

October 1999

of an Information Technology Department that range from Application Development to Local Area Networks (LANs). In addition, he has performed technical computer audits/reviews on various computer platforms and is currently a Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA).

Message from the Information Manager

Jon Pulling, CBCP

Who would have thought that a hotel would have to implement its own contingency plan while hosting a symposium of contingency planners. For those of us down in Orlando, Florida in mid-September at the DRJ conference, that's exactly what happened. From the time the conference started on Saturday, everyone was keeping their eye on the eye of hurricane Floyd. By Monday afternoon, it was becoming quite evident that even with the storm predicted to remain offshore, Orlando could still experience severe storm conditions. At the Tuesday morning session, the conference organizers stated that it would be business as usual. A spokesman from the hotel assured us that they had a contingency plan and if conditions worsened, they were prepared to enact measures to protect the attendees from harm, as well as supply them with food and water.

Fortunately, Floyd decided to stay far enough off the coast that Orlando only experienced very minor rain fall and winds. But I was very impressed with how, not only the hotel, but all the surrounding counties' emergency response procedures were carried out. More people were evacuated along the coast than had ever been evacuated before. As always, there seems to be a certain amount of hype generated by the media, and this no different. But over all, I thought the quality of information being disseminated was very good and kept those of us who were interested up to date with storm activities.

October Meeting

Tuesday, October 12, 1999

Subject: State of Texas Y2K Status

Speaker: Mel Mireles

Place: IBM, 2 Riverway, Room 1501

Lunch and networking: 11:30 – 12:00

Presentation: 12:00 - 12:30

Mel Mireles is a senior analyst for the Year 2000 Project Office at the Department of Information Resources in the State of Texas. The Project Office has responsibility for coordinating and facilitating statewide Year 2000 efforts of the 200 agencies and institutions of higher education in Texas, and monitoring their progress toward Year 2000 operability. There are over 222,000 state and university employees with an overall state population of approximately 20 million. He has provided statewide and national presentations about the Year 2000 issues.

Mr. Mireles has over 15 years of Information Systems knowledge and experience. He has managed various areas

The South Texas Chapter of the Association of Contingency Planners meets regularly on the Second Tuesday of each month at 11:30 a.m. in RM 1501 of the IBM Building at Two Riverway, Houston, TX.

Upcoming Conferences

March 19 -22, 2000

**DRJ Disaster Symposium and Exhibition
San Diego, CA**

For Info: (314) 894-0276; www.drj.com

Register by Dec. 31, 1999 and SAVE!!

August 14 - 16, 2000

**ACP International Symposium
Seattle, WA**

See the ACP International web site at www.acp-international.com. There is a link to the Seattle chapter.

If you know of any conferences or meetings , national or local, that should be included, please let me know by the end of each month. I will be happy to include them in the list.

MVP Nominations

It is time once again to select candidates for the MVP award for our chapter. The requirements are simple. The individual should be an ACP member in good standing. The choice is agreed to by our Board (and can be a Board Member). The person should be someone who provides outstanding service and value to our Chapter, be that knowledge, enthusiasm, participation or/and interface with others.

If you would like to nominate someone for MVP, send their name to John Link, chapter President. Nominations will be open until the October meeting, at which time a vote of the membership will be taken. The winning candidate's name will be forwarded to the National office by November 1st for formal recognition.

Woman Digs Deep For Y2K Bug 'Pills'

HONG KONG — A Hong Kong woman forked out HK\$120,000 (US\$15,440) to buy stomach pills from con men after they told her they could cure the millennium bug, police said on Tuesday.

The 43-year-old woman, who apparently did not know if the millennium bug was a computer problem or a physical ailment, handed over the money on Monday after the con men convinced her she could make handsome profits by reselling them.

"The two men took the pills out and told the woman they could cure the Y2K bug. She then went to a bank to withdraw the money...for 430 of those pills," a police spokesman said. "Experts later found the pills were for stomach ache."

Another woman handed over HK\$40,000 on Monday to buy electrical components from three con men, believing they could be resold for astronomical profits to fix the millennium bug

Y2K

Turning From Fixes to Fallback Plans

By Stephen Barr

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, October 5, 1999

With the bulk of their Year 2000 computer fixes made, federal agencies are increasingly focused on developing emergency backup plans that will keep their doors open for business if they encounter any Y2K glitches that interfere with operations.

The importance of contingency planning was underscored Friday, when federal systems began a new fiscal year and four agencies discovered some bugs that were fixed the same day.

The National Science Foundation discovered three minor problems, including one system glitch that prevented the processing of cash advances requested by grantees. The Energy Department's procurement data system temporarily rejected about 30 of 800 transactions, primarily because of a technical error by Energy employees. The Justice Department and the Federal Aviation Administration also encountered glitches in their financial management systems.

But the true test for agencies will not come until Jan. 1, when computers using two-digit dates need to correctly recognize "00" as 2000, not 1900. To handle potential computer bugs in January, most Cabinet departments and large agencies have devised what they call "Day One" strategies.

At the Social Security Administration, for example, an elaborate Day One plan emphasizes quickly catching any glitches that would stop or slow monthly benefit checks to 44 million Americans. The benefit payments--33 million of which are electronic transfers to banks--are among the most politically sensitive Y2K issues at the White House and in

Congress.

Social Security programmers have sifted through 35 million lines of mainframe code and tested data exchanges with the Treasury Department, Federal Reserve and banks. When finished, the effort will have cost the agency an estimated \$50 million.

Under Social Security's Day One plan, agency computers will shut down earlier than usual on Thursday, Dec. 30. Taking the systems off-line will allow officials to collect all their 1999 computer transactions from nearly 14,000 offices, including those in the distant time zones of Guam and Hawaii.

