

# Shop Talk

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## The dimensions of effective communication

*Washington State Department of Transportation finds new leader in Yvonne Medina*

By Phil Partington, POS staff



Yvonne Medina

Washington State Department of Transportation welcomes a new sensation to its facilities team.

Yvonne

Medina joined WSDOT as its new Facilities Administrator on November 6, 2006. She accepts the challenge of providing leadership to the headquarters, five regions and marine division in a complex program with limited funds and competing needs.

Medina came to Washington from California with her husband, Charles Milligan, Ph.D., the new superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools. Prior to this job, she was Director of Facilities Planning and modernization of Fontana Unified School District in Southern California. It was a \$500 million capital program for site acquisition construction and modernization of public K-12 school facilities.

According to Medina, she was, "looking for an opportunity in a public agency where I could utilize my education and background in architecture, but also be provided with challenges and opportunities for professional growth."

Medina brings her school district experience to WSDOT, including organizational and management skills, as well as an ability to think out-of-the-box by identifying problems and locating alternate solutions. Yet, she stresses that one of the most important skills necessary for being a leader in her position is her ability to communicate.

"There are four dimensions in order to communicate effectively," said Medina. "I try to live by those dimensions."

According to Medina, the four dimensions of effective communication are:

1. **Building relationships** – Relationship-building is critical for many different reasons. Everyone responds uniquely to different forms and methods of communication and it is critical to understand these aspects in order to be effective in giving and receiving your message, as well as feedback.
2. **Listening** – "It's not just about talking to or at people. Sometimes communications must require more listening than talking."
3. **Contextualizing** – "I'm a visual person. I need a frame of reference." Medina adds that during the learning process of her

new job, she has focused on understanding the intricacies and definitions of the various sorts of maintenance facilities in the WSDOT regions and headquarters. For example, facilities at the Eastern Region office in Spokane will have different challenges and necessities because of geographic issues and other factors than facilities at the Northwest Region office in Seattle.

4. **Humility** – "It's not an ego thing. You have to try to stay objective," said Medina. "I'm wise enough to know that there is a lot I don't know." She emphasizes involving others in the decision-making processes. Otherwise, you run a higher risk that you will have to backtrack to fix things.

"I love Washington," said Medina. "I arrived at the end of October and survived the ice and wind storms so far. People in Washington are considerate and appreciate family and friends. My husband and I are looking forward to settling down and raising our sons in such a beautiful environment." For more information on this article, contact Yvonne Medina, [MedinaY@WSDOT.WA.GOV](mailto:MedinaY@WSDOT.WA.GOV).

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## POS Notes: Annual report

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### Join the Consortium Listserv!

The Consortium's electronic listserv links you to various plant operations and maintenance professionals, and allows members to advertise surplus or salvage items, solve problems, answer questions and simply learn from each other's experiences. Contact your Plant Operations Support staff at [plantop@ga.wa.gov](mailto:plantop@ga.wa.gov) to sign up!

### If you're not already a member of the Consortium,...

...what are you waiting for? If you don't already have every resource at your disposal and all the money you need, then find out how the Plant Operations Support Consortium can help! Contact us at [plantop@ga.wa.gov](mailto:plantop@ga.wa.gov).



**Bob MacKenzie**

Your Consortium turned 11 years old this past January. Wow! That's 11 years of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, sustainability and generally making good things happen.

Thank you!

Many members have requested we provide a summary of the year's activities — similar to a corporate annual report of sorts— so we can update members on progress, lessons learned or ways members leverage their Consortium. We have provided monthly reports to our bosses in GA since 1996, so being held accountable what we're all about. If you'd like to see any or all of the monthly reports, please give us a ring or drop an e-mail. As always, please let us know how we can do better to support you and enhance your operations. We'll start right out by reporting a key "deliverable."

