

[Click for Table of Contents](#)

SPECIAL ISSUE

Oasis

JUNE 1995

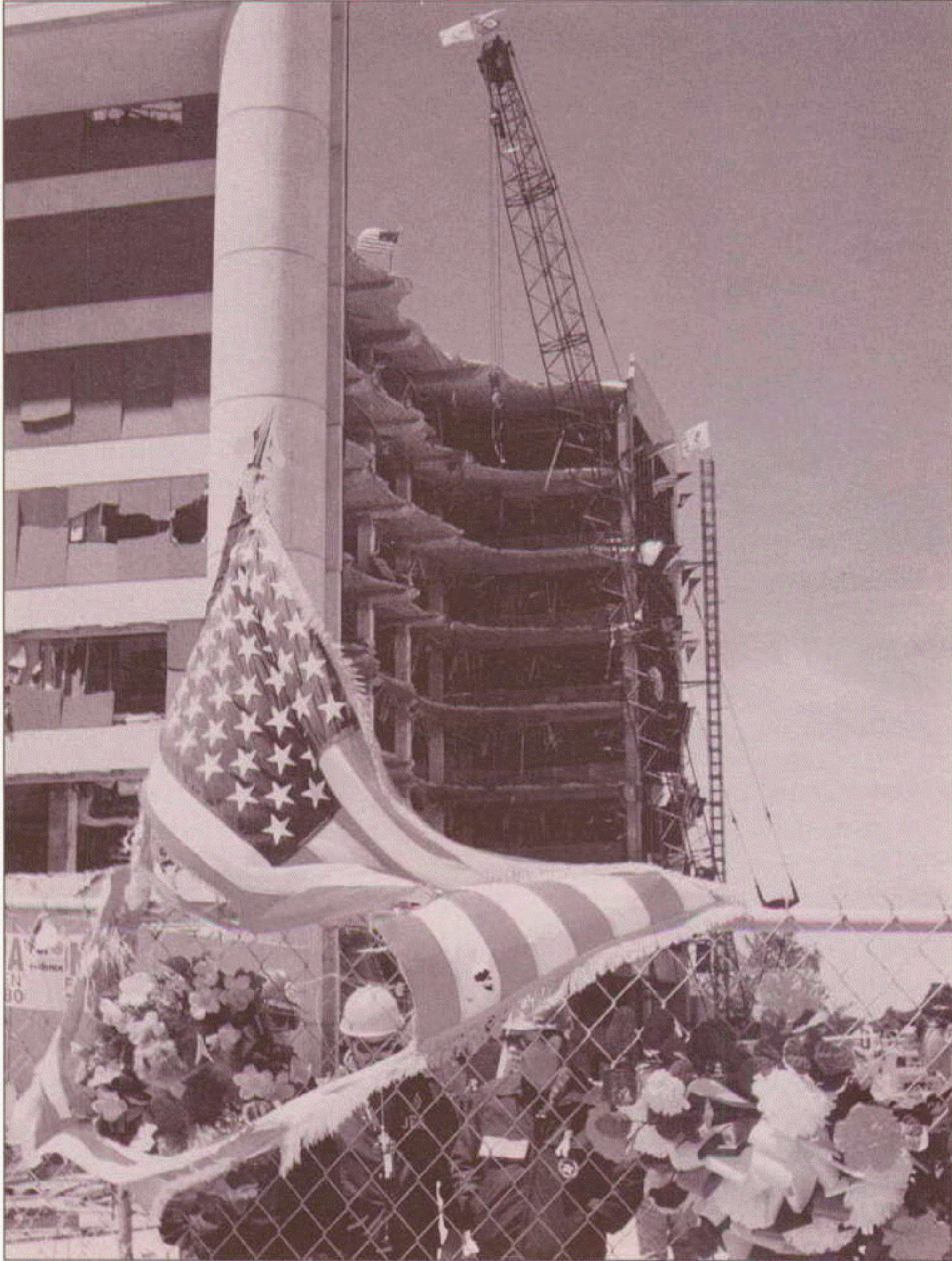


photo courtesy of Gene Romano, FEMA

Bomb destroys federal building in Oklahoma City

Oasis

Click on a Topic Below

Features

- 4 Bombing in Oklahoma City
- 7 Personal accounts: what happened in the district office
- 10 Incident leaves SSAer widow
- 11 Memorial observances

- 12 Employees we lost
- 13 Crisis counseling aids healing
- 14 Relief efforts organized
- 15 How employees are helping

Departments

- 3 Commissioner's message
- 17 Personnel matters
- 18 Inklings: remembering a friend

From the editor

This special issue of *OASIS* focuses solely on the Oklahoma City bombing incident. It is being distributed desk-to-desk so that every employee can receive a copy. We encourage employees to take it home to share with their families.

