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Cyd V. Grimes, C.P.M.
Purchasing Agent

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Pct. 2 Commissioner Karen Sonleitner
Pct. 3 Commissioner Gerald Daugherty
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Travis County Purchasing Quarterly

In the Spotlight
Patricia Estrada

By Jerome T. Guerrero

There are two families in Patricia's life - her husband and two children; and her Purchasing Office family.

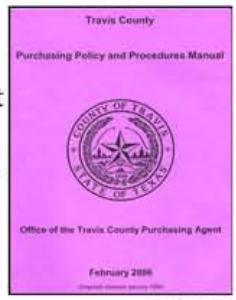
This young mother and wife is a very devoted family woman. In our interview, her commitment to both families became apparent. At the office, you are never excluded, you are always accepted.

At home, she spends time with her two children, Erik, 10, and Brittany, 8. She checks in with their schoolwork, teachers and after school activities. I can tell she is lovingly concerned for the care of her family. Erik spends time with his father, Gabriel, producing music with the computer. Patricia joined ***Girlstart*** with Brittany to encourage her in math and science. "I want my children to have an opportunity to do the best they can."

She gives a lot of herself to her children and the office but what about her future goals? "When the kids get older, I want to continue my education. I see myself growing with Travis County." As the lead Purchasing Clerk, she assists the purchasers with the same concern and care she does with her first family.

Updated Manuals Receive Approval

By Jerome T. Guerrero



"It's been ten years since I sat before this Commissioners Court ...when the old policies and procedures were approved..." stated Cyd V. Grimes, C.P.M. when she appeared before a court work session on February 16, 2006, to discuss the new and improved Purchasing Policies and Procedures Manual. On February 28, the court unanimously approved that updated manual, along with the updated Fixed Assets Policies and Procedures Manual.

One of the major changes of the newly approved Purchasing Manual is the authority given to the Purchasing Agent to approve state contract and cooperative agreement purchases over $25,000, and contract modifications less than $50,000, provided funding has been approved. This allow the Purchasing Office to process purchases under these criteria much quicker, and in the end it will save the Commissioners Court, the Purchasing Office, the end-users and ultimately, the taxpayers both time and money.

Both the Purchasing and Fixed Assets manuals were updated to reflect the current law. Additionally, notable changes to the Fixed Asset Policies and Procedures manual are the Declaration of Representative form and H-T-E Fixed Asset instructions.

Visit the Purchasing Office intranet site to view the manuals or call the office at 854-9700 to learn more.

(See related articles pages 3 - 4.)

Purchasing Liaison Spotlight

Brunilda "Bruni" Cruz

By Jerome T. Guerrero

"Personal growth...professional growth." These seem like buzz words but for Brunilda "Bruni" Cruz, Financial Analyst, TNR (Transportation & Natural Resources) , these are not buzz words but actions that changed her life. Bruni is a bright, energetic young woman with five years at Travis County.

Persuaded by her older brother, Rafael Cruz, former engineer for Travis County, she left her native land of Puerto Rico (U.S. Commonwealth), to work for Travis County. It was a hard move for her because she had spent her childhood and adulthood years in Puerto Rico. "I knew that if I was to grow both personally and professionally, I needed to move," she said.

She stays in contact with her family and younger brother, Francisco in Puerto Rico. She travels often to visit family.

She earned her Bachalors in Marketing from the University of Puerto Rico. She spent five years working for the *Lotería Tradicional de Puerto Rico* (lottery system) as an accountant. Currently, she is working on her masters in accounting.

When we discuss her Financial Analyst work, she is very serious and thoughtful. You can see the cogs and wheels turning in her head. Travis County is lucky to have this bright and intelligent woman. "I love to work here. Everyone has supported me growing. They have been so nice to me." She still misses her native land and family but she is growing.

"The place you were born should always be in your heart."

Who Should Write the "Specs"?

By Beau Grant, CPPO

This may come as a surprise to some managers, internal customers, and procurement personnel, but procurement should not be writing specifications! It is the requestor's job to write the specification. It is procurement's job to perform a value analysis of the specification to ensure that it is clear and complete. A value analysis is the best way to fulfill the requestor's "need" (versus "want") and ensure that the specification allows for competition.

