

CHFS Focus
June 7, 2010

Nominate Now for Governor's Ambassador Awards

In recognition of state employees' significant contributions to their workplace and/or community, the Personnel Cabinet launched an enterprise-wide storytelling initiative designed to encourage, support, acknowledge and reward employees who embody the principles of Kentucky's Unbridled Spirit.

The Kentucky Governor's Ambassador Award highlights the stories of employees who have significantly and positively impacted the lives of their coworkers, customers and community at large in the areas of customer service, courage, leadership, professional achievement, teamwork or community service and volunteerism. Nominations may be made by an employee or by a private citizen.

A selection committee makes three recommendations in each category to the Governor for his final decision. Each recipient of the Governor's Ambassador Award receives special recognition by having an engraved, personalized brick placed outside the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History.

The deadline for submitting nominations is Aug. 31. For an application and more information concerning the Governor's Ambassador Awards, visit <http://personnel.ky.gov/emprel/GovernorsAmbassadorAward.htm>

Personnel Board Elections Open

Ballots for the 2010 Personnel Board Election were mailed out May 28. They are due back to the Personnel Board by June 15 or must be postmarked to the Personnel Board by June 15. For the first time, state employees may send ballots back to the Board by fax, scanning and e-mailing the ballots to personnelboard@ky.gov, by hand delivery, messenger mail, or by first class mail using your own stamp. Please call the Board at (502) 564-7830 if you have questions.

Website Offers Enhanced Travel Info

If you're planning a trip this summer and want the most up-to-date travel information before you go, you might check out the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's 511.ky.gov website. The site now offers enhanced traffic information with a number of new features for travelers.

The site operates on a Google Maps-based system, which will be familiar to many users.

"Our enhanced 511 reflects not only an effort to provide more tools to the traveling public, but also to make our information more meaningful," said Acting Transportation Secretary Mike Hancock.

For example, road closures will be displayed in their entire length, rather than as a single point on the map, and users will be able to toggle between Map View and Route View. In addition,

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Route Report lets users choose a specific route by clicking on a link instead of searching for the route on the map.

Another new feature is a scrolling status bar that displays urgent traffic information, such as current major incidents, at the top of the page. Information about an incident can be displayed with a click. Amber Alerts will be displayed in the same space.

A navigation bar on the left side of the screen allows users to customize their view by turning on and off “layers” of information. Users also can select city or regional maps from a scroll-down menu and immediately zoom to that area.

When there are updates on the site, the Refresh button, at the top right of the map, will appear. Clicking will refresh the page.

Upcoming events that could affect travel on Kentucky roadways will be displayed in a Future Info section, so travelers can plan accordingly. The new menu also gives links to data feeds such as RSS and Twitter.

A brief demonstration video on some key features of the new 511 site is available on the KYTC website at <http://transportation.ky.gov/511/how-to-use-511.html>.

The 511 service was launched in Kentucky in 2002 to provide useful and timely traffic and travel information about Kentucky roadways. A telephone version of the service is available by dialing 511.

Living Well: Consumer Savvy or Victim

Many consumers make food purchases based on food packaging and claims of healthfulness. Major manufacturers are now packaging more and more products with “healthy” claims in bright, bold letters on their products.

For instance, if you are standing in front of the yogurt or butter section, the products that will catch your eye are the ones that say they will boost your immunity or decrease your risk of heart disease. Let’s face it, no company is going to put “fattening but delicious” on their packaging. Companies know that even if a product is considered unhealthy, like butter, they have to put a healthier spin on it to make their product stick out.

I am not an expert in advertising or product endorsement, but I do know there are several tricks of the trade that increase sales. Among those tricks are product placement (eye level is the prime real estate for name brand products), product packaging and, of course, price. A recent article on Forbes.com (<http://www.forbes.com/2010/05/19/food-claims-supplements-lifestyle-health-yogurt-margarine.html>) listed 10 foods that make health claims that have not been substantiated in studies. Some of those listed were Dream Water (claims to promote sleep), POM Wonderful (promotes the benefits of the pomegranate) and Flax Plus (contains Omega-3s).

It's true these products – and others listed in the article – contain certain “healthy” additives or ingredients. But studies have shown none was strong enough to back the packaging claims. Some are more obvious than others. For instance, Flax Plus does contain Omega-3 fats, but from flax seed, not from fish oils, which are proven to promote heart health. All of the other products were tested only on small groups and had little to no proven results that supported their health claim.

Even though I have a background in health and fitness, I, too, have fallen victim to these outrageous claims and made purchases based on a product's packaging and health claims. I learned the hard way to do some research before I buy certain products with unrealistic claims. I am able to identify false claims when it comes to fitness equipment and supplements by avoiding TV ads and supplement stores/aisles. However, grocery shopping is a weekly (or more than weekly) necessity in my house, so being consumer savvy is something I am still learning.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

An old adage says that “laughter is the best medicine,” and multiple studies have proven it has some truth. Helpguide.org notes that laughter is actually a powerful antidote to stress and conflict. Nothing works faster or more dependably than a laugh to bring your mind and body back into balance.

Here are some of the ways that laughter is good for you:

It relaxes the whole body. A hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles feeling relaxed for up to 45 minutes afterward.

It boosts your immunity. Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, which improves your resistance to disease.

It triggers the release of endorphins. These are the body's natural “feel-good” chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and are known to temporarily relieve pain.

It protects your heart. Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

Always make work your priority, but also remember to find humor in your everyday office life. Laughing can improve your attitude and your work!