Many people contributed to this issue, especially employees in the Dallas Regional Office and the Oklahoma City Area Director's office. We appreciate their time and efforts. We'd also like to thank the employees in the Oklahoma City District Office who took the time to talk and write to us about their experiences. It was a difficult task, but we know that SSAers nationwide will want to read their emotion-packed stories, which begin on page 7.

One especially touching story is that of Claims Rep Judy Walker who lost her husband Bob in the tragedy. She talks about their life together, beginning on page 10.

A special thank you goes to Gene Romano of the Federal Emergency Management Agency



for sending us several pictures, including the one on the cover.

As it turns out, Gene not only helped coordinate rescue efforts in Oklahoma City, he also took two of the photos we're printing in this issue. On the cover, a torn American flag recovered from the destroyed federal building and memorial flowers adorn a security fence, while law enforcement agents stand by.

The artwork in the center of this column is a reproduction of the receipt that employees are given after donating to the headquarters memorial garden. More information about the garden is on page 11, as well as on the back cover.

Throughout this crisis, employees have responded with an outpouring of sympathy and support for the victims of the bombing. We will report more on their efforts in future issues.

Sheryl Morris

Shirley S. Chater
Commissioner

Sheryl Morris
Editor

JUNE 1995 VOLUME 41 NUMBER 5
SSA Publication No. 03-010

Joan Wainwright
Associate Commissioner
for Communications

Judy Clapsaddle
Assistant Editor

Published for the employees of the Social Security Administration.
Contributions and inquiries should be addressed to the Editor,
4-H-10 West Highrise, Baltimore, MD 21235. Phone 410-965-3909.
cc:Mail address - Sheryl Morris at -S5R

Commissioner's message

Commissioner Chater addresses the Oklahoma City tragedy

This special issue of *OASIS* is devoted to coverage of the shocking events that recently occurred in Oklahoma City. Shortly after the devastating blast that virtually destroyed the Murrah Federal Building, I saw firsthand the terrifying results of this horrible act. I had the honor of meeting with some of the families of SSA employees who had died in the blast, and, on behalf of all SSA employees, I extended our sympathy and support.

I talked with SSA employees who had endured the physical and emotional pain inflicted by the bombing. And despite their personal feelings, I was amazed by the sense of courage and hope that survivors and their families demonstrated time after time. The people I met will serve as an inspiration to me for the rest of my life.

I also want to thank Regional Commissioner Noel Wall and his regional office staff who responded so quickly to the disaster. The employees in the states that comprise the Dallas Region—Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, New Mexico and

Texas—are especially aggrieved by this tragedy since they have worked so closely with many of SSA's Oklahoma City employees over the years.

While April 19, 1995, will be a "defining" moment in American history it will also serve as a time of renewed commitment to public service. The heroes we saw on the evening news or read 'about in the papers were mostly public servants—people who seldom get the respect that they richly deserve for conducting their day-m-day business of helping people. We saw images of federal employees who carried co-workers to safety and of Oklahoma City police and firefighters who struggled, sometimes unsuccessfully to save the lives of dozens of people.

There were the painful images of federal employees who experienced the emotional guilt of not being able to do more to help their co-workers and friends, and we heard the inspirational stories of injured workers who returned the day after the bombing—to temporary offices—in order to get back to the work of helping



others. As public servants, we should all be inspired by the courage and strength of our fellow federal employees, as well as the state and local people who were there for us at a time of crisis.

This has been a very traumatic event for all Americans, but particularly so for us at SSA. From what I have seen of the character of the employees of this agency over the last several weeks, I know that you will continue in the proud tradition of caring for others and of facing challenges head-on with conviction and strength.

Shirley J. Chater

Oklahoma City tragedy

Coping with the aftermath of monumental disaster



photo courtesy of Gene Romano, FEMA

Members of the Puget Sound Urban Search and Rescue Team march out of the make-shift memorial at the base of the destroyed federal building after completing their final recovery shift.

April 19 began as a normal work day. At 9 a.m., the reception area of SSA's Oklahoma City District Office was buzzing with activity. Fifty of the office's 61 employees were on duty and between 20 and 30 members of the public were ready to conduct business.

But two minutes later, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building home of the DO and other government agencies, was ripped apart by a bomb blast. The DO, located on the first floor of the building, was at the core of the blast.