Some examples of actual specifications submitted are: "Snow Fence"; "Purchase one each John Deere Hydro Seeder Model #888"; "Dead Animal Collection Services"; and "Dive Boat"!

A procurement officer would have to possess psychic powers to determine the missing elements of the request. Psychic powers are not in any procurement position description I've ever seen!

Simply put, procurement folks are not qualified to write specifications. And yet, they keep trying to do the requestor's job and get frustrated and blamed because it took too long or the wrong product or service was acquired. Does this ring a bell with anyone?

Only the requestor can provide the necessary information for a good specification. The problem is they generally don't know what that is or how to write it in the form of a specification.

When I was a chief procurement officer, my contract officers were constantly complaining about having to request additional information on about 70 percent of the specifications received. When I spoke with the requestors, they said they knew what they wanted and needed but could never put it into a specification that satisfied the contract officers.

As a result, I developed a specification writing class called "I Want a Car that Floats and Flies." The class taught the users how to write a functional specification. The contract officers also attended. I asked them all to write a specification for a car that floats and flies, which resulted in a barrage of the following questions: Who is requesting it? What will it be used for? How fast must it go? How far? How many passengers? When? Where? How will it be built, paid for, delivered, maintained, operated, etc.?

That exercise demonstrated the fundamental questions that need to be answered in a functional specification that enables both the user and the contract officer to better understand each other and mutually evaluate the specification. The user was much more comfortable writing the specification and the contract officer was better able to conduct the value analysis of the specification more quickly.

There was more to the class than that, but we were all talking the same language for the first time and knew what was needed for a good specification. By the end of the class users were writing meaningful, functional specs that made sense and could be processed by procurement. Processing times were significantly reduced, and the requestor was getting what they needed.

Is it something you could use?

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Beau Grant, CPPO, is a Master Instructor for the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP) and President of Beau-Geste Enterprises. Readers can reach Grant by e-mail at: Grantbge@aol.com.

Travis County Wins 4th Award for HUB Program

By Sylvia Lopez

The United States House of Representatives, Office of Congressman Chet Edwards 17th Congressional District of Texas, has honored Travis County with the "Certificate of Recognition Corporate Supplier Diversity Award 2006" for their Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Program, which celebrated a ten-year anniversary in 2004. Travis County was the first Texas County to officially adopt a HUB Program.

Cyd V. Grimes, C.P.M., Travis County Purchasing Agent and Sylvia Lopez, HUB Program Coordinator accepted the award on behalf of the County. It was one of several presented annually at the Central Texas Procurement Conference in Waco, Texas. The County was recognized for demonstrating leadership in expanding new business opportunities to small and minority-owned businesses.

Purchasing Office Updates Intranet site

By Jerome T. Guerrero

The Purchasing Office is in the process of updating its intranet site. Available only to Travis County employees, the site is a wealth of information about the Purchasing Office. Please visit http://tcnet/iPurch/ to see the updated site and find a variety of useful information.

In addition to the updated Purchasing Policy and Procedures Manual and the updated Fixed Assets Policies and Procedures Manual, you can find information and documentation about many other things, including some of our commonly used forms and information about Fixed Assets procedures. A Purchasing Quarterly archive features all issues back to 2001. The useful links pages features links to the cooperative purchasing opportunities available to the county, plus other usefull links. County employees will soon be able to click on the e-Assets link to update, verify and transfer county assets, and transfer and swap inventory using e-Surplus. (see related article on page 4)

Purchasing Office

Development on the site is a 'work in progress' as new features and services become available and are added. Some features to look for in the near future are "Meet the Purchasing Staff", HUB info, H-T-E help and an awards page.

Please check back often for the newest developments. Help will be a click away.

eAssets Update

By Jerome T. Guerrero

One of the responsibilities for the Purchasing Office is the tracking, storing and inventory of Travis County assets. "Assets are every employee's responsibility," said Ron Dube, Fixed Asset Manager.

With over 4,000 employees and tens of thousands of assets, tracking the computers, office furniture, vehicles and all the other assets necessary to run the County is an almost overwhelming task. In order to make this job more manageable, the Purchasing Office is working with ITS to develop a system to help track all county assets. Each employee will be able to log on to the e-Assets system to "claim" their assets. The system is extremely user friendly. Benefits of the system include greater accountability for County property, better assessment of replacement property during budget time, and increased reporting capabilities.