**Response to member requests for assistance remain primary focus.** Plant Ops staff responded to 566 total requests-for-assistance in 2006, for a total savings of \$995,495. How do we calculate those savings, you ask? Give us a call and we'll share the formula we've used since the program's inception. That's an average of about 47 RFAs and \$82,958 in avoided costs or outright purchase savings per month. POS also answered 217 requests-for-models (savings of \$58,595) and offered 317 referrals (savings of \$41,410). Requests were as diverse as the Consortium membership, ranging from how to eradicate pesky yellow-belly marmots to indoor air quality resolution;

from assistance in purchasing entire vehicle fleets to providing advice on personnel recruitment and where to go to get the best deal on myriad topics/issues. The total savings to members spanning the entire 10-year program life now exceeds \$30 million! Most members have realized more than a 5:1 ratio of value/benefit to membership fee. What a credit to your efforts and kudos to you for such a savvy business approach to operations.

These numbers do not include savings realized by members during our 28 construction projects in 2006...and we think those savings were tangible, on the order of \$743,200. For example, a project involving dismantling and movement of eight modular buildings from Olympia to Yakima, Washington on behalf of Washington State Department of Transportation totaled less than \$100,000. Similar projects in the state have cost more than \$325,000.

**Project/construction management services lauded.** POS project management personnel received accolades during the grand opening ceremonies of the Oakland Madrona Family Support Center for Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department in Tacoma. A state legislator at the event also recognized GA/POS for "collaborating with local governments and sharing its expertise." POS continues to manage the City of Hoquiam Train Station Renovation project transition and has entered yet another project management partnership with Jefferson County for the re-roof and HVAC repair of their Port Hadlock Corrections Center. POS staff also assisted three members in developing their

own job-order contracting programs. Meanwhile we seem to have become modular/portable and demolition experts by default. The Evergreen State College received two bargain modular units and the Washington State Military Department received four units with the help of an entire team of partners. Savings to both members were considerable.

**Operational sustainability practiced routinely by members this year.** We're absolutely delighted that so many members responded to our dozens of announcements of reusable materials and equipment. Taxpayers are clearly the beneficiaries of your innovative, savvy practices. Oak Harbor School District saved more than \$100,000 by salvaging a Liebert System from a POS-managed project. Likewise, Washington State Departments of Corrections, Social and Health Services,



**Jack Anderson, president of Interstate Modular, Inc., directs the movement of modular buildings on the state Capitol Campus.**

Transportation, Veterans Affairs, Military and Natural Resources; as well as Sunrise Beach School and many other districts and municipalities routinely took advantage of program offerings.

*(Please see "Notes," page 8)*

## Forward thinking in facilities: What to do *after* a No-Fault Effectiveness Assessment

### Community college offers practical and effective advice

By Phil Partington, POS staff



**Nancy McKinney**

South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) recently leveraged the program's No Fault Effectiveness Assessment (NFEA) service, yet receiving the assessment proved to be just the beginning. Plant Ops members often wonder about the next appropriate steps after receiving an NFEA.

POS staff interviewed Nancy McKinney, vice president of administration at SPSCC, about its approach to the NFEA.

"It all comes down to how we can best use our resources and be good stewards of our facilities," said McKinney. "How can we create a good working environment to develop people?"

According to Nancy, the college is taking three crucial steps in response to the NFEA.

1. Ensure staff has sufficient opportunity to view results in order to take ownership, provide input and move forward at an operational level.
2. Organize the first meeting for a sustainable advisors committee that will consider the NFEA from an instructional curriculum as well as an operational perspective.
3. The third component of the plan focuses on the customers, which to SPSCC means everyone on the campus from the students to the employees. This is the step that details the small and large hurdles that may arise in lieu of the suggestions acted upon in the assessment.

"The third step is truly going to be a fun process," said McKinney. "It will be a great way to connect the custodial and maintenance staff with everyone else on campus."

SPSCC is no stranger to the concept of evolving. At one point, the community college was made up of nothing but portable buildings for classrooms. That's certainly not the case anymore. In fact, the college is expanding with new buildings to its Hawks Prairie extension campus in Lacey.

"This college has done a lot of great things," McKinney adds. "Doing great things means a continuous effort. What we're trying to do is be even better."