Damage to the federal building was severe and deadly. After more than two weeks of searching through the rubble, rescuers recovered 166 bodies, including 16 people who worked in the SSA office. News reports identified 21 DO visitors who were killed. Most SSA employees sustained some injuries, four were hospitalized overnight, three for several days and one is still in the hospital.

"We share in the horror and outrage at this act, and our concerns are with all those affected by this disaster," Commissioner Chater stated. "It is a terrible and senseless tragedy."

The Commissioner visited Oklahoma City from Sunday April 23, through Wednesday

April 26. She met with employees and families of blast victims in homes, in hospitals, at the area director's office, and at funerals, extending her sympathy and support.

President Clinton arrived on Sunday to participate in a memorial service organized by Oklahoma's First Lady, Kathy Keating. Several DO survivors and family members of employees who were killed had a private audience with the President and Mrs. Clinton prior to the service.

SSA joined other federal agencies in taking quick action to help survivors and their families cope with the tragedy. Less than three hours after the explosion, members of a regional recovery team, headed by Dallas Regional Com-

missioner Noel Wall, were onsite in Oklahoma City to provide support for SSA employees and to restore service to residents.

Personnel services

"A major concern of the team was to ensure the well-being of SSA employees and to make arrangements for counseling and personnel services," Noel said.

A trauma counselor from SSA's Employee Assistance Program spoke to surviving employees on Friday April 21. "That was the first time that the employees had seen each other since the explosion," said Area Director Dick Allen. "It started the healing process for many of them." (See related article, page 13.)

Jan Powell, a regional office personnel supervisor newly assigned from the Department of Health and Human Services to SSA, assisted with workers' compensation claims, federal survivors claims and payroll issues.

The SSA recovery team arranged for Department of Labor employees to take workers' compensation claims involving

No accounts lost at federal credit union

The explosion in the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building destroyed the one and only Federal Employees Credit Union where SSA employees and more than 500 beneficiaries had direct deposit. But, thanks to modem technology, all of the FECU accounts were electronically controlled, and no accounts were lost.

"The day after the disaster, the Dallas region notified my office about the situation," said Program Analyst Russ Young, Office of Public Services and Operations Support.

"Before I learned that the FECU accounts were secure," he continued, "I was afraid that we would have to divert the funds to another credit union and reconstruct all of the accounts.

"Fortunately, all of the FECU databases were intact and accessible electronically from another location," Russ added. "And to accommodate customers who

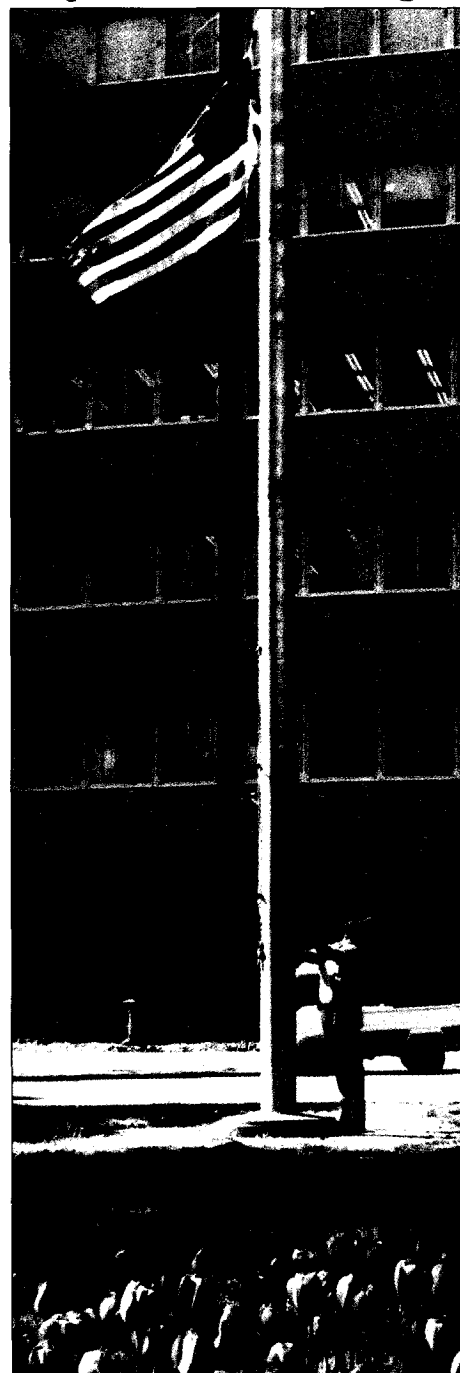
wanted to cash checks, the Treasury Department set up a temporary credit union at the Tinker Air Force Base nearby."

