
◊ BREANA News ◊

Volume 2, Issue 1

November 5, 1998

From the President

I have just come from the third meeting of the Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) (see the article elsewhere in this issue). This is a new experience for me. There had been warnings from people belonging to such groups at other locations that progress would be extremely slow. The meetings are scheduled for 3 hours, but typically last 4. The first two were dedicated solely to procedural matters, and yet on these rela-

Medical Plan Changes

BNL is changing the medical plan for current employees and pre-Medicare retirees. If you qualify for Medicare you will not be affected unless you are also the dependent (e.g. spouse) of a current employee. You will have received a mailing from the lab describing the plan that affects you and comparing it to the HMO plans offered. The best guess is that there are about 350 retirees and dependents that are affected by the new plan. The new plan is called a PPO and it is also an "indemnity" plan. This means that you select the medical services that you need and the insurance then works out how to pay for it. CIGNA has worked out an agreement with a set of doctors and hospitals about reimbursement. This is referred to as

the "in-network" services. Other doctors, hospitals, etc. are "out-of-network". The rules for paying for the services are different for the two categories. Hospital services are covered 100% in both cases, so the differences will probably not be seen by you. Doctors services are covered differently. In-network doctors accept a small co-payment (typically \$10) and that's all you have to do. Out-of-network is handled very much like the current plan, in that is there is a deductible, you get 80% coverage and you might have to file a claim (different doctors do this differently, some filing the claim for you, some making you file the claim). There are a number of other differences, but the general idea is that when you

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Good news. After looking at last years expenditures and next years (probable) budget, the officers and steering committee have decided to extend everyone's membership for an additional year for no additional cost. Our finances are in surplus, thanks to the generous support of the lab and our own slowness in getting organized. We have had smaller expenditures for mailing and office supplies than we expected. However these expenses are expected to increase in the future as we generate a regular Web page and move the membership database to the office computer. But for now, if you receive this newsletter we consider you a paid up member of BREANA.

Medical Plan Changes - cont d

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get service from an “in-network” provider, you make a co-pay and have no paper-work. If you use an “out-of-network” provider then the rules are similar to the current rules. Note that you can use either in or out-of-network services at any time you select.

A word about the history of this change. Last year when the extent of the BNL budget problems for

A sidelight for those that might not have known how Connecticut General became CIGNA. A while back, Connecticut General (CG) merged with INA and came up with a name which is the merger of their

the next year became known, Human Resources began investigating changes to the Medical coverage that could

be made to save money without changing the nature of the coverage very much. They came up with the PPO option (which is estimated to save the Lab over \$2 million) and then started talking with various groups of employees and retirees about it. After discussions with the BREA officers and others, they made significant modifications to

the original proposal which will reduce the impact on retirees.

The Lab has prepared an extensive (about 7 pages) Question and Answer sheet that explains many details. The most complicated details are on coordination of benefits between the PPO plan and Medicare. For those with access to the Web, this is available on the BREA pages (start at <http://www.buoy.com/~gc>). For others, contact the BREA office or Human Resources at the Lab for a copy.

The Citizens Advisory Council

The BNL director has set up an advisory committee called the Community Advisory Council or CAC. It consists of representative members of the community (the current jargon for describing such people is “stakeholders”). BREA is represented on this committee by the president, Graham Campbell, with John Denes as an alternate. This committee is just being formed and, because of the many extremely diverse elements represented, has yet to progress beyond the initial organizational details. So far there is only a draft charter which has yet to be discussed by the council that states:

The purpose of the Brookhaven Community Advisory Council (CAC) is to ensure that the ideas, interests, and concerns of the BNL communities are considered by the Laboratory in its decision making processes. The CAC's mission is to address concerns about the Laboratory's policies and operations, explicitly those related to environment and public health issues.

The membership of the CAC is very diverse, ranging from local government and civic organizations to activist and environmental groups. There

are currently 32 members, but two additional groups (Riverhead Town and Fish Unlimited) have requested membership. The whole issue of membership (who determines who can be a member and what the criteria are for membership) has yet to be addressed by the council.

We expect the CAC to be an important mechanism for improving BNL's relationship with the community. However, with the membership as diverse as it is, progress is expected to be very slow. Meetings are open to the public and are held the second Thursday of each month at 7p.m. in Berkner Hall.

