, you can borrow against the policy (although not until the policy has been in force for a few years), provides favorable tax treatment, and the cash value grows on a tax-deferred basis. Cons: Premiums may be more than other options, and any unpaid loans or withdrawals will be deducted from the death benefit, which might leave you with inadequate protection. *Permanent life insurance is for those with a long-term need and who can afford to pay for permanent coverage.*

Whole Life insurance provides coverage for life as long as you pay the premiums. The cash value increases over time and can be used to accumulate wealth.

Both the premiums and death benefit are fixed. Since it builds a cash value, the death benefit also includes the balance of the policy holder's "savings" account. Pros: Fixed premiums and builds cash value. Cons: Most expensive life insurance option and you pay management fees as part of your premiums. *Whole life is like a savings plan that provides a nest egg at the end. If you don't have the discipline to save, whole insurance can help you save; however, there may be better ways to invest your money.*

Variable Life is a fixed-premium whole life insurance where the payment amounts are determined by the performance of investments selected by the policy holder, not the insurance company. Typically high fees are associated with it. When considering this type of policy, remember returns are not guaranteed and the risk rests with you, not the insurance company. If your investments perform well, your death benefit increases. Pros: Builds a cash value, investment mix can be changed, you can borrow against the cash value, premiums are fixed, and the death benefit can increase. Cons: You could lose the entire cash value depending on investment performance, premiums are generally higher than other life insurance options, and your death benefit can decrease. (Your death benefit will not fall below a certain level regardless of investment performance.) *Variable life insurance should be considered a long-term, high-priced financial commitment.*

Universal Life combines the low-cost protection of term insurance with a savings component invested in a tax-deferred account. This type of policy provides a minimal rate of return, and the cash value investments grow at a variable rate adjusted monthly. Premiums are flexible and based on interest rates; however, falling interest rates may cause premiums to increase and even cause the policy to lapse if interest can no longer pay a portion of the insurance costs. Pros: Adjustable death benefit and

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answer member questions. The training covered everything from retirement options, deaths, and disability to sick leave, separations, and divorce. Throughout the training, the goal remained the same: get the team to a point where they could answer most questions or respond to inquiries without placing a caller on hold, transferring or passing them around, or asking them to call back.

The training also included usage of PERSI's Online Guideline, a repository for the terminology, policies, practices, and procedures relating to PERSI benefits. It also includes Idaho law regulating the way the system operates. Technical writer Larry Sweat is currently modifying the guide to keep it user-friendly and up-to-date. Because the guide makes information readily available, anyone in PAC who gets stumped by a question can usually still provide an answer within a matter of seconds with just a few strokes on their computer keyboard. This handy online tool ensures PERSI provides quick, consistent, and accurate information to every caller.

“Just because callers are served so quickly, it doesn't mean the work ends there,” notes Judy. “Since there's generally research and paperwork associated with each inquiry or request, the majority of PAC's work takes place after the call ends.” During down (non-phone) time, PAC does paperwork or tries to locate current mailing information on members whose mail has been returned to PERSI.

New Phone System

Anticipating an increase in phone calls as baby boomers begin to retire, PERSI is installing a new phone system to automatically route incoming calls to all three PERSI offices (Boise, Pocatello, and Coeur d'Alene). The routing will be seamless to callers. Besides the PAC staff in Boise, Lynne Yowell will be answering caller questions out of the Pocatello office and Kathi Kaufman will be taking on the task in Coeur d'Alene. Both have been with PERSI for several years and, as members of the PAC team, they have completed the same training as their Boise counterparts. “Employers should know anyone in PAC can assist their employees,” explains Kim. “Members don't need to talk to the same person every time to get the right answer,” adds Judy.

Tracking Trends

Since its inception, PAC has taken approximately 43,000 calls – an average of 825 calls per week. PERSI tracks the incoming calls and uses monthly statistics to measure its effectiveness. At a glance, Kim can see how many calls were received, how many were answered, how many were abandoned, the percent of abandoned calls, and the overall level of service. This data is then used to track trends. For example, May 2006 had the highest number of calls, while January 2006 had the lowest. Based on this type of information, PERSI is in a better position to plan phone coverage and gauge its staffing needs.

Retirement Specialists

The PAC also includes Retirement Specialists in Boise (Catherine Atchison, Lisa Conn, Melody Hodges), Pocatello (Roger Bartlett, Lisa Mabe), and Coeur d'Alene (Kari Caven). These folks meet with members to discuss specific retirement issues and to help complete the paperwork necessary to ensure a smooth transition from work to retirement.

This summer, PERSI realized the Retirement Specialists were an untapped resource. So in June, these experts began splitting their time between member appointments and PERSI's member education program. With their extensive knowledge, it made sense to have the Retirement Specialists more involved with the retirement workshops. To help them succeed as educators, they all recently participated in a 2-day Train the Trainer workshop to hone their training skills.

As PAC enters its second year of operation, Kim is optimistic about the direction the team is going. “Everyone is not only rising to the challenges put in front of them by PERSI, but they've also repeatedly shown they are not afraid to step out of their comfort zone to take on new responsibilities. I'm proud to work with this caliber of people,” she says. Judy adds, “Kim has been a wonderful addition to PERSI, and has played a big part in PAC's success.”

The PERSI Answer Center can be reached Monday - Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (MST) by calling (208) 334-3365 in the Boise area, or toll-free 1-800-451-8228 from other parts of the state.

RETIREE
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decide how much to pay into the savings component, builds cash value, leverages rising interest rates, and costs less than many other insurance options. Cons: You might pay into the policy for years before any cash value is realized and your premiums will rise when and if interest rates fall. *Universal life may be a good option for you if you want control over the savings and insurance components.*

Variable Universal Life combines features of variable and universal life insurance. After your initial premium, you decide when and how much more to pay into the savings component of the policy and you can adjust the death benefit. You can choose from a variety of investment options. Pros: Builds cash value, adjustable death benefit, and you choose investments based on your comfort with risk. Cons: No guarantee of cash value, increased risk when choosing investments, and you could lose your entire cash value if your investment mix performs poorly. *Variable Universal Life may be good for you if you need a flexible life insurance policy.*

No matter which type of insurance you choose, it pays to do some research and compare prices before signing on the dotted line.

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