Soon after the explosion, the Dallas region contacted employees to assure them that their pay would not be interrupted. At the same time, various SSA office components at headquarters and the Mid-America Program Service Center worked together to send a letter to beneficiaries.

"Everybody dropped what they were doing to cooperate with this project," said Russ.

"Because of the strong commitment to teamwork among SSA staffs, we were able to get this special notice out to more than 500 beneficiaries in a few days.

"Thanks to modem-day technology and dedicated SSA employees, at least a payment problem was one thing no one in Oklahoma City had to worry about."



Flags at federal installations were flown at half-staff in honor of Oklahoma City bombing victims.

SSA employees injured or killed in the bombing. All claims were taken and many of them were processed within two weeks.

Quick action

Almost immediately after the bombing, RO personnel in Dallas began the process of identifying Oklahoma City pending workloads and reassigning scheduled appointments to offices across the region. There was minimal delay in handling the Oklahoma City DO telephone appointments that were scheduled for Wednesday and the next few days. Employees in other offices took those interviews.

"Many offices continue to help with interviews scheduled since the bombing, and the process is working smoothly," Noel said.

At the recovery team's request, calls to SSA's 800 number from the Oklahoma City area code were routed to the Grand Prairie, Houston and New Orleans tele-

service centers, and those tele-service reps were given special instructions for handling the calls. The call volume has been closely monitored, and other calls have been redirected as needed to ensure that calls from area code 405 get through quickly

James Everett, Assistant Regional Commissioner for Program Operations and Systems, said that a special 20-person OKC Unit was set up in the Dallas Training Center. A number of training center employees as well as volunteers from around the region worked to identify from computer records all pre-claims, initial claims, appeals and postentitlement actions that were pending in the Oklahoma City DO at the time of the explosion. They are processing the pending workload, contacting claimants and beneficiaries as necessary to complete the work.

Work was reassigned from the nearby Moore, Shawnee and

Chickasha branch offices to free those employees for increased walk-in traffic, and additional interviewers from across the region were detailed to those offices.

To simplify matters for survivors of federal workers in other agencies, SSA employees in designated offices, such as El Dorado and Pine Bluff, Ark., and Bartlesville, Okla., called to help them file survivor claims. For example, the Bartlesville BO was linked with the Federal Highway Administration.

"Overall, with the immediate and unlimited support offered by central office components," Noel said, "we have been able to maintain essentially full service for residents of the Oklahoma City area."

Helpful publicity

"Information about how to take care of Social Security business was provided to local news outlets through news releases, interviews with reporters and a news conference by Commissioner Chater and Noel," said **Dee O'Neil**, Regional Public Affairs Officer.

The day after the bombing, Assistant Regional Commissioner Earl Melebeck's Field Services Branch team began to survey new office sites. Thanks to this quick work, a new Oklahoma City DO opened on May 22 in a shopping mall about four miles away from the site of the bombed federal building.

"SSA employees everywhere treated this horrific event like a family tragedy," Dee said. "The messages of condolence and offers of personal and operational support from around the country have meant a lot to the surviving employees of the Oklahoma City DO and the families of those employees who were killed." ♦

Building home to 15 federal agencies

The nine-story Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City opened in 1977 and has housed various federal agencies during the years. On April 19, the building was home to 15 agencies, several defense department offices and a day care center.

In addition to our 61 employees and about 24 children who attended the day care center, the approximate number of other workers and agencies affected by the bombing include:

- **125-Housing and Urban Development;**
- **48 - U.S. Army;**
- **31-Federal Employees Credit Union;**
- **26 - Federal Highway Administration;**
- **23 - General Services Administration;**
- **22 - Department of Agriculture;**
- **22 - Defense Investigative Services;**
- **19 - Drug Enforcement Administration;**
- **17-U.S. Marine Corps;**
- **15 - Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms;**
- **15-Secret Service;**
- **10-Department of Veterans Affairs;**
- **8-Health and Human Services;**
- **6-Customs Service;**
- **5-General Accounting Office; and**
- **1-Department of Labor.**

Sheer terror

Employees recount the horror of the Oklahoma City tragedy

At 8:50 a.m. on April 19, Claims Rep **Dan DeMoss** went to the large plate glass window at the front of the Oklahoma City District Office and paused to look up at the sky. After a moment, he turned and walked to the back of the office to one of the PCs, picked up a file and began to type a letter. At the desk directly behind him, Assistant District Manager **Dennis Purifoy** already was busy working.