Adventures in the Sahara

This is another article in our (hopefully) continuing series about what our members have been doing since their retirement.

Don David retired from the Lab to the hamlet of Brookhaven in 1989 and has been visiting old and new friends around the world since then.

In November 1997 he and his wife, Genie, joined with the Friendship Force of the U.S. and the Saharawan Aid Trust based in England to bring some tons of humanitarian aid by convoy to the western Algerian Sahara Desert. The group gathered at the House of Lords for a send-off under the guidance of Lord Christopher, Earl of Whichelsea and Nottingham, leading his sixth trip to help the Saharawi. Surplus buses, Land Rovers, ambulances, water wagons, an 18-wheeler and one chuck wagon for the use of the travelers were ferried over the Channel laden with medical supplies, non-perishable food, athletic equipment and uniforms, an incubator, a pre-fab building, toys and stuffed animals, water pumps and 140 friendly helpers. As citizen ambassadors they traveled through France and Spain in a convoy of 28 rainbow-painted vehicles shepherded by elite French and Spanish police es-

corts. Going was slow as the vehicles, all recycled and lovingly restored, broke down constantly, shook too much to drive fast and took 45 minutes for all to get through the innumerable tollbooths. A heavy fog blanketed the countryside. The expected glamour of long French evenings in bistros did not materialize. But it

warmed up beyond the Pyrenees and the Spanish police allowed the Friendship Force buses to trundle on ahead, allowing time to enjoy the night life of Barcelona and Alicante. They crossed the Mediterranean on the slightly listing ferry "Tassili" through a minor gale, to be surprised by the Algerian government's refusal to allow the convoy to be driven south, due to "road washouts". The group was flown from Oran south by Algerian paratrooper plane ("Hold here, then jump") to a forlorn patch of desert peopled by refugees from Western Sahara.

In 1975 Spain withdrew from its colony of Western Sahara and the Moroccan government sent troops and settlers into the territory. Morocco has undertaken a sizeable economic development program in the

Western Sahara as part of its long-term claim to the land.

The sovereignty of Western Sahara has been disputed since then and sporadic warring has continued for 25 years.

The expanse of desert where 200,000 Saharawis exist is vast and dead. Nothing lives there, not a snake or bug or bird, ex-

cept these poor people making habitable an essentially uninhabitable sea of packed sand, which they have "greened" somewhat using deep wells for irrigation, establishing schools, hospitals, a democratic and tolerant government and a complex administrative and distributive system. With their courageous spirit they live in expectation of a UN-run referendum in early 1999 to allow them back into their homeland, with access to water trees, potash deposits and the Atlantic.

Don and Genie lived for a week in the adobe hut of a Saharawi family - Henda, her daughter Dane, Buto, Bouba and baby Dadai. Most of the men are away serving with the army across the border. The family crowded into their tent to provide more room for

The expanse of desert where 200,000 Saharawis exist is vast and dead. Nothing lives there, not a snake or bug or bird,

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Adventures in the Sahara - cont d

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their guests. They also provided lavish hospitality, the hennaing of hands for beautification, and enthusiastic exchange of smiles and gestures for communication, great coffee and crunchy, sandy biscuits for breakfast. Sahawari living quarters are furnished with soft rugs and lined with cushions. There are low tables, no chairs. Good knee flexibility is required for graceful squatting.

Although surrounded by 360° of nothingness, the Sahawaris made them feel at home, entertaining, feeding and offering tours of their well-organized village of Birlehlou, part of the district of Smara. The refugee camps are organized into four districts (wilaya), divided into six or seven villages (darya), separated to prevent epidemics or total destruction in war. Each village is then divided into neighborhoods with small streets between the houses, tents, and outbuildings. Everything is the exactly identical beige color causing some difficulty in orientation and finding one's way home. Each neighborhood has a water cistern, a dispensary and a day-care center. Individual homes are provided potable water from 20 miles away by wagon, using garden hoses. At the

time of the Moroccan invasion the Saharawi literacy rate was about 5%; now at least 90% of the Saharawi read and write. Arabic is taught in the younger grades; Spanish starting at about 3rd grade. Much of the recitation is by rote and the students are very well behaved. For secondary education they've built two large boarding schools. College education is offered to many refugee youngsters by Algeria, Cuba and Libya. Most doctors, nurses and teachers are well-trained Saharawi. They're prepared for a long stay in the desert, but hope to escape soon for return to their own country.

