Budget challenges force staff changes at BBT

Five Church of the Brethren Benefit Trust colleagues will end their employment with the organization effective Dec. 16 due to budgetary and economic factors (see page 2).

The first point of contact for many BBT members and clients has been Cindy Benthusen, the general office services representative for the organization. She has served BBT since 2000, during which time she provided support to the president's office, led mailing projects, and greeted visitors. Cindy and her son live in Elgin, Ill.

Cindy Bravos began serving in BBT's Communications department in May 2007 when she was hired as the Congregational Contact Network coordinator. More recently, Cindy has served as the organization's marketing coordinator. Cindy's work focused on promoting BBT's ministries in the denomination and at Brethren-affiliated organizations. She also produced the annual Memorial Tribute video for the past three years. Cindy lives with her family in St. Charles, Ill.

As director of Insurance Services, Willie Hisey Pierson has helped increase the number of client groups serviced by that ministry. He has served in this role since December 2010. Willie and his family live in Plainfield, Ill.

After working for Church of the Brethren General Board, Lauryn Klotzbach became a member of the Communications team for BBT in June 2004. She has served as the production coordinator since then, and has been key in developing the look of BBT's marketing materials and publications. She also served as the lead administrator of the organization's content relations

Continued on Page 4

BFI clients gain increased access with Web portal

On Sept. 29, online account management became available to Brethren Foundation's organizational clients. Via the client portal, authorized individuals can now access monthly statements, initiate transactions, run statements and performance reports, and review both summary and detail account activity for custom date ranges. All reports can be downloaded or printed.

“We are pleased to provide this additional service to our clients,” said Steve Lipinski, manager of Foundation operations, and Sandy Schild, director of financial operations, explore a test version of BFI's client portal at Annual Conference 2011 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

“We believe that client portal users will appreciate the functionality of the online processes and access to additional account information. “This service has been under development for some time and has benefited from extensive testing by staff, the service provider, and a small group of clients who have served as beta testers,” Mason added.

“ Their collective efforts have yielded a product that we hope many clients will use and appreciate.” Interested representatives of BFI's organizational clients can contact Steve Lipinski at 800-746-1505, ext. 377, or slipinski@cobbt.org for assistance.

Brethren Foundation

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Balancing effectiveness with efficiency in a difficult marketplace

The news on Page 1 of this publication is sobering — five BBT staff members will be leaving us mid-December due to the elimination of their positions. They represent 20 percent of the BBT workforce.

The reasons for the reductions are several — the long-term impact of the challenging economic landscape, the changing face of health care, and the consolidation in some areas and expansion in others to address the ever-changing needs of those we serve.

Over the past three-plus years, BBT has worked hard at making improvements to benefit our members and clients. We added customer service functionality, online Web portals for access and administration of accounts, a variety of new investment options, the daily valuing of funds (for Brethren Foundation in 2010; coming to Brethren Pension Plan in 2012), and communications pieces and seminars that we present upon request that help articulate how people can improve their financial and personal wellness through choices they make.

Our work has made a difference. In 2011, BBT grew in the number of members and clients we serve in nearly all of our lines of business. But we can’t stop there. We have worked hard to be effective in what we do; now is the time to see if there are efficiencies we can implement to help us reduce our overall expenses. There are.

The job reductions at BBT come from a restructuring of our organization. As of Jan. 1, we are combining our Pension and Insurance ministries into one department — an employee benefits department — so that our Pension and Insurance ministries can be cross-promoted and administrated with one unified staff that is focused on the many rules and regulations and client demands of the employer benefits industry. Scott Douglas, BBT’s Pension director and vice president, will lead that department instead of assuming the previously announced role of chief operating officer. Instead of filling that new position as I planned to do as of last summer, our management group will be reduced in size to four, giving us the right number of senior staff for this restructured organization and giving us the ability to be more nimble in our decision-making. Each member of that group will take on an additional responsibility, just as Scott is doing with the addition of insurance to his oversight and Steve Mason, director of Brethren Foundation, has done for many years as he also has served as director of Socially Responsible Investing. John McGough, our chief financial officer, will also become our compliance officer. I will oversee our Communications operations.

In 2012 we will be changing some of how we do business. We will be streamlining insurance operations and moving our Pension administration to a third-party record keeper, which will help us provide a number of useful tools that will enable members to better manage their retirement resources, including the ability to seek advice about how they should invest their funds. We no longer will have a receptionist at our office, but will still have a live voice easily accessible when people call us.

For the 2012 budget building process, we went through each line item and analyzed needed effectiveness against possible efficiencies. The result includes focusing our attendance at denominational events to where we are asked to present seminars aimed at helping people be good stewards of their resources, offering our members and clients electronic delivery of our publications, and outsourcing more of our design and mailing operations. We are moving to new technology that will dramatically reduce our in-house printing costs, and we are changing one Board meeting to greatly reduce costs while increasing dialog time.