Not far from Dan and Dennis, Operations Officer **Eric McKisick** was demonstrating the features of one of the office typewriters to a representative from Langston University. It was to be a morning of show-and-tell as Eric escorted the representative from one piece of office equipment to the next.

Claims Rep **Richard Dean** was at his desk in another section of the office. He had just finished his first cup of coffee and was completing some paperwork he had started the day before.

And Claims Rep **Loni McNiven** was giving a co-worker advice on conducting an interview in Spanish with a non-English-speaking claimant.

Twelve minutes later, at 9:02 a.m., the nightmare began.

"The explosion threw me out of my chair, knocked my glasses

off and sent my PC flying past my face," said Dan. "The room had gone completely black and there was just the horrifying sound of concrete crashing down all around me."

Dan continued, "I was stunned afterward and had to lay on the floor for a moment. When I was able to get up, I walked over to Dennis and pulled him out from under a two-foot-high pile of rubble. Looking up through the skylight nearby, I could see clear to the ninth floor of the federal building."

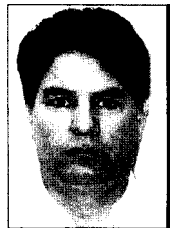
At this point, Dan, Dennis, Eric and Richard thought they had experienced a natural gas explosion. Lorri was knocked unconscious for some time after the explosion.

"It's strange," Richard said, "but I remember seeing a brilliant flash of light, simultaneous with the sensation of an invisible force pressing me out of my chair to my knees and hearing a huge explosion before everything turned black. I found myself covered with heavy five-foot square ceiling tiles, shattered glass from light fixtures, modular furniture panels and the overhead doors from my modular credenza unit which had sheared off."

The eight-inch pressurized pipe in the ceiling, providing chiller water for the building's

'The room had gone completely black. . . '

-Dun



air conditioning system, had severed, pouring 42-degree water into the work area.

Dust and debris from the fallen ceiling tiles caused many people to gasp for air.

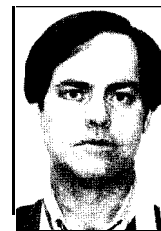
"The fallout was so thick I could eat it, and it took everything I had just to breathe," said Eric. "The worst thing was not being able to see. Until my eyes adjusted, I couldn't tell if they were open or not."

"All around me, I could hear employees screaming and trying to get out."

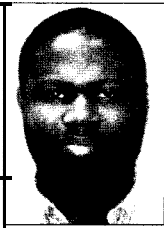
After they recovered from the initial shock of the explosion, Dan, Dennis, Eric and Richard turned to help others who were in distress.

'I remember seeing a brilliant flash of light. . . '

-Richard



**'The fallout was so thick I could eat it. . .'
-Eric**



"One by one I managed to free several employees from the rubble," Richard said. "I took them out the emergency exit located in the breakroom at the rear of the office. The interior walls around the breakroom had collapsed and the exit door had been blown open, providing the only light source for the back half of the office.

"During my third trip back into the office, I was lucky to find and dig one co-worker out alive from under three to four feet of debris. The force of the explosion had blown her back 40 feet from the reception area," he added.

Meanwhile, Dan and Dennis were working feverishly to help some co-workers trapped in the stockroom near the front of the office.

"They were screaming for us to get them out," said Dennis.

"We managed to pull them up out of some of the rubble and then waited for the firefighters to lower a ladder through the skylight. I returned to the main part of the office to search for other survivors. I was calling out. Lorri returned my call, and I followed her voice and found her on top of some filing cabinets six feet above the desks."

Lorri said, "About the time I crawled to the top of the filing cabinets, I looked at my watch. It was 9:50 a.m. I was in a daze. I heard Dennis calling and called for help.

"By this time, I was soaking wet and barefoot with fiberglass embedded all over my face. Luckily, all the electricity was out. The

water was two feet deep and with all the loose wiring, many of us would have been electrocuted."

Dennis and Lorri exited the building through the emergency exit at the rear of the office.

Within half an hour after the bomb went off, survivors began to trickle out of the dark death-trap of the Murrah building and into daylight and safe surroundings. As employees emerged from the building, they were jolted by noise and confusion.

"The scene was utter chaos," said Richard. "The area surrounding the building was saturated with rescue workers, firefighters,



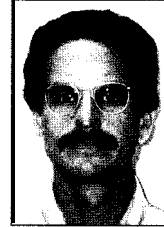
**'I was in a daze. . . and called for help.'
-Lorri**

police and ambulance personnel. As far as the eye could see, the streets were congested with the walking wounded. First aid stations and triage units shared opposite corners with burning vehicles."