SPSCC demonstrates effective and practical steps to take following a NFEA and is to be applauded for the great things they do and for their continual drive toward improvement. McKinney joined the SPSCC team in (please provide date...or at least the month and year). She arrived from Grays Harbor College, another community college that recently partnered with the Plant Ops NFEA team.

Read about the **GHC** experience in the Fall 2006 issue of *Shop Talk* (<http://www.ga.wa.gov/plant/SHOPTALK/FALL06.PDF>).

## Consortium Honor Roll

New members marked in **yellow**.

<b>Schools</b>	Olympic CC
Abbotsford, BC	Renton TC
Bremerton	Evergreen State College
Bridgeport	Univ. of Wash.
Cascade	Wash. State Univ Energy
Centralia	Coop Ext.
Chehalis	Eastern Wash. Univ
Clover Park	<b>Ports</b>
Comox Valley, BC	Port of Everett
Coquitlam, BC	Port of Kennewick
Delta, BC	Port of Sunnyside
East Valley Spokane	<b>Municipalities</b>
Easton	City of Hoquiam
Eatonville	City of Marysville
Edmonds	City of Oak Harbor
Elma	City of Redmond
Enumclaw	City of Tacoma
ESD 101	City of Tukwila
Federal Way	City of Tumwater
Highline	City of Walla Walla
Hoquiam	Clark County
Ketchikan, AK	Cowlitz County
Kittitas	Cowlitz County PUD #1
Liberty	Grays Harbor Public Dev.
Marysville	Auth.
McCleary	Jefferson County
Mission, BC	King County Housing
Moses Lake	Authority
Mount St. Michael's	Kitsap County
Mukilteo	Lakehaven Utility District
North Thurston	Lewis County
Oak Harbor	Pierce County
Ocosta	Pierce County Housing
Okanogan Skaha, BC	Auth.
<b>Olympia</b>	Pierce County Library
Peninsula	System
Port Townsend	Tacoma-Pierce City Health
Puget Sound ESD	Dept
Quilcene	Town of Eatonville
Rochester	Whatcom County
Rosalia	City of Port Moody, BC
Saanich, BC	<b>States</b>
South Kitsap	Alaska
Snohomish	Oregon Youth Authority
Stanwood-Camano	<b>Wash. St Agencies</b>
Sumner	Corrections
Sunrise Beach	Criminal Justice Training
Surrey, BC	Commission
<b>Valley</b>	Ecology
Wenatchee	Fish and Wildlife
White River	General Administration
Wishkah Valley	Health
Yelm	Information Services
<b>Universities/Colleges</b>	Licensing
Big Bend CC	Liquor Control Board
Clark College	Military
Columbia Basin CC	Natural Resources
CC of Spokane	Parks & Recreation
Everett CC	School for the Blind
Grays Harbor College	School for the Deaf
Highline CC	Social & Health Services
	Transportation
	Veterans Affairs
	Washington State Patrol

## School M&O crew share bond through global travels

### *North Thurston Public Schools celebrates their diversity and military roots*

*By Phil Partington, POS staff*

With 19 schools educating more than 13,000 students (more than one-third of Thurston County youth) and with a staff count of more than 1,600 people, the maintenance and operations crew at North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) have their hands full. Yet, they share a unique bond that contributes to positive results in their daily grind. Most of their 21-member crew can boast of having a military background full of interesting travels and unique experiences and/or some experience traveling the world. The group marked their journeys on a map in attempts to mark their global adventures only to find that it might have been easier to mark where they haven't been.



**Ted Perkins**

"So much of our staff has come from different military branches, organizations and countries, which gives us a commonality that has led to great camaraderie and respect," said Ted Perkins, district maintenance and operations director. "That translates into positive results in our operations, because there are connections within the group that have developed. Integrity and honesty are always there."

Perkins and John Bitters, maintenance supervisor, have an open-door policy without repercussions for staff members sharing their viewpoints and input on department issues and improvements.