When Don and Genie returned to Heathrow, filled with relief at returning to the decadence we're all used to, they resolved to help their new friends in their struggles to regain their country, and have been doing so by working with Lord Chris, with the UN, with Congressional representatives, with Friendship Force members and with Western Saharans in the US.

Addresses

To qualify for bulk mailing rates, we have standardized our mailing labels. If there is any difficulty in receiving

this newsletter or if you hear of any problems, please let the BREA office know.

Sprague v GM

We reported previously that this suit by 84,000 salaried GM retirees against GM stemmed from the promise of GM to provide free medical benefits to retirees for life. While this was stated in the employee's handbook and in advisories at the time of retirement, GM maintained that they had the right to change its medical insurance coverage afterwards. GM often, but not always, stated their right to change their policy in their employee's handbook.

At the time of BREA's April 1998 newsletter we reported that the U. S. court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit had ruled that GM was within its right to change medical benefits after employees retire. Sprague et al. then petitioned the U. S. Supreme Court to hear the case. The Supreme Court, without comment, refused to hear the appeal. The decision of the Sixth Circuit Court therefore remains in effect.

BREA on the Internet

BREA is part of the modern Internet world. Those who have Internet access might be interested in what we are doing. We are building a Web page slowly, link by link. Take a look at <http://www.buoy.com/~gc> for the pages under construction. When these are finished, they will probably be moved to a BNL site.

There is also the BREA mailing list, BREA-L. Any member of BREA can subscribe to this list and can send mail to it at any

time. If you were an early member, there have been some changes. The high volume BNL announcements have been put into another list, so the BREA-L list now has only an occasional message. In order to subscribe to either one of these mailing lists, send a mail message to ListProc@bnl.gov containing the line:

subscribe BREA-L *your name*
 or
 subscribe BNL-ANNOUNCE-L *your name*

(the subject of the mes-

sage is ignored - the above line goes into the body of the message). The BREA-L list is open only to BREA members. The BNL-ANNOUNCE-L is open to anyone. When you are enrolled in either of these lists, you will receive a message telling you how to do various things (e.g. how to get off the list!) If you forget to keep this message, send a message saying HELP to ListProc@bnl.gov to find out how to control the list.

If you are new to mailing lists, they are just a way to send an e-mail message to a group of people. If you send mail to BREA-L@bnl.gov, the list processing program will send a copy of this message to everyone on the list. Please note, if you "REPLY" to one of these messages, your reply will be sent to the list, not to only the person that sent the message to which you reply. Also note the difference between sending mail to ListProc@bnl.gov (which controls the program that does the mailing list processing) and sending mail to BREA-L@bnl.gov (that message gets sent to the entire mailing list)

Abbreviated Financial Report

Balance Sheet

Assets

Cash	\$5500.00
Accounts Receivable (BERA)	\$900.00
Total	\$6400.00

Liabilities and Capital

General Fund	\$6400.00
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Statement of Income and Expense

Income

Membership dues and Contributions	\$6643.00
Contributions from BERA	\$1500.00
Interest earned	\$121.00
Total Income	\$8264.00

Expenses

Postage	\$971.00
Printing and Reproduction	\$639.00
Contribution to Friends of Brookhaven	\$100.00
Internet access	\$78.00
Office Supplies	\$76.00
Total Expenses	\$1864.00

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Medical Plan Changes, Dues, the CAC, and the Sahara

From the President - cont d

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tively non-controversial matters agreement was reached only slowly and on very few topics. By the third meeting the facilitator pressed to start talking about substantive issues even though the procedural issues had not been solved. But it took the entire meeting to define which issues to address first.

Why is progress so slow and hard to come by? I

think the main issue is a matter of trust. The council membership is very diverse, not simply pro or anti-BNL. History has led to a breakdown of trust between these groups over BNL. The lack of trust in BNL by the community members is well documented in the press. A point I try to make at every opportunity is that trust is a two way street. There is also a strong lack of trust of the activist community

from within BNL. Until trust is rebuilt in both directions we will continue to be at loggerheads. I think that BNL recognizes its responsibilities here and is trying to be honest and open with the community. Now it is up to the activists to be responsible in their activities. Another Montel Williams show would slow progress immensely.