Later, charter buses were brought in to transfer the wounded to area hospitals.

Richard borrowed a flashlight from a firefighter, reentered the building a final time and concentrated his search in the front part of the office. He assisted two firefighters by pointing out areas where he knew employees should have been seated at the time of the explosion.

After several minutes of lifting and moving debris, Richard found a co-worker lying by her desk, obviously in severe shock. She was carried up the ladder through the skylight by the Oklahoma City firefighters.



**'The prayers and concern for us meant so much. . .'
-Dennis**

As they left the building, all employees began to search for each other to see who had managed to get out safely.

Dan said, "Later, as I was walking away, I glanced back at the gutted Murrah building with black smoke billowing up from burning cars and realized, for the first time, the extent of the destruction and devastation caused by the bomb. I wonder how anybody got out of there alive."

Following the tragedy, Oklahoma City employees received an outpouring of moral, as well as financial, support from SSA employees around the country. (See related story, page 15.)

"On behalf of the Oklahoma City District Office, I'd like to thank everyone for being so kind to us in our time of need," said Dennis. "The prayers and concern for us meant so much, and the number of cards that poured in from every office was astounding."

It's been less than two months since the Oklahoma tragedy, and like before, Oklahoma City DO employees are back on the job helping others. The tragedy will never be forgotten, but the DO is moving forward.

"I'm so happy to be back to work, and so are many of my co-workers," said Eric. "We have a mission to serve the public and nothing will ever be able to stop us from accomplishing that mission." ♦

Personal account

'I thought my clothes and skin were melting off my body'

by Nancy Shaw
Claims Rep
Oklahoma City, Okla.

Returning to work after maternity leave last year was much easier knowing that my son George was right upstairs from me in the day care center. It was wonderful. I would bring George down to the office to show him off. I would go play with George and the other children at lunchtime. I became very active and served on the center's board of directors. I thought there was no safer place, because it was in a federal building.

George had been at the center less than a year when I had to take him out because of repeated respiratory infections. Looking back on it now, I am grateful that he wasn't there on April 19.

On April 19, I arrived at work about 7 a.m. and began processing claims. At 8:30 a.m., a co-worker asked for some assistance on a case. We were just finishing up when there was a deafening boom and then total darkness. There was an immediate burst of wind that was so intense that my hair was pressed against my face and my clothes were pressed tightly against my skin. I was still sitting at my desk and turned my

head away from the blast and tucked my body down.

It was terrifying. I thought my clothes and skin were melting off my body. When my co-worker called out to see if I was all right, her voice brought me back to reality. I immediately said, "No." But I felt my body and arms and realized that my body was okay. The smell of oily smoke and dust filled the room, and we used clothing to cover our mouths and noses.

We removed the debris that had fallen on top of us. Wires were hanging from the ceiling, and we could not see very far in front of us. We were afraid the building would collapse, but were afraid to move or fear of being electrocuted. We could hear water running and realized no sparks were coming from the wires. I fumbled around in the dark and found my cellular phone in my desk. By that time, four of us had gathered by my desk, and we climbed on top of desks and over debris to exit through what used to be our back door.

I came out with a few minor cuts, a few bruises and breathing difficulties. After we exited, we were told to move away from the building. I never saw the front of the building.

I feel blessed that I did not have to witness the devastation



Nancy and George, Halloween 1994.

and human suffering in the front of the building. Some of my co-workers were not so fortunate and those sights will be etched in their minds forever.

Once outside, I used my cellular phone to call my family and let them know that I was alive. It was hard to get a line, but I finally got through about 9:30 a.m. They were hysterical because of the view of the building they were seeing on television. Other people near me wanted to call their families, too, so I gave my mother the names and phone numbers of other people to call.

The next hour we spent on the streets trying to locate co-workers, but it was impossible because the police kept directing us farther away from the building for fear of another bomb. A group of us walked several blocks and stopped in a restaurant. A television was on, and it was only then that I realized that our building was in shambles.

(Editor's note: Nancy Shaw started her SSA career in 1977 as a development clerk in the Gretna, La., District Office. She came to work in the Oklahoma City DO in 1979.)◆

'Package deal'

Two SSAers—together in life, separated by death

They met in 1985 while working in the Southeastern Program Service Center. She was a secretary; he was a benefit authorizer.

"I knew when I saw him that he was the one for me," said Judy Walker. "He had a wonderful voice, and I liked his confident walk. So I asked him out for dinner."

