



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!



LOSFA LOOP

December 2009 Edition

Volume 2-12

From the Desk of the Executive Director

Realizing that this is the last issue of the LOSFA LOOP for the 2009 calendar year, I can't help but to be somewhat reflective. This time last year I was thanking my entire staff on their team effort in re-designing our agency's website. I was happy about the contemporary new look, the RSS Feed capability and short videos on the site. I had no idea that in less than a year's time we would expand our use of technology as an outreach mechanism to include a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and our latest effort, the use of web widgets (Page 9). We're going to continuously seek innovative avenues to reach our students in order to truly be Louisiana's First Choice for College Access. Speaking of reaching our students, I want to personally thank every counselor who attended one of our Professional Counselor Workshops and applaud the efforts of our Public Information and Communications Division for once again coordinating and conducting a successful and informative workshop series (Page 4).

This time last year I was also wishing the entire state of Louisiana a happy holiday season, while at the same time cautioning everybody about the perils of allowing the challenging economic times to dampen their holiday spirit. Although a year later the state of Louisiana is still within the midst of a challenging economic climate, I am pleased to report that, during the month of October, LOSFA's Default Prevention Section helped to make this holiday season a little brighter for over 4,200 borrowers by helping them keep their loans out of default. Those averted defaults accounted for over \$47,000,000 in loan balances! In keeping with the spirit of helping to ease the financial burden for Louisiana residents, we will

once again have our office set up to receive payments from START account owners who wish to meet the December 31st deadline to reduce their tax liability for 2009 (Page 3).

Because of components like the aforementioned tax benefits, as well as earning enhancements and various investment options, the START Saving Program has always been a shining star within the state of Louisiana. It has been ranked as high as number one among 529 plans in the entire country and consistently ranks in the top ten. As the administrators of a top ten program, we take great honor in congratulating another top ten from the great state of Louisiana, Dr. Scott Cowen, President of Tulane University in New Orleans. In the November 11th issue of Time Magazine Dr. Cowen was recognized as one of the top ten university presidents in the entire country. In the article Dr. Cowen was quoted as saying "One of the critical decisions we made was to integrate public service into the university's core curriculum so that every student would engage in public service for all four years". As the agency that administers financial aid programs for many of those students we feel that

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LOSFA Outreach

LOSFA's Public Information and Communications Division representative Jerri Mack (center right) stands with Huntington High School counselors Clementine Ware-Johnson (left) and Debra Walter (far right) at a presentation on October 14.



Mark your calendars!

⇒LOSFA's annual Call-In Night has been scheduled for February 1, 2010. Call-In Night allows those students and parents who cannot contact LOSFA during normal work hours to speak to our financial aid representatives after hours.

Watch for additional information on Call-In Night in upcoming LOSFA LOOP editions.

⇒The deadline for START Saving Account deposits

for the 2009 tax year is Dec. 31. Deposits made into START accounts after that date will be applied to the 2010 tax year and may not be counted toward the \$2400 (single filer) or \$4800 (married couple filing jointly) tax exemption on 2009 state income tax.

⇒Student Transcript System training is scheduled for January 5 - 8, 2010 at the Computer Training Center at Louisiana Technology Park, Baton Rouge.



LOSFA would like to wish all our friends and readers a joyful, peaceful holiday season. May your holiday season be filled with good memories, good food and good cheer.



Reduce your state tax liability for the 2009 calendar year

Deposits credited during the 2009 calendar year can reduce a START account owner's state tax liability for that year. Deposits received, (not postmarked) by the close of business (4:00 p.m. CST) on Thursday, December 31, 2009, will be credited in 2009.

Up to \$2,400 in deposits per beneficiary made during 2009 (\$4,800 per beneficiary if the owner files a joint tax return) can be deducted from income reported on the owner's 2009 Louisiana Income Tax Return. All deposits received in 2009 are also eligible for Earning Enhancements, which will be credited to accounts effective December 31, 2009. Out-of-state account owners should send a copy of his/her 2008 federal income tax return to the START Saving Program, Post Office Box 91271, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9271.

Deposits should be payable to the START Saving Program and may be delivered one of three ways:

1. Regular mail addressed to START Saving Program, Post Office Box 91271, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9271. Please allow mail time since deposits must be received and not simply postmarked.
2. Overnight delivery addressed to 1885 Wooddale Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806.
3. In person delivery at the LOSFA Office 3rd floor, 1885 Wooddale Boulevard, Baton Rouge.