The decision to make these and other changes within BBT was weighed carefully and ultimately approved so that we can continue to be responsible in our operations and responsive to our members and clients.

But our hearts are heavy. We soon will be saying goodbye to five of our colleagues who have worked hard for the benefit of all who BBT serves. They each are receiving benefits that will assist them in finding new employment, and their work at BBT will be celebrated before they leave. But this change leaves uncertainty for them in finding new employment.

We thank them for their service, and we wish them the very best in the future. They will be missed. — N.D.
Supporting loved ones through economic challenges

We all know someone whose job has come to an abrupt halt since the market upheavals in 2008 and 2009. Job loss has impacted the lives of everyone, including the young and old: Older employees currently average 53.6 weeks of unemployment before finding a new job according to AARP, while only 59.5 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in the work force were employed in July 2011 — the lowest rate for that demographic in the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ history.

With the nation’s job market at a low point, there are many people out there who have lost their jobs or who are affected by a job loss in their family. It’s difficult to comfort friends and loved ones who are grieving the loss of their careers, financial security, and self-esteem. How can you comfort those whose lives have been impacted by the Great Recession?

Ask how you can help

You may feel uncomfortable talking with your loved one about his or her recent job loss, but an important way to be supportive is to ask if you can offer your help, or offer to do specific things so that person doesn’t have to determine what would be helpful. It can be difficult for those in need to ask for assistance, so offer it before it’s requested.

Children may need extra support

Losing a job can impact family dynamics, even if the household finances are secure. Children in particular may struggle to understand why a parent has lost a job. The New York State Department of Labor suggests keeping children “in the loop” regarding job loss and the job search process — that way they don’t manufacture worst-case scenarios. Children need to be reassured that it’s neither a parent’s nor the child’s fault. It might even be helpful to children if they are allowed to feel like they are helping the family stay strong through the hard times. “(Kids) want to help, and having them do something like taking a cut in allowance, deferring expensive purchases, or getting an after-school job can make them feel as if they are part of the team,” the Department of Labor guide recommends.

Keep them in a rhythm

For someone who’s spent perhaps their entire adult life in a work schedule, being derailed from the 9-to-5 rhythm because of unemployment might be a huge source of stress. Help that person stay active and motivated to fill each day with routine events. For example, help the person schedule a “shift” in the day for job searching. Encourage him or her to volunteer during the week — the feeling of working, combined with getting that person out of the house, might improve his or her outlook.

Encourage your unemployed friend or family member to take control over forces that can be controlled. Setting up meetings with former colleagues, attending job support groups and career fairs, and spending time making a great cover letter better might be the things that your loved one can do to feel in control of the situation. — B.S.

LTCi: A New Year’s resolution worth making and keeping

Have you thought about purchasing long-term care insurance, but just keep putting it off? Maybe you need more information or are concerned that it might cost too much. Why not make yourself a New Year’s resolution to check out long-term care insurance? It’s a choice that can give you peace of mind for the upcoming year and many years to come.

After all, consider the other insurance products you invest in, like home insurance or car insurance, and what your risks are after age 65. The 2011 American Association for Long-Term Care Insurance Sourcebook reports that men have a 2.2 percent chance of having a major house fire and a 15.5 percent chance of having a severe car accident, but a 44 percent chance that they will need LTCi. Women over 65 have a 2.6 percent chance that they’ll have a major house fire and an 18 percent chance they’ll get in a serious car accident, but there’s a 72 percent chance that they’ll need LTCi.

If this information has persuaded you to make a resolution about LTCi, contact Brethren Insurance Services today. BBT’s Insurance staff members can provide answers to your questions, offer additional information, and create a free proposal that will give you an idea of cost. Please call 800-746-1505 or send an email to insurance@cobbt.org to learn more.

This year, keep your New Year’s resolution. You’ll be glad you did!
Steppin’ Up and Steppin’ Out!

Participants in NOAC’s Step Up and Step Out for Ministry Summer Service 5k walk gather before taking a scenic stroll around the shore in Lake Junaluska, N.C. (above). The early-morning event was co-sponsored by BBT and the Youth and Young Adult Ministry. Participants at all paces joined in on the fun (bottom left and center), and the morning’s walk ended with healthful snacks for participants (bottom right).

“Budget challenges ...” continued from Page 1

management system. Lauryn and her husband live in Elgin, Ill.

Diana Seymour joined the Insurance team in January 2010 to help grow that ministry’s medical and ancillary business. She spent 24 years in the insurance industry before working at BBT, including positions with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida and The Plexus Groupe. Diana and her husband live in Bartlett, Ill.

