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NADE

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DISABILITY
EXAMINERS

NADE Members Risk Life and Limb for Mother Nature



From left: Leann Amstutz, unknown Americorps volunteer, Laura Christiansen, Mark O'Neill, Michael Magill, Stacey Shankland and James Shuck.

Written by Michael Magill, Washington DDS

OlyWADE put together a team to participate in United Way's "Day of Caring" project. A group of intrepid volunteers helped their community by working at a nature preserve on their own time to help remove invasive plants. This will provide better habitat for animals and promote native vegetation on reclaimed land. This was not easy, and it involved a lot of hard work from this group, but in the end, the blackberry bushes did not stand a chance! It was quite a Herculean effort, but

OlyWADErs were up to the challenge and did a phenomenal job!



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A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PRESIDENT



President Sharon Summers

Greetings, Colleagues and Friends!

As we embark upon the fall season and the holiday celebrations, let me wish everyone a happy and peaceful New Year. As you can see in this edition, our chapters have been busy with activities, whether charitable, celebratory, or otherwise. I have always said, "Active chapters beget active members, and active members beget active chapters." It is great to have goals and to achieve them! Membership is growing each month.

NADE made comment on the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. We were able to get a letter in to the Senate just before voting took place. While we may be disappointed that the anticipated disability reforms have been tabled, the good news is we do have a 2 year budget. I have reached out to Erick Williamson, NCDDD President. We each expressed a willingness to work toward a shared purpose in the upcoming year.

NADE is proud to inform everyone there will be a new, dynamic website coming in the next month or so. It is currently being tested and our data base is being uploaded as I write this article. We are taking extra precaution to protect the privacy of our NADE membership. The website will be attractive, user-friendly and resourceful. It will feature a "members only" access that will allow our members to view resource materials for the purposes of conducting proper meetings, view information such as Robert's Rules of Order, view Power Points and many other resources. It will allow membership automation. This means you may manage your membership online. We are working with a private contractor to make sure all the features implemented will move NADE forward in our endeavors in the years to come. The good news is this website will be managed by a "volunteer" webmaster, Jake Schwartz from the Montana chapter. Jake has extensive IT training and we are happy he is willing to serve. There are other volunteers in line for training as a succession planning strategy. This will be a cost effective measure and we will see the savings as the years progress. NADE has a wealth of talent in our chapters and among our retirees. We are trying to take advantage of this talent whenever possible and practice good stewardship. We hope you will watch for the launch and give us feedback.

The Mid-Year Board Meeting in Baltimore will be February 25, 26 and 27, 2016. We plan to invite several SSA leaders to our meeting in order to keep abreast of the ever changing horizon. The NADE Board will conduct extensive business matters in these few days. The executive leadership of NADE will be meeting with congressional leaders in March. Tonya Scott, NADE President-Elect and Jennifer Nottingham, NADE Legislative Director will accompany me on these visits. We always look forward to the possibility of visiting SSA's Acting Commissioner, the Honorable Carolyn Colvin. We will also visit other related agencies and stakeholders as time permits.

Our message will depend on you, our members. What will be your message to these key people? If there were something you could say to them, what would it be? Tell the NADE leadership your concerns. You may find our emails on the current NADE website at www.nade.org/Board. The NADE Board addresses these concerns at the Mid-Year Board Meeting and develops the top 10 Talking Points to take to the visits. Let us hear from YOU!

NADE's Letter to Senators Wyden, Hatch, Enzi and Sanders

Senate Finance Committee SD-221 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510

The National Association of Disability Examiners (NADE) would like to comment on the budget bill currently pending before the U.S. Senate. NADE is a professional association whose purpose is to promote the art and science of disability evaluation. The majority of our members work in the state Disability Determination Service (DDS) agencies where 15,000+ employees adjudicate claims for Social Security and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability benefits. As such, our members constitute the "front lines" of disability evaluation. Our membership also includes many SSA Central and Regional Office personnel, attorneys, physicians, non-attorney claimant representatives, and claimant advocates. The diversity of our membership, combined with our extensive program knowledge and "hands on" experience, enables NADE to offer a perspective on disability issues that is unique and which reflects a programmatic realism.

NADE is concerned that there will be a significant impact upon the ability to adjudicate claims with the elimination of the Single Decision Maker (SDM). Of utmost concern would be the loss of the Disability Examiner Authority, which is used to expedite decisions for our Quick Disability Determinations and Compassionate Allowance cases, which expedites terminally ill cancer claims and other devastating illness. We take pride in our ability to provide quick determinations on these claims to be able to get benefits to those that are clearly disabled and most in need. The loss of the Disability Examiner Authority will result in longer processing time for these critical need cases.