**North Thurston Public Schools maintenance and operations crew.**

"The crew members are a key part of the decision-making," said Bitters. "We want them to tell us when something is going on. If someone's had a bad day, we want them to say something. For instance, it's better to know and assist the person to deal with the problem at hand, say, an electrician get their hands on 440 volts when he or she is distracted."

The group is so proud of their diversity and military background that they celebrate it every year on Memorial and Veterans Day. Perkins and Bitters credit military and other forms of experience with team building as a key reason for their operations' success.

"It doesn't matter where you worked at in the military," Bitters said, "You've got that 'know-how' ability to make things work when things are tough."

Perkins added, "In the military, your decisions often determine whether you live or die. In that situation, you have to get past your emotions and get done what needs to be done. Our crew has that kind of experience to get past their emotions and to focus on the logical steps to get from point A to point B when it matters most."

Ultimately, Perkins and Bitters credit the character of their staff members for the operations effectiveness on the job. One example they gave had to do with a co-worker who recently passed away from a brain tumor. In the final days of his life, he was just short of the five-year point to retire. Maintenance and Operations crew members donated personal leave in order to get him to his retirement threshold. They also helped in relocating him and his wife into their new home.

Another example is of a member of the maintenance staff who grows his hair and donates to "Locks for Love," a program for creating hairpieces for children cancer victims. He has been doing this for many years. Another employee raises money for the Leukemia Lymphoma society to help find a cure for bloodborne cancers by participating in long distance bike races and hiking events.

"That is the quality of the individuals in this department," said Perkins.

That sort of heart is visible in the quality of work that these crew members showcase every day on the job, and clearly contributes to the overall educational experience of students at the award-winning NTPS and its surrounding community.

**For more information on NTPS' maintenance and operations crew, contact Ted Perkins, 360.412.4521.**

## Declare your independence: Is there life after outsourcing?

### *How to survive—and thrive—in the face of the outsourcing trend*

Part 1 of a guest series by Alan Bigger, President Elect of APPA and Director of Buildings at University of Notre Dame



**Alan Bigger**

From a facilities manager's point of view, some harsh realities are facing professionals that maintain facilities in the United States.

Shrinking school district budgets and spending less money on building maintenance is becoming an increasing threat to the stability of maintenance and operations at facilities throughout the U.S.

Facility managers have been forced to scour the horizon of management options to determine if there are ways to narrow the gap that is created by an ever-increasing number of buildings to maintain with an ever-decreasing pool of maintenance and operational dollars.

This is complicated by the fact that buildings are becoming more expensive to maintain and clean.

In this bleak landscape, one of the options that may be entertained is the outsourcing of services currently provided by an in-house staff.

The concept of outsourcing is not new, but what is new seems to be the intensity and drive behind the current outsourcing economic model. Things that used to be perceived as immune to outsourcing are now being contracted out more frequently.

According to one industry article, 90 percent of facility managers who are members of the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) say they are responsible for housekeeping services, but only one in five perform those functions with in-house staff.

Housekeeping is the most outsourced facility-related service in most commercial organizations.

In order for in-house operations to survive the decreases in operational budgets and the buying power of those budgets, or to bring services that have been outsourced back in-house, the facility manager needs to concentrate on these key areas:

1. Remember customer service. The services that we provide should be customer driven.
2. Far too often, in-house cleaning operations tell the customer what services they are going to get, with no room for negotiation.
3. Service should be driven from the customer down to the service provider, and the customer's specific cleaning needs should be of paramount importance to an in-house staff.
4. In short, the customer should be treated like royalty — our jobs depend upon it.

#### **Better work through benchmarking**

The cleaning department should have performance indicators for each major business element and these should be measured or benchmarked against available industry performance indicators.

Such elements could include:

- Cost per square foot to clean
- Cost of supplies per square foot
- Custodial productivity (square footage a custodian cleans per day)
- On-the-job injury (OJI) rates
- Lost time rates
- Employee turnover rates
- Indicators of quality as rated by customers, etc.

These performance indicators should be shared with managers, administrators and most importantly, the front-line employees.