LOSFA will be set up to receive in-person START deposits in Room 322 on the third floor of the Wooddale Tower Building (1885 Wooddale Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806) from 8:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Monday, December 28 through Thursday, December 31.

On or before the third week of January, 2010, START account owners will be mailed a notification of total deposits made in 2009 to be used for state income tax return filing purposes.

Should you have any questions or need assistance, please call us at 1-800-259-5626 x1012 or e-mail us at START@startsaving.la.gov.

LSU-A Financial Aid Workshop a success

LOSFA held the Fall 2009 Financial Aid Workshop on Wednesday, November 4, 2009 at LSU-Alexandria. Attendees received information on federal student aid legislation and regulatory processes, FAFSA enhancements, professional judgement and the life cycle of a Stafford loan.

Lissa Powell, Regional Training Executive with Sallie Mae Services, provided the latest information from the U.S. Department of Education. Powell also provided guidance to attendees on how to use the section on the life cycle of a Stafford loan, as a training tool for new aid officers.

After an excellent jambalaya lunch, the day ended with LOSFA's School and Lender Services (SLS) section providing information on TOPS, Go Grant, Early Start and new outreach activities.

Schools that were unable to attend may receive workshop manuals by contacting their SLS representative.

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our mission to promote and provide college access is synonymous with public service. For this reason we applaud Dr. Cowen and share his commitment to public service as well as his belief that this commitment must be fostered among the future leaders of this state.

-- Melanie

Professional School Counselor Workshops 2009

LOSFA's annual Professional School Counselor Workshops wrapped up last month, with a total of 820 school counselors attending.

Counselors from 395 high schools and 64 middle schools were updated on the most current TOPS and financial aid information available.

"We were thrilled by the turnout of counselors at all of our workshops, even with severe weather threatening at some sites", said LOSFA's Public Information and Communications Director Gus Wales. "We always enjoy the opportunity to meet face to face with the counselors we work so closely with throughout the year," he continued. "We were especially pleased with the representation of middle school counselors as this was only the second year we have included them," Wales concluded.

The following four pages include photographs taken at the workshop held on November 9th at Southern University.



LOSFA's Public Information and Communications representative Scott Burke gave a Financial Literacy for You presentation.



Southern University's Associate Director/Senior Recruiter for the Office of Admissions and Recruitment Robert Rene, Assistant to the Southern Chancellor Michelle Hill, LOSFA Assistant Executive Director for Marketing and Outreach David Roberts, LOSFA's Scholarship and Grants Director Deborah Paul and LOSFA's Public Information and Communications Director Gus Wales attended the Baton Rouge workshop which was held at Southern University.



LOSFA staffers in attendance at the Baton Rouge workshop were: (back row, left to right) Scott Burke, Erica Hughes, Deborah Paul, Justin Marshall, Suzan Manuel, Jerri Mack, Jerry Oubre and Gus Wales, (front row, left to right) Andrea Early, Susan Bohall, Caleshia Clark, Deputy Executive Director Sujuan Boutte, Michelle Darling, Mona Kraushaar and David Roberts.



Public Information and Communications (PIC) representatives who coordinated and conducted the entire Professional Workshop Series include (back row, left to right) Scott Burke, Suzan Manuel, Justin Marshall, Jerri Mack and PIC Director Gus Wales, (front row, left to right) PIC Supervisor Michelle Darling and Mona Kraushaar. PIC staff not pictured: Jessica Warner, Kate Herke, Kendra Woods, Nicole Southern, Rhonda Bridevaux and PIC Supervisor Kristen O'Neil.)





College Goal Sunday

MMM... A Money Sundae?

Louisiana College Goal SundaySM is an event that will help you melt away the tedious process of filling out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) in order to obtain financial aid. Free on-site assistance from area college financial aid professionals will be provided.

For more information, including what you need to bring, visit us at our website.
www.osfa.la.gov and click on College Goal Sunday

Louisiana College Goal SundaySM Locations 2010 February 21st, 2010 2 - 4 P.M.

- Alexandria**
Louisiana State University - Alexandria
- Baton Rouge**
Baton Rouge Community College
Southern University
- Bossier City**
Bossier Parish Community College
- Grambling**
Grambling State University
- Hammond**
Southeastern Louisiana University

- Houma**
Fletcher Community and Technical College
- Lafayette**
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
- Lake Charles**
SOWELA Community and Technical College
- Monroe**
Louisiana Delta Community College
- Natchitoches**
Northwestern State University

- New Orleans**
Delgado Community College - West Bank Campus
Dillard University
Southern University - New Orleans
- Ruston**
Louisiana Technical College
- Sorrento**
River Parishes Community College
- St. James**
St. James High School

Check our website for additional site locations and specific room locations at each site.

The College Goal Sunday program was created by the Indiana Student Financial Aid Association with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc, and with supplemental support from Lumina Foundation for Education.

Louisiana College Goal SundaySM is sponsored by the Louisiana Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (LASFAA) and the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) with funding from a Lumina Foundation for Education grant.

New technology offers new areas for outreach

Students, school staffers and parents looking for new ways to keep up with LOSFA now have some new avenues for information. LOSFA now has a presence on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

The decision to attempt a foray into social media came after repeated requests from students who spend a great deal of time on the sites.

“The use of these social sites gives us another avenue to communicate with students,” David Roberts, LOSFA’s Assistant Executive Director of Marketing and Outreach, said. “We’re not using them in lieu of traditional means of communication, but they can expedite the dissemination of general information.”

Twitter, a site that allows its users to post statements 140-words at a time, had a following of 6 million registered users as of April 2009. Estimates project that that number will double by the end of the year, and increase another 50 percent in 2010 for a total of 18 million users. That sounds like a lot, but Facebook has 200 million registered users. (Statistics via Mashable.com, a social media research site.) According to YouTube’s Official Blog, the site has recently passed the 1 billion views a day mark.

Clearly, this is a market worth exploring.

By jumping into the social media marketplace, LOSFA hopes to “Increase our access to our students and parents,” Roberts said. “By establishing and maintaining a presence in areas that students already are interacting with one another, we hope to exponentially increase awareness of LOSFA’s college access initiatives including financial aid programs and outreach activities.”



Follow us on Twitter™ to discover more about LOSFA:
<http://twitter.com/LOSFA>



View LOSFA’s Channel on YouTube™ user-generated content website:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/LOSFA1000>



Find “LOSFA” on Facebook



Members of LOSFA’s Advisory Committee (left) met on Nov. 20th, to discuss Early Start grade reporting, TOPS Tech payments to Proprietary and Cosmetology schools, the GO Grant Allocation Review and the results of a school survey on LOSFA services. The committee also discussed private loans and recieved an update on federal plans to transition to direct loans.

WEB WIDGETS ARE HERE!

Looking for a way to increase awareness about LOSFA and our programs for your school or association? Grab one of our free web widgets for your Web site!

What is a widget? It is a small program that you can easily put on your website, blog, or personalized Start page. The rotating images within the widget serve as links to the corresponding information on LOSFA's website. Since LOSFA maintains these web widgets they will not use any of the bandwidth from your Web site and there is nothing that needs to be installed or downloaded to your site.

Right now LOSFA has Four Web Widgets: Who is LOSFA?, Upcoming Events, In the News and Bulletins.

To use one of our Web Widgets on your page, simply copy the supplied code next to the widget you want and paste into your page.

Copying the code is simple. Highlight the code with your mouse and either choose edit-copy from your browser menu, or hold down the control key on your keyboard and type the letter 'C'. Pasting the code is a little more difficult because you need to know where to go to paste it. You should search through your host sites help documents and frequently asked questions for information on where to go to install a widget. Once you know where to paste it, the hard part is over. Simply follow the instructions, and then choose edit-paste from your browser menu to paste the code. Alternatively, you can hold down the control key on your keyboard and type the letter 'V'.

The most important thing to do is to not let the code intimidate you. Once you have gone through the process once, it is really quite simple to add more web widgets to your site.

Links to LOSFA widgets can be found at <http://www.osfa.state.la.us/widgets/widgetIndex.htm>



For more information, contact the
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance:

By Phone: 800-259-5626, Ext. 1012

By E-mail: custserv@osfa.la.gov

By Mail: P.O. Box 91202, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9202

Web Address: www.osfa.la.gov

For submissions, opinions or comments for LOSFA Loop, please contact
David Roberts at droberts@osfa.la.gov.