Nationwide there is a shortage of medical consultants in the Disability Determination Services. Efforts have been made to recruit new medical consultants but we still have backlogs and delays waiting for medical or psychological reviews consultants. The loss of the SDM will only exacerbate this condition. While some cases are very complex and necessitate the review of a physician or psychologist, some claims are simple and can be completed by a well-trained SDM examiner. With the elimination of the SDM administrative costs will increase on all cases. There will also be delays in processing time for all types of decisions.

NADE appreciates the security in having a two-year budget bill. This will allow for more effective planning. NADE has always supported the expansion of the Cooperative Disability Investigation Unit to every state. We see it as a critical step in program integrity.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Summers

NADE President

November, 2015

Overpayments: Recovery and Prevention

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In a recent <u>audit report</u>, OIG estimated that over 10 years, SSA paid 4 million people about \$16.8 billion more than they were supposed to receive. To make these estimates, auditors reviewed about 1,500 in-pay Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) cases from 2003.

The overpayment totals are one thing, but what causes those payment errors?

OVERPAYMENT CAUSES

Social Security overpayments occur for a number of reasons, as the audit listed:



Photo: Shutterstock

1. Work Activity or Change in Income

Payment errors related to work activity or income changes can happen a number of ways: beneficiaries don't report these changes to SSA when they're required to, SSA doesn't schedule work activity reviews with beneficiaries as it's encouraged to do, or beneficiaries actively conceal the information from SSA (this is fraud, by the way). You can read more about these types of overpayments here.

2. Medical Improvement

When SSA finds beneficiaries medically improve, the agency terminates benefits. Beneficiaries, however, can appeal the termination decision and request that benefits continue during the appeals process—if the termination decision is upheld, payments made during the appeals process are "overpayments," but they're considered *unavoidable* because law requires SSA to make payments during the appeal.

3. Multiple-Reason Combined Overpayment

This one, actually, is self-explanatory.

4. Imprisonment or Fugitive Status

The Social Security Act prohibits payments to people in prison or fugitive felons actively fleeing law enforcement. The Inspector General <u>recently discussed with Congress</u> our and SSA's efforts to prevent payments to prisoners and fugitive felons.

5. Payment Issues after Death

We've long encouraged SSA to maintain accurate death records to terminate payments to deceased beneficiaries, limit overpayments, and prevent deceased payee fraud. You might remember the Inspector General discussed this issue with <u>"60 Minutes" and Congress</u> earlier this year.

OVERPAYMENTS (cont.)

RECOVERING AND PREVENTING OVERPAYMENTS

OIG estimated SSA had **recovered** \$8.1 billion of the \$16.8 billion in overpayments, meaning people repaid the money to SSA. It can take SSA years to recover an overpayment (beneficiaries can dispute overpayments, overpayments can be reconsidered, beneficiaries can pursue a payment plan or a settlement, etc.)

Overpayment notices aren't hard and fast, however. SSA also waived or cancelled \$2.4 billion of the overpayments identified in the audit. SSA can waive an overpayment collection if the beneficiary isn't at fault and meets other criteria.

SSA is also taking steps to **avoid** overpayments. For example:

- Proposing computer data matches so it can receive wage information on beneficiaries and ensure correct benefit amounts;
- Using third-party databases to verify beneficiaries' property and resources (which can affect payment amounts); and
- Prioritizing regular reviews to make sure people are still eligible for payments, according to SSA rules.

For perspective, last year SSA paid \$141 billion to 11 million DI beneficiaries, and \$51 billion to 8 million SSI recipients. Still, OIG and SSA take payment accuracy seriously, so it's worthwhile to review this information, to identify overpayments, and to alert the Agency and Social Security stakeholders about these issues.

For more information, visit: http://oig.ssa.gov/newsroom/blog/july9-top-5-reasons-for-overpayments

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CADE SERVES UP FUN AT FALL FESTIVAL



Submitted by Frances Buena

Colorado's Association for Disability Examiners (CADE) hosted an Italian-themed Fall Festival in October, including catering from an Italian restaurant and assortment of games. One game included a contest building a Leaning Tower of Piza with dry spaghetti noodles and marshmallows. Another game involved racing Italian Hot Wheels cars by pushing them on a track with dry spaghetti noodles. Participants formed teams and dressed in themes. One team (pictured below) dressed as Italian chefs.