In-house operations should perform in the same manner as any competitor, be fully cognizant of how the organization is operating, and be able to validate that the organization is working at peak efficiency.

The performance indicators should meet or exceed established industry standards so that their operation is on a competitive footing with the industry.

#### **Best practices an ally**

The cleaning department should always be looking for best practices, but surprisingly, some best practices may not always come from the same business that we are in.

For instance, one integrated pest management service provider uses hang tags on doors to indicate that a room has been treated.

We learned from their hang tag system and adapted it to our jobs so the customer knows what task we have performed.

The hang tag can then be dropped in campus mail with comments from the customer, rating the quality of the service provided.

This best practice from the pest remediation industry is now being used in the cleaning industry.

#### **Hone those computer skills**

Computer management systems (CMS) are here to stay and there is no excuse for organizations that do not use some of the incredibly powerful staffing analysis programs that are available.

*("Outsourcing," continued from page 6)*

The hardware and software prices are now manageable for every department budget.

Cleaning professionals should be able to track productivity indicators, quality assurance indicators, cost factors, etc., all at the press of a button.

We currently use a software program to track a variety of elements, including quality assurance.

Each supervisor is provided a personal data assistant (PDA) to inspect work areas and enters the results into the hand-held device.

The PDA information is then downloaded and feedback is provided to employees.

Periodically, summary data reports are generated and we compare the QAs (what the supervisors see) with any complaints that customers may have made from the same area (what the customer sees) and then try to narrow the gap.

This program also assists us to highlight the problem areas; solutions to the problem areas are integrated into our monthly training sessions.

#### **Embrace change, flexibility**

What was good yesterday may not be acceptable for today and should be revitalized for tomorrow.

Too often, in-house organizations become more self-serving than customer serving, focusing on doing things the way they used to be done instead of the way they should be done.

Cleaning professionals need to be less rigid in the delivery of our services and should strive to diversify the types of services that we provide and add value to those services.

#### **Empower your staff**

The effective facilities manager recognizes that empowering people to perform is the best element in the development of any productive facilities program.

How can this be done?

1. Involve persons in the decision making process. For instance, when purchasing a new piece of equipment or a product, have the people that will use the equipment or product most test the product and listen to their feedback.
2. Provide realistic and meaningful training. If we are to expect more of our staff, it is critical to provide more training to assist staff in being more productive and effective in the cleaning process.
3. Provide the highest quality equipment. Provide the best and most productive equipment available and then provide meaningful training on how to use the equipment. The equipment provided should allow for the custodian to clean the greatest amount of area in the minimum amount of time and in an effective manner.
4. Recognize people for a job well done. This can be in the form of official recognition programs, safety programs, a positive note written to the person, a pat on the back, or just informally thanking a person. Recognition needs to be timely and meaningful, not months after the fact.
5. Set an example for others to follow. If you expect much of others, put your words into action and expect to demonstrate more of yourself. Demonstration is one of the most effective learning tools and it also indicates that we care.

**Contact Alan Bigger, 574.631.5615, or e-mail [bigger.1@nd.edu](mailto:bigger.1@nd.edu) for more information.**

**Be on the lookout for Part 2 of "Declare your independence: Is there life after outsourcing?" in the Spring 2007 issue of Shop Talk.**

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If you learn of more opportunities please share them so other members can benefit. We're family and we learn from each other!

## Yes, he's for real! A journey to the 'Bitters' ends and back

*'The only death you die is the death you die every day by not living'*

By Phil Partington, POS staff



**John Bitters**

John Bitters, supervisor of maintenance at North Thurston Public Schools in Lacey, Washington, lives by two famous mottos. One is Norman Vaughn's famous quote, "The only death you die is the death you die every day by not living." The other is the motto of his old regiment, "Who dares, wins."

He was former member of Special Air Services (British Special Forces) and had many overseas assignments. That might have sparked his interest in adventure. From dog sledding 7,000 miles in 15 months around Greenland, living the lifestyle of the Eskimos and Greenlanders; to being the only guy who parachuted at the North and South Poles, Bitters has ventured to the far edges of the world and lived to tell about it.