That dinner was the first step to the altar for Judy and Bob Walker. They married a year later.

In 1988, a pilot teleservice center opened in Birmingham, Ala. Bob and Judy accepted positions

as technical assistant and teleservice rep, respectively. Then, in 1989, they both went to help open the Albuquerque TSC.

"We were a package deal," said Judy "While at the Albuquerque TSC, Bob and I helped paint a mural depicting hot air balloons on the wall in the main area. It's still there today"

To further his SSA career, Bob wanted to get claims experience. So both Walkers applied for claims rep positions.

"Bob was selected for the Oklahoma City DO," said Judy.

"To go with him, I took a (downgrade to a service rep. Then this

past December, I was selected for a claims rep position. I started a class at the Dallas Regional Training Center in February.

"I had an apartment there, and Bob and I would visit on most weekends."

'When I saw the building, I knew that everyone did not get out.'

—Judy Walker

It was while she was attending class that Judy heard about the bomb blast at the federal building in Oklahoma City. She flew home on the first available flight.

"I didn't realize the magnitude of the blast until I got into the airport and saw the TV coverage," Judy said. "When I saw the building, I knew that everyone did not get out."

Judy and a friend went from hospital to hospital trying to find Bob.

"Bob had had heart surgery last June," Judy said. "So I knew he needed his daily medication. Each day that went by was harder and harder. We kept hoping there was a chance he would make it."

Bob's mother, sister and brother came from Florida to wait with Judy. Three of their children from previous marriages also arrived from out of state. They all spent a lot of time at the center established for the families of victims.



Bob and Judy Walker attend a Christmas party in December 1994.

Finally on May 2, almost two weeks after the blast, rescuers found Bob's body in the rubble of the building that had once housed the DO.

"It's been hard," said Judy "But the agency has been wonderful to me. Everyone has offered support.

"Bob was well known throughout the Birmingham and Albuquerque TSCs," Judy continued.

"It was comforting to find the many friends who attended the memorial service. Just their physical presence was important to us."

Bob was buried in Leeds, Ala., about 20 miles east of Birmingham. "That's where we always called home," said Judy

Bob was born in Jacksonville, Fla., in 1942. He attended the University of Florida. He was an Eagle Scout and active in scouting for 46 years. He was a Mason and a Shriner, performing fund-raising activities to benefit the burned and crippled children's fund. Bob also served as assistant district commissioner and unit commissioner for the Will Rogers District in Oklahoma City He joined SSA in 1980.

Judy reminisced about how Bob enjoyed working on his computer at home. "We also loved to just jump in the car and travel across the states sightseeing," she said. "We had recently purchased a motorhome and were looking forward to using it for family reunions and vacations."

Bob is survived by one son, three stepsons, one stepdaughter, and 12 grandchildren.

"Recently, when I attended the funeral of co-worker Mike Thompson, I finally saw many of my co-workers," Judy told OASIS. "They were the most beautiful faces I have ever seen. I lost Bob, I lost many friends, but I'm very thankful for the ones I didn't lose." ♦

Remembrances

Memorial garden symbolizes more than loss

In the days and weeks following the April 19 bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City, there was an outpouring of sympathy and condolences by SSA employees.

Employees also sought to remember the lives and contributions of their co-workers killed in the tragedy.

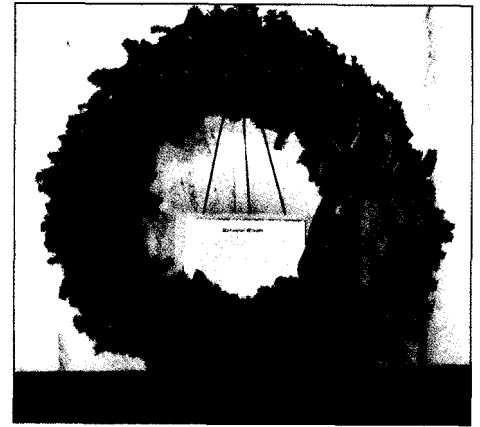
On Thursday, April 27, several thousand headquarters employees attended memorial services offered by clergy of several denominations.

Plans also were made quickly to establish a memorial garden at SSA headquarters, which was dedicated in a brief ceremony on May 19. (See back cover.)

This memorial garden will serve as a remembrance of the SSA employees who died in the April 19 devastation in Oklahoma City. A flowering redbud tree, the state tree of Oklahoma, will be the focal point of the garden. Other plantings will eventually grace this garden, as contributions for funding the garden are received from employees.

Also, a memorial plaque listing the names of SSA's victims will be placed in the lobby of the Altmeyer Building.