Training for fixed assets liaisons will begin in April, just in time for the Fixed Assets inventory in May.

Visit the Purchasing Office intranet site or call the office at 854-9700 for more information.

Quote of the Day

"Life loves to be taken by the lapel and told, 'I'm with you kid. Let's go.' "

- Maya Angelou (1928 -)

Special Events Calendar

"Annual HUB Vendor Fair"
April 26, 2006
9:00 AM- 4:00 PM
Frank Erwin Center –
UT Austin Campus
Austin, TX
Contact
Annette Smith
asmith@austin.utexas.edu

Travis County "Bond Kick-Off" Event
May 10, 2006
5:45 PM - 7:30 PM
Tentative location
County Commissioners Court
314 W. 11th Street
Austin, TX
Contact
Sylvia Lopez
(512) 854-4561
sylvia.lopez@co.travis.tx.us

LCRA Vendor Open House
May 11, 2006
3505 Montopolis Blvd.
Austin, TX
Register on-line at www.lcra.org
Contact
Al Beavers
(512) 473-3278
e-mail: al.beavers@lcra.org

Health & Human Services HUB Vendor Fair 2006
June 28, 2006
Brown Heatly Bldg.
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, TX
CONTACT
Larry Nunn
(512) 424-6896
e-mail: larry.nunn@hhsc.state.tx.us

e-Bid System Update

The Purchasing Office is close to total utilization of e-bid (rfpdepot). All construction and professional services bids are now listed on rfpdepot.com. All vendors are being instructed to register with rfpdepot.com.

One vendor, H.M.T. Services Corp. was recently awarded a bid through e-bid. Mr. M. Hilal, owner, said, "I was surfing the web, when I got a pop-up to visit rfpdepot.com." It was his first time to do business with Travis County. "It was very automated...It has made life real easy."

The savings in time and money continue to add up for the purchasing office. For the second quarter, $53,443 was saved in budgeted amount versus actual dollars spent.

Q & A

Q: What is the biggest change in the purchasing manual?

A: The biggest change is that state contract or cooperative agreement purchases no longer need court approval. The Purchasing Agent has the authority now to sign all these purchases, even those over $25,000. Another change is that the Purchasing Agent now has the authority to sign contract modifications up to $50,000.

Q: How will I know which purchases/contracts will be affected by the changes?

A: All state contract purchases (state term contracts, DIR purchases, TXMAS, State catalog purchases), all cooperative purchasing agreement purchases (H-GAC, BuyBoard, US Communities, Texas Cooperative Purchasing Network), and contract modifications under $50,000 fall under these new procedures.

Q: Will my responsibilities as a purchasing liaison change? How?

A: The only thing you should be aware of is that for any kind of state contract or cooperative agreement purchase, you should indicate on the requisition that it is one of those purchases. This will key the auditor's office to release your requisitions to Purchasing so they can be processed. Your other responsibilities don't change at all. You still need to provide the same documentation to the Purchasing Office as you would have before. We'll just be able to turn around your requests much faster.

Q: Will there be someone in purchasing to help me with the changes?

A: We're all here to help you. Please call anytime you need help. You can reach the Purchasing Office at 854-9700.

State Travel Management Program Available to County Employees

Employees traveling on County business requiring overnight stays can take advantage of discounted hotel rates by using the State Travel Management Program Hotel Contracts. Some hotels also extend the government employee discounted rate for personal travel. Instructions and participating hotel list can be found at the following link.

http://www.tbpc.state.tx.us/travel/hotelintro.html

Enterprise Rent A Car offers the state rate for both business and personal use for county employees. Please visit the County intranet for rates and rules for travel.

Contact Regan Morton with Enterprise Rent-A-Car at 912-0332, ext. 223, 4210 South Congress Ave.

NOTEWORTHY...

Welcome

Diana Gonzalez joined us on Feb. 13, 2006 as a Purchasing Agent Assist. IV. She brings 12 years of state experience and a very strong Construction and Professional Services background.

Welcome and Good Luck!