In fact, he holds the record for the highest para-jump from a plane at the South Pole and is the first New Zealander to jump onto the Antarctic continent. He is a Guinness Book of World Records holder in 1972, with a recorded drop of 23,900 foot.

"I think my experiences could provide educational opportunities in geography, social economic perspectives and more," said Bitters. "I find that people are pretty much the same around the world. They have the tendency to survive many situations. When you peel the layers, we're all basically the same."

Maybe, but there's not a lot of us who have driven dog sleds across the Antarctic.

Bitters has seen a lot. He recommends taking the opportunities to do interesting things when they present themselves, because "you may never get the opportunity to do it again."

For those interested in learning a thing or two about global warming, Bitters spent a year studying ice packs at and around the arctic ocean. He gives talks about it around the state upon request and has offered his expertise and experiences in the form of lectures to schools or communities and groups who might be interested.

Bitters also takes his vast experience and world knowledge to help students by giving motivational talks to schools and also through a program called Olympic Peninsula Institute (OPI). Through this program, teachers and other trained volunteers host two-week campouts where they provide mentoring to participating students. Many of these students, Bitters indicated, are experiencing being away from home for the first time.

*(Please see "Bitters," page 8)*



**John Bitters has a rare encounter with some of the local inhabitants, while dog sledding in Antarctica in 1973.**



**Bitters dog sledding near Deception Island, Antarctic Peninsula, Antarctica. Spring 1972.**

**In support of the US Navy Arctic Submarine Tracking Operation in Spring 1985, Bitters gets ready to deploy his parachute to land at the surveillance station at the geographic North Pole.**



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Linda Villegas Bremer, Director

***("Notes," continued from page 2)***

**On-site assessments provide popular program offerings.** The Consortium's No-Fault Effectiveness Assessment (NFEA) proved increasingly popular in 2006. South Puget Sound Community College, Grays Harbor College, East Valley and McCleary School Districts and the Tri-Met organization in Portland, Oregon were examples of successful NFEA's in 2006. Pattie Williams, Support Services manager for GA, was the mainstay of the NFEA custodial component. What a super contributor!

Welcome New Members! POS welcomed Olympia School District, Valley School District, City of Oak Harbor, Grays Harbor College, Everett Community College, School District # 68 (Saanich, B.C.), Puget Sound Educational Service District, Bremerton School District, and Grays Harbor Public Development Authority to the Consortium.

**Renewal rates remain stable.** We remain convinced that the health of the self-sustaining POS program is gauged by the renewal rates of its members. By that measure, your POS Consortium remains quite healthy. Our "churn" rate is less than ½ of one percent; and many organizations return to the Consortium after funding concerns have been resolved at their local level.

**POS forms operational partnership with WSU-Energy Extension.** Your POS staff is in the process of forming an operational partnership with WSU-Energy Extension professionals in Olympia. The intent is to leverage the strengths of both organizations to the ultimate benefit of our members. WSU-Energy Extension is also an award-winning group that provides research, engineering, and clearinghouse functions that are often requested by POS members. POS members should realize a true and immediate benefit from the partnership. We'll keep you posted as this exciting process unfolds.

Happy New Year, POS professionals! It's a singular pleasure supporting you. Call me—360-902-7257—or drop and e-mail—[bmacken@ga.wa.gov](mailto:bmacken@ga.wa.gov)—to chat about how we can be of service.



***The Evergreen State College leveraged Consortium re-use offerings with the procurement of two used modular buildings in Fall 2006. Savings to the college exceeded \$75,000.***

***("Bitters," continued from page 5)***

"We're guilty when we don't take a proactive approach to helping people who need it," said Bitters. "I think we should feel obligated to do what we can when we can."

Bitters demonstrates true heart in maintenance and we commend him for applying his world training and experience to help enhance the educational experience of the students at NTPS.

**Contact John Bitters 360.412.4521 if interested in learning more about his adventures, and/or if you're interested in scheduling a lecture.**