Employees can make contributions to the memorial garden through the Employees Activities Association, 6401 Security Boule-



vard, Attn: Memorial Garden, 1-C-14 Operations Building, Baltimore, MD 21235.

Of course, other memorial services and events have been held across the country, as **Commissioner Chater** noted in a May 10 *Commissioner's Broadcast*.

She said, "The memorial garden is just one way in which we can remember and honor the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing. Many of you in the field are planning your own services, such as planting trees, memorializing the SSA victims with a plaque in your office, and/or gathering for a few moments just to remember your colleagues.

"Whatever you may choose to do to honor the victims of the Oklahoma City tragedy, I thank you for your support and concern for the SSA employees who lost their lives in such a senseless event." ♦

In memoriam

Honoring those the agency lost in the Oklahoma City bombing

RICHARD ALLEN, Claims Rep, had 22 years of service with SSA. A Vietnam veteran, he was born in Bailey's Crossroads, Va., and won a scholarship to Panhandle State University in Goodwell, Okla. He is survived by a daughter and his mother.

SAUNDRA AVERY, Development Clerk, worked nine years for SSA. She was a native of Danville, Ark., and was active in her church. A graduate of Central State University in Edmond, Okla., Sandy is survived by her parents and a brother.

OLETA BIDDY, Service Rep, worked 20 years for SSA. Oleta was born in Rosebud, Ark., and was active as a Sunday school teacher and taught children's choir at her church. She is survived by her husband, a son, two grandchildren and two sisters.

CAROL BOWERS, Operations Supervisor, had 33 years of service at SSA, starting as a clerk-steno in December 1961. Carol was born in Chandler, Okla., and is survived by her husband and a son.

SHARON CHESNUT, Claims Rep, worked for SSA for 21 years and was an active member of her church. She was born in Oklahoma City and is survived by a daughter, her mother, a sister, a stepson and a stepdaughter.

KATHERINE CREGAN, Service Rep, had 14 years of SSA service. Kathy was a native of West Memphis, Ark. A widow, Kathy is survived by three sons and five grandchildren.

MARGARET GOODSON, Claims Rep, had almost 21 years of service with SSA. Margaret enjoyed motorcycling and camping trips with her husband. Other survivors include three sons, one daughter, three brothers and four grandchildren.

ETHEL GRIFFIN, Service Rep, had 19 years of service with SSA, starting as a claims clerk. She was born in Illinois, where she attended Southwest Jr. College and the College of DuPage. Ethel is survived by her husband, two children and three grandchildren.

RONALD HARDING, Service Rep, had more than 30 years of government service. He served two years in the Army and also worked for the Air Force before joining SSA in 1967. A respected musician, Ron is survived by two sons, two daughters, his parents, two brothers and a sister.

RAYMOND JOHNSON, National Indian Council on Aging worker, was stationed in the Oklahoma City DO for the past six months, helping with Head Start programs for Seminole children. Born in Lawton, Okla., Raymond is survived by his wife, seven children, 21 grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and a brother.

DERWIN MILLER, Claims Rep, worked at SSA for five years. Derwin was an Arkansas native and a member of the Army Reserve. He was hired through the Outstanding Scholar Program. He is survived by

a daughter, his parents, two brothers, a sister and two grandmothers.

CHARLOTTE THOMAS, Contact Rep, had 12 years of service with SSA. She was employed previously with the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services. Charlotte is survived by a son.

MICHAEL THOMPSON, Field Rep, worked for SSA for 19 years. He served in the Army for more than two years. A Vietnam veteran, Mike is survived by his wife, three sons, one daughter, his mother, two brothers and one sister.

ROBERT WALKER, Claims Rep, had 15 years of service with SSA. He served in the Army for three years. Born in Jacksonville, Fla., Bob attended the University of Florida. He is survived by his wife, one son, three stepsons, one stepdaughter and 12 grandchildren. (See story page 10.)

JULIE WELCH, Claims Rep, was hired under the Outstanding Scholar Program in August 1994. Julie was a recent graduate of Marquette University and had studied abroad at the University of Madrid. She is survived by her parents, a brother and a stepbrother.

WILLIAM STEPHEN WILLIAMS, Operations Supervisor, had 20 years of service with SSA. An Oklahoma native, he had a degree in mathematics from Oklahoma State University. Steve is survived by his wife, three daughters, his father, two sisters, one brother and two grandmothers. ♦

Crisis counseling

Getting help to start the emotional healing process

Coping after a major crisis is always difficult. But when tragedy strikes, such as recent events