During that night, Social Security computers will finish batch runs where the data entered during the day is moved into master files. With its 1999 transactions completed and files updated, Social Security offices will be ready to close on Friday, Dec. 31 to observe the New Year's holiday.

Just before midnight Friday, Social Security's main data center in Baltimore will switch to generators powered by jet fuel. The agency has stockpiled sufficient jet fuel to operate for several days. It does not expect any disruptions to the region's power grid, but as a precaution wants to guard against any electrical surges that could damage its automated equipment.

"We don't know if there [are] going to be power surges. We don't know, at this point, what the public is going to do. Is everybody going to get up and turn everything on to see if it's working? We have some concerns that we could have a lot of pull on electricity, so we don't want to take any chances," Kathy Adams, the Y2K expert at Social Security, said in an interview.

When the power company "lets [the agency] know everything is fine," Social Security will turn off its generators and hook back into regular power lines, Adams said. The power switching will not require the agency to turn off its computers. On Saturday morning, New Year's Day, groups of programmers will report to work throughout the day to run checks on the computer systems. Social Security's 14,000 facilities include field offices, toll-free telephone call-in centers, appeals offices, regional offices and the Baltimore headquarters.

Social Security managers will report to their offices "at prearranged times with a checklist . . . and make sure the computers are working, that they can turn them on and get connections," Adams said. The managers will report their findings to regional offices, which will forward data to a command center in Baltimore, scheduled to open in late December.

Perhaps more important, Social Security has selected approximately 100 sites to serve as "barometer offices." At these facilities, which include 55 offices that make disability determinations, the agency's technical staff will test software systems by conducting a series of typical transactions, such as processing applications for benefits.

The Baltimore command center will monitor the processing and check to see that the systems are working properly. If glitches are found, "business resumption teams" will be

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dispatched to make any repairs. The teams will have Saturday night and Sunday to fix problems.

On Jan. 3, Social Security will open for business. If past years are a guide, that Monday will be one of the busiest days of the year. Many Americans choose to retire and apply for Social Security benefits on the first business day of the year, and Social Security hot lines take more calls in the first week than most other weeks of the year.

Social Security will also transmit benefits to about 44 million Americans that day, pumping \$33 billion into the economy. "The staff is focused and working hard," Adams said. "We're ready."

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Y2K's Silver Lining: Top 10 lessons we've learned

Gerry Stenson

1. Technology is everything. Probably more than anything else, we've learned how incredibly reliant we are on information technology (IT) for virtually every aspect of our business.

It's not just about the arcane back-office functions of computers, hardware, software, cables, wires, printers and scanners. It's about having the data at hand to make good decisions on developing the products that our customers want.

It's about the way disparate processes such as accounting and marketing relate to each other. It's about how we deliver the best possible service to our customers.

2. We can't leave IT decisions to IT alone. Senior management has been outside the loop -- perhaps willfully in many cases -- while IT charted its own course. IT departments deserve direction and need boundaries, just like everyone else.

3. Non-IT managers must know technology. Lack of technical knowledge is no longer acceptable at any level of management. All managers absolutely must understand what information technology can do for their line of business.

For instance, all our banking store managers must know about Norwest's Internet-banking product -- not only to promote it to our customers, but also in order to offer them the efficiency and 24-hour-a-day access that they demand.

4. IT managers must know management. Strong technical skills and knowledge are just the beginning -- not the whole game -- for IT managers. They also must manage people well and understand and implement the vision of top management.

5. Have a clear sense of IT inventory. Y2K has made it abundantly clear that many organizations didn't have a clue about their internal IT resources. If you don't have a firm grasp of what's critical in your IT world, you may be missing

out on cheaper, more efficient alternatives or on ways of deploying your existing assets more effectively. Keeping track of what you have should be an integral part of the acquisition process.

6. Document, document, document. While lack of documentation is not a problem unique to the IT industry, Y2K has certainly highlighted the need for documentation in businesses and organizations. Documentation to a business is what long-term memory is to an individual. With Y2K, the biggest challenge was determining what kinds of internal systems we had and what was on everyone's computers. Without documentation, the institutional memory of an organization's technical accomplishments and information resources is continually eroded by the passage of time and employee turnover.

7. Interdependencies exist everywhere. Y2K has proven to us that our businesses cannot operate autonomously. There are interdependencies with our suppliers, our vendors, our customers, our strategic allies, our partners. For example, Norwest relies on a number of vendors to make sure our ATM network works flawlessly for our customers. But understandably, Norwest customers tell us -- not our ATM vendors -- what they want to see in terms of ATM service. So it's incumbent on Norwest to communicate our customers' needs and desires to our vendors. Y2K seems to have brought about a better sense of community -- that we're all in this together.

8. Planning for failure is essential. Contingency planning, or planning for failure, is the mark of any successful project. This proved to be true in April 1997 when the flood of the century hit the Grand Forks, N.D., area. Because Norwest had contingency plans before the flood, we were able to make cash available to our customers with little interruption in service.

Likewise, we have contingency plans in the event phone service is interrupted, come Jan. 1.

9. Know what's mission critical. As companies have had to study virtually all their systems and processes because of Year 2000, it's become much more clear what is and what isn't mission critical. It's important to know what we cannot live without before we make new investments. For instance, we know at Norwest that 40 percent of all loans are originated by telephone. So we view our telephone system as mission critical.

10. There will be a sequel. Something like Y2K is bound to happen again. It might be a virus, it might be some other surprise lurking in the techno-woodpile. It pays to spend some time and money today to hedge against a huge tab tomorrow.

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