Estella Fitzpatrick brings a little culture to the Fall Festival

CADE also arranged a scavenger hunt through people's cubicles, searching for items like key chains or a gavel. The winning team got a gift certificate to a restaurant for a luncheon.

Dalene Apodaca, Ella Fitzpatrick, Katie Gibbs, Jenny St. Onge, Erin Power and Cindy Peters organized the event, and enlisted management to serve the catered lunch to all DDS staff. Everyone had a fabulous time!



From left: Kristi Olson, Crystal Barella, Roberta Aikens, Diana Thompson, Trista Meininger from Unit 22 called themselves, the Pi22a Crew. Photos by Wendy Petersen

FALL PHOTOS FROM AROUND THE NATION



OREGON DDS: From left, Gwen Ayers, Dawn Coulter, Erin Donnithorne, Destiny Stom, Vicki Kellner, Sue Shroy and Jesse Ceja. Oregon hosted a costume contest to benefit The Center for Hope and Safety, a women's shelter, in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. First place prize: an OrADE membership. Second Place: \$25 gift card. Third Place: \$10 gift card.



SOUTH DAKOTA DDS: From left: Patti Vandenburg, Crystal Bach, and Karen Goodge

OLYWADE ENLISTS FAMILY TO HELP KIDS IN NEED

By Korin Gary

OlyWADE's volunteerism is featured on our front page, but their generosity and community spirit goes even farther!

Members enlisted their spouses and children to help with FORKids, a program that delivers nutritious food to children who qualify for free breakfast and lunch in the public schools, who don't have access to those meals on the weekends, and when school is out for a holiday.

"The community donates food, Thurston County Food Bank provides grocery bags, and we fill the bags with foods that meet a required ratio: two proteins, a fruit, two grains, etc.," says Michael Magill, a Disability Hearing Officer. "This week, our group went down to the local food bank and packed about 500 food bags to be delivered to local elementary schools to kids in need. We



From the bottom clockwise: Tyler Magill , Landon Nakamura , Crystal Magill, Christie Hoffmeister, Susan Connors, James Shuck, and Stacey Shankland

even got our kids involved in the bag packing! We participate in this once a month as an office, and have a great time helping out kids in our community."

The FORKids program delivers more than two thousand grocery bags per week, and OlyWADE has adopted seven schools. Members deliver the bags on their lunch breaks or after work. Sometimes, they send the bags to school with their kids, to benefit their classmates who qualify.

Bringing family members and friends into your chapter's community service projects is a great way to bridge home and work, and bring people together. NADE is proud of all of our chapters' service to their communities.

NORFOLK VADE HELPS LOCAL SCHOOLS



By Sabrina Winslow

Norview Middle School, a Title I school near our building, had instituted a dress code this year. Students were required to wear a certain color by grade level: white, blue or yellow. Norfolk VADE started a drive in September to collect polo shirts for kids who couldn't afford them (pictured left and right). The staff was very generous. They donated binders, packs of paper, pens, pencils, highlighters, backpacks and other supplies.

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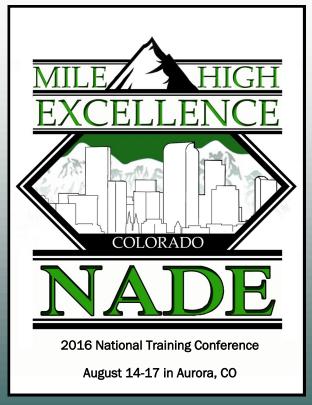
Holiday Celebration Ideas for the Office

Source: www.yourERC.com
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Winter brings a lot of things we find hard to embrace: snow, cold weather, taking 10 minutes to bundle up for the cold, and more snow. But with all of the hassles of winter, it also brings along something we can embrace: the holidays! The holidays are a great way to bring your office together and celebrate through gifts, contests, food and decorations. Here is a list of ideas for your holiday office celebrations.

- Decorate cubicles or office door and hold a contest
- Host an office potluck
- Play holiday office bingo
- · Host a hot chocolate bar with different toppings
- Host a bake-off
- Rent a photo booth
- Get involved with Toys for Tots or Trees for Troops
- Host an ugly sweater day
- Show a holiday movie at the office, make popcorn and hot chocolate
- Put marshmallows in a large jar and have a contest to guess how many are in there
- Decorate office windows with spray snow and invite people to write messages to each other in it
- For the new year, create a time capsule

This article was originally published in the ERC HR Insights Blog. ERC is a leading provider of employee training and HR services.