These staff will complete their duties in mid-December, but will receive salary and benefits through March 31, 2012. They also will receive consulting services to assist them in finding employment.

Additionally, in the restructuring process, Randy Yoder will end his employment with BBT on Dec. 31, 2011, but maintain a role with BBT as an individual contractor selling Long-Term Care insurance.

Patrice Nightingale will shift to the manager of production position effective Jan. 1, 2012, to reflect the changing level of demand on BBT’s Communications department.

In September, German Gongora joined Church of the Brethren Benefit Trust’s Information Technology department as its programmer analyst and technology support specialist. German brings over 20 years of technology experience to this new role. His most recent position was as a consultant in Naperville, Ill., which is where his family currently resides. German holds a Master of Business Administration from the Universidad del Rosario, Bogota, Colombia, and a Bachelor of Computer Science from Universidad Catolica de Colombia, Bogota, Colombia.
Get through tough times with alternative income streams

Whether you just need some extra cash for the Christmas season, or you are unemployed and looking for ways to supplement your cash flow, consider these ideas about creating a new source of income —

Leverage your expertise
Think about your skill set for a moment — you might be surprised at how long the list actually is. Perhaps one or two things on it could be leveraged into something bigger? Maybe you can use your expertise in a particular field as the subject of a lesson to teach at a community center or local college. Are you a crafter or artist? Use a website like etsy.com to sell your handmade goods. Are you a skilled writer? Check out  squidoo.com, a company that enlists experts to make small websites for every topic under the sun. For every skill you have, there’s likely to be an outlet — however great or small — for you to earn a bit of cash on the side.

Make sure your friends, family, and congregation know about your special skills, too. They can help match you with opportunities that arise that can make good use of your talents.

Downsize your “trash” — it might be treasure
Thanks to sites like eBay.com and craigslist.org, the Internet has become a huge marketplace for buying and selling goods between individuals. It may be emotionally difficult to convert family heirlooms, collections, or other prized pieces into income, but if you have items that you suspect have some value on the open market, this might be the time to sell them.

How do you determine the price to sell your beloved pieces? A place to start might be the sites you’ll use to sell the items. Compare asking prices for similar items and move forward from there. Depending on what you’re hoping to sell, it may make sense to consult a member of the Appraisers Association of America. This group focuses mostly on personal property; learn more at www.appraisersassoc.org.

Embrace your inner entrepreneur
Perhaps it’s time to write your own success story. Being unemployed and passionate about a business idea can give you the time and focus needed to embark on a new frontier. The U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy reports that loan standards loosened in the second quarter of 2011 as demand for small business loans ticked up. The quarterly report also notes that “the increase in the number of start-ups and expansions of existing businesses led to net employment increases in the last three quarters of 2010.” This means that your bright idea could one day allow you to hire someone in a similar economic situation! — B.S.

Become an expert on church finance and tax laws!

Registration is now open for the Best Practices Resource Workshop to be held Saturday, Feb. 4, 2012, at the Kansas City International Airport Marriott in Kansas City, Mo. The seminar is co-sponsored by Church of the Brethren Benefit Trust and is designed for pastors, church treasurers, financial secretaries, stewardship and finance committee members, and others involved with the finances of their church. This workshop for congregations will empower your church to better understand financial management for congregations, health care reform, pastoral housing issues, retirement issues, and more. To learn more, visit www.brethrenbenefittrust.org/best-practices-workshop.

Can’t make it? BBT will provide a free DVD of highlights from the seminar to the first 200 interested individuals. After that, they will be available for $19.95 each. Contact BBT staff at communications@cobbtt.org or 800-746-1505, ext. 376, to order your copy.
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the staff at Brethren Benefit Trust!

Save trees, save money — “go green” and get BBT’s newsletters electronically

Conserving financial and natural resources is important to Brethren Benefit Trust, and we hope you will help us do that. That’s why the organization recently began offering members and clients the option of receiving three of its most widely circulated publications via email rather than on paper. The agency’s Annual Report; its quarterly newsletter, Benefit News; and press releases/news briefs that are sent to BBT’s members and clients throughout the year can now be received electronically by completing a brief form at www.brethrenbenefittrust.org/green. Join the hundreds of members who have already signed up!

Test out our new email addresses!

Beginning in November, BBT email addresses became easier to read and type. Now, staff email addresses follow this format: [first initial last name]@cobbt.org. For example, BBT President Nevin Dulabaum’s email address is now ndulabaum@cobbt.org instead of ndulabaum_bbt@brethren.org. This new email address structure eliminates the hard-to-read underscore and strengthens BBT’s organizational identity. Soon emails sent to the old BBT addresses will not be received; please update your contact list and spam filter immediately.

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