Congratulations

To Lolly Jones and Lori Clyde for career ladder upgrades to Purchasing Agent Assistant IV. Lolly is the county's Insurance Procurement Specialist. Lori is the IT Procurement Specialist. Also, Jason Walker was promoted to Purchasing Agent IV, Construction Procurement. Jorge Talavera joins the Professional Services contracts area from the commodities area.

Great job!

eSurplus Coming Soon

The Purchasing Office is working with ITS to implement an automated Surplus Recycling tool. This new software tool is in the development phase. This procedure will allow the entire County to view the best surplus items available at the warehouse, and will provide visibility for those items needed by departments.

The user will click a link to browse the eSurplus site. From there the process will allow the user to "reserve" an item of interest, and allow time for the user to go to the warehouse to make sure the item is acceptable. If the user decides to take the item, a work order ticket will be generated to have the item moved.

Until this software is completed, please feel free to contact the Warehouse Manager, Dan Rollie, at 854-6459 to inquire about currently available surplus items.

Travis County
Purchasing Quarterly
Special Information

Supplement to the Spring 2006 Issue

Unsolicited and unwanted e-mail (aka SPAM)

By Shannon Clyde

The ITS Department offers GroupWise, our electronic mail service, to nearly all Travis County employees and organizations. Each user receives 106 e-mail messages per week on average from the Internet.

During the week of March 15th, we saw over 425,000 electronic mail messages arrive from the Internet. Nearly 293,000 were unsolicited/unwanted mail messages (SPAM). That is a 69% SPAM rate. When you consider that another 1,500 mail messages contained infected attachments, only about 30% of our inbound electronic mail from the Internet is legitimate.

What is the ITS Department doing to reduce the amount of SPAM you receive? The ITS Department has deployed an anti-spam tool at the Internet gateway, where our email messages enter our network. This tool goes by the colorful name, SPAM ASSASSIN, and it is stopping thousands and thousands of SPAM email messages everyday. SPAM ASSASSIN scans all inbound electronic mail messages and attachments to look for infections, SPAM, and unallowed attachment types. During the week of March 15th, SPAM ASSASSIN stopped an average of 74 SPAM mail messages from reaching each user's electronic mailbox.

Why do we still get SPAM? As we determine better ways to stop this type of electronic mail messaging, the senders of SPAM determine ways to get around our methods. It's like SPY VS SPY in Mad Magazine. One minute we are ahead of them, the next they are ahead of us. The result is a fluctuating, small percentage of SPAM that makes it past our SPAM ASSASSIN.

Don't reply to SPAM or follow links. Removal requests rarely work. Do not attempt to reply to a SPAM message and never follow links within these messages. This tells the sender that their unsolicited mass-marketing mail message was received. In most cases, this leads to increasingly more SPAM as your e-mail address is sold to other mass-market mailers. In some cases, you could end up downloading malicious software onto your computer without realizing it which could result in the loss of passwords, financial information, and identity theft.

Legitimate mass marketers who follow federal laws will remove you from their marketing list. Unfortunately it's hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys. The majority of mass mailings are not from legitimate companies. The Information Security Officer recommends never replying to mass-marketing electronic mail of any kind.

We continually monitor new tools that help prevent delivery of unsolicited mail messages as they come on to the market. Most are using the same underlying technology that we are using.

Play it safe. Delete all unwanted/unsolicited electronic mail messages immediately without opening them.

For more information on Information Security efforts at Travis County, please visit the ITS Department Information Security Web site on TCNET:
http://tcnet/depts/its/security/default.htm

SPAM - 5 Simple Things To Know:

- The "from" address is usually fake or someone else's address, not the real sender.
- The subject line and "from" address usually give you a clue that the message is SPAM
- Do not open SPAM, just delete it.
- If you do open it, do not click any links or open any attachments.
- Never reply to SPAM

Strength

When all things change from what we know
And the luster of gold has lost its glow
Off in the distance that could be a light
Or only our imagination belying our fright
For in the darkness that covers us all
We lose ourselves and become enthralled
To ways and days that at best gives bloom
Of thinking thoughts about doom and gloom
But in the recess of our being a spark is bright
The fire that burns forever and gives us the might
To face the challenges no matter their shape
For we know down deep we have what it takes.

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