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Getting to Know You: Jake Schwartz, NADE Webmaster

How long have you been with the DDS? How long have you been a NADE member? I've been with the DDS for about a year, and actually just heard about NADE. The idea of being a webmaster was thrilling to me, so I jumped at the opportunity and signed up.

What's your title at DDS? What do you like best about your job? I'm a Computer Support Specialist. I love the flexibility and versatility of the position. I'm never stuck doing one thing endlessly, I'm constantly learning new things about the computer technology field. It's wonderful, and I've never been happier at a job.

What's your experience with websites? I've been developing websites and programming since my teen years (I'm in my mid-twenties now). I'm currently developing a website for a video game/novel I'm producing.



Do you have any pets? I'm a total cat lover. Just a few weeks ago, I learned that I've developed an intense allergy to them. I haven't owned any pets of the feline variety for a while, so this came as a pretty big disappointment; looks like I'll be turning to Benadryl to combat this harsh reality.

Any hobbies? I'm an avid video gamer, writer, and programmer. As I mentioned above, I'm working on a video game and novel coupling, and I plan to release them in tandem with my website. The game will initially start out as a mobile device game (iOS + Android), but I hope to move to other platforms like the PlayStation Vita and Nintendo 3DS.

Favorite color/favorite food/zodiac sign? Blue/brownies/Libra (I'm very balanced)

Ever met anyone famous? My father's a Steadicam operator in the motion picture industry, so I met quite a few stars in my childhood: Ben Stiller, Tom Cruise, Tobey Maguire, Paul Rudd, Michael Caine, etc.

Are you a native of Montana? I was born in Vancouver, Washington. I spent my childhood there, and then moved briefly to Coquitlam, British Columbia before settling in Helena, Montana.

Ever worked for another DDS? This has been my first opportunity to work at a DDS, but I'm loving every moment of it.

Fraudbusters: Transgender Woman Stole Benefits Under Her Former SSN

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July 20, 2015

A Portland woman who stole nearly \$250,000 in Social Security benefits escaped a prison sentence Monday, based partly on what a federal judge called her long and trying experience as a young adult.

Richelle Dee McDonald, born male in 1945, was taken in off the meaner streets of San Francisco by a drag queen, worked as a prostitute, was disabled when hit by a city bus, and later underwent a sex-change operation.

Records filed in Portland's U.S. District Court describe McDonald's long-term fleecing of the Social Security Administration:

At age 15, she obtained a Social Security number under her birth name, Richard Duncan McDonald. But in late 1972, she applied for another SSN – this time as Richelle Dee McDonald – declaring she had never received one of the federal IDs.

McDonald applied for Supplemental Security Income in 1974 under her male name, staking claim to federal disability payments because of injuries suffered in a motor vehicle accident.

But by 1976, McDonald was earning income as Richelle. She underwent sex-change surgery in August 1981 and worked in Oregon as a janitor for Kaiser Permanente from 1986 to 2010.

Meanwhile, she received monthly checks and electronic deposits into a Bank of America account in California as Richard McDonald, where she maintained a driver's license in that name.

McDonald's lies to Social Security helped to funnel \$248,968.76 into her bank accounts over a 32-year stretch, according to court records. But her perfidy was undone after she applied for Richelle McDonald's retirement benefits.

Social Security officials, attempting to verify her identity, discovered similarities between Richard and Richelle McDonald (although Richelle listed herself precisely four years younger) and referred the case to Social Security's Office of the Inspector General.

The chief investigator in the case, Special Agent Shane R. Winder, served McDonald with a criminal summons in May 2014, after she was indicted for Social Security fraud, theft of government funds and wire fraud.

"You stole a quarter of a million dollars that didn't belong to you," U.S. District Judge Marco A. Hernandez declared Monday morning during McDonald's sentencing. He asked if she had anything to say for herself before he passed down her sentence.

"I'm just sorry I did what I did," she said.

Hernandez sentenced McDonald, who is 70, to eight months of home detention and three years' probation, the punishment agreed upon as part of a plea negotiation between her court-appointed defense lawyer, C. Renée Manes, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Helen L. Cooper.

McDonald, who previously signed over \$30,000 to the government, was ordered to pay back all the money she stole. Social Security is expected to withhold McDonald's retirement benefits to apply to her restitution.

Cooper said it would take about 20 years for Social Security to recoup its losses.

-- Bryan Denson

Social Security Disability Representation ~ Medicare Advisor



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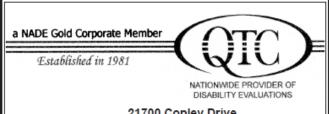
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