



# LOSFA LOOP

February 2010 Edition

Volume 3-2

## **From the Desk of the Executive Director**

February is Financial Aid Awareness Month. Despite the fact that it is always Financial Aid Awareness month at LOSFA, we still acknowledge the month as such and take advantage of every opportunity to increase awareness of financial aid programs. That is why we're launching the month with our ninth annual "Call-In Night" on Monday, February 1st from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Our Public Information and Communications staff is normally available to answer telephone calls from the public Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, but for one night every year we extend those hours to accommodate those who may be unable to call during normal business hours. Our staff will be available to answer questions about TOPS, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the Go Grant and other aid programs and general financial aid inquiries.

Another important component of Financial Aid Awareness Month is our annual College Goal Sunday Event. So much time and energy goes into planning this event at 17 different sites throughout the state that it's hard to believe that the date is almost here.

When you factor in Mardi Gras and the New Orleans Saints in the Super Bowl, February 2010 is shaping up to be a very exciting month for Louisianans. Unfortunately, all of the excitement is not good news. Pending budget cuts that have adversely affected all of higher education have also affected the GO Grant funding for this year. (Page 3)

It is becoming quite customary that I acknowledge the commitment of my staff in every issue of the LOSFA LOOP and this issue is no exception. I want to acknowledge two examples of that commitment. The first deals with our commitment to customer service which you can read about on page 5. The second deals with our commitment to humanity overall. After the recent tragic events in Haiti several staff expressed an interest in doing something agency wide to assist with the Haitian relief effort. With just a two day campaign, we were able to raise over \$800 and make a donation to the American Red Cross. This only reflected a portion of their efforts as several other staff members donated directly via text messaging and on-line payments. I have also been informed that there is even more to come. It is this type of commitment that continues to allow LOSFA to be Louisiana's First Choice for College Access.

-- Melanie

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## LOSFA Outreach

LOSFA Public Information and Communications Supervisor Michelle Darling conducts Student Transcript System (STS) training for professional school counselors from across the state at the Louisiana Technology Center in Baton Rouge. The sessions provided updated information about the STS system to enable counselors to better serve their students.



## February is Financial Aid Awareness Month

### February 1 -- Call-In Night

LOSFA will be open extended hours, 6 - 9 p.m.  
Call: (800) 259-5626, ext. 1012 or 922-1012

### February 21 -- College Goal Sunday

2- 4 p.m., at 17 sites across the state (listing on Page 4)

### February 23 -- Eunice High School Financial Aid Night

6 p.m., Eunice High School, Eunice

What is Financial Aid?

6 p.m., Grant High School, Dry Prong

### February 24 -- College Knowledge and FLY (Financial Literacy for You)

6 p.m., St. Martinville Senior High, St. Martinville

Northwest High School Financial Aid Night

6 p.m., Opelousas

### February 25 -- St. Tammany Parish College/Career Quest Fair

6 p.m., Slidell City Auditorium, Slidell



## State budget cuts trim GO Grant appropriation

Pending final approval by Gov. Bobby Jindal, this year's funding for the GO Grant program will be cut by \$7,796,892.

The cut is the result of budget reductions ordered by the governor to reduce the state's projected budget deficit. LOSFA's share of the reductions is \$7.8 million and cutting the GO Grant was the "least onerous cut we could make" Executive Director Melanie Amrhein said.

The agency's administrative costs paid through the state general funds are far less than could be absorbed in a cut this size, Amrhein said. There has been discussion about possible cuts to the TOPS program and, because of statutory language, a request has been sent to the state Attorney General's office asking for clarification on the issue.

Cutting the GO Grant funding at this point will not affect any students currently receiving the grant, Amrhein said. Recent changes in the grant's funding

formula will allow LOSFA to fund all students currently benefiting from the GO Grant at their present level, even after absorbing the budget reduction, through the end of this school year. Schools will be notified after the March 24th billing deadline about re-allocating any surplus funds where needed.

The next few months will determine funding levels for the upcoming academic year.

Dr. Michael Gargano, Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission member (representing the LSU Board of Supervisors), was not pleased that the state's need-based financial aid program was cut, instead of TOPS, which is merit based.

"TOPS is a great program," he said, "but we need something equally as great in need-based aid that is statutorily protected."

The Go Grant program is not statutorily protected. It may be cut or eliminated by the legislature any year.

## TOPS Tech a success at eligible Proprietary and Cosmetology schools

Thanks to changes initiated last year, TOPS Tech students wishing to pursue a degree at eligible cosmetology and proprietary schools are now able to do so and take full advantage of their award.

Beginning in September 2009, 56 new learning institutions began accepting TOPS payments. So far, LOSFA has processed two rounds of billing for the new institutions, with the third round scheduled for March 1. Students wishing to take advantage of their TOPS Tech award at a cosmetology or proprietary school need to be enrolled before that date.

Pricilla Marcel, owner of Omega Institute of Cosmetology in Houma, said "Word is getting around."

"We do question the students who are inquiring about school now and the May graduates [about their TOPS status]. High schools are letting the students know" that the awards may be used at cosmetology and proprietary schools. "As of now we have 3 eligible students," she said. "The true test for us will be this coming fall. As far as the process, it seems easy. We just have to work out the current enrolled students. LOSFA's staff has been very patient,

knowledgeable and great to work with."

Eddy Caillier-Dillard, a Financial Aid Leader with Blue Cliff College in Houma, agreed.

"We have several students using the TOPS Tech and the biggest benefit is that it helps us compete with state community colleges. The students are very surprised when I tell them we accept TOPS Tech. The process is easy and Linda Gooch (of LOSFA's Scholarship and Grants Division) is always offering help if I need it. She really watches my input of information and checks to see if all is well."

Proprietary and Cosmetology schools offer degrees and certificates in programs not typically available at 4-year colleges or universities, such as dental assistant, medical assistant, pharmacy technician, air conditioning & heating/refrigeration technology and massage therapy. To determine if a school is eligible to accept TOPS Tech, contact the school's financial aid department.

For questions or additional information, contact LOSFA at 800-259-5626, ext. 1012.

# REMINDER!

## COLLEGE GOAL SUNDAY IS IN 3 WEEKS



# College Goal Sunday

# MMM... A Money Sundae?

Louisiana College Goal Sunday<sup>SM</sup> 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov) and click on College Goal Sunday

### Louisiana College Goal Sunday<sup>SM</sup> 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 Sunday<sup>SM</sup> 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.

## LOSFA stays open during holiday to accept START deposits

Despite Dec. 31 being a proclaimed state holiday, a small group of LOSFA employees remained on duty to accept START deposits from account owners putting money into their accounts under the wire to meet the yearly deadline to qualify for a deduction from Louisiana taxable income of up to \$4,800 per account and state matching contributions (earnings enhancements). Prior to Gov. Bobby Jindal declaring Dec. 31, 2009 a state holiday, LOSFA had informed START account owners that they would be able to make in-person payments that day. So, a small group of LOSFA employees -- START's Terri Finley and PIC's Michelle Darling, Jerri Mack and Rhonda Bridevaux -- worked through the holiday to honor the agency's commitment to account owners.

Account owners from as far away as Lake Charles brought deposits to the LOSFA office on Dec. 31st. While the majority of state workers enjoyed their day off, LOSFA employees were on-hand to help out.

"We were very steady on Thursday," Michelle Darling, Public Information and Communications Supervisor, said. "We accepted more than \$463,000 in deposits and answered 111 phone calls. The vast majority of callers needed information about START deposits and directions" to the LOSFA office.

The total amount of START deposits collected that day -- including those brought into the LOSFA office and those accepted by wire transfer -- totalled \$965,000, according to Mary Jane Lange, Director of Finance and Accounting.

Total deposits credited to START Saving Program accounts from December 28 thru December 31, 2009, were \$4,582,775.50.

## TOPS beneficiaries grateful for program

Too often, the voices of those benefiting from TOPS are drowned out by public debate. It is important to acknowledge those voices when they speak. This note was recently sent to LOSFA and is reprinted with permission.

*"Thank you for providing financial support to both of our children. Our son Derek graduated from UL-L in May 2003 in Mechanical Engineering and our daughter Amy will graduate this December with honors in Mass Communication.*

*With all the negative things being said about La. education, this is a very positive service to those who apply themselves.*

*Hope this continues for years to come."*

*Thanks again -- Brian and Theresa Gonsuron, Breaux Bridge.*



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](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov)

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

Web Address: [www.osfa.la.gov](http://www.osfa.la.gov)

For submissions, opinions or comments for LOSFA Loop, please contact  
David Roberts at [droberts@osfa.la.gov](mailto:droberts@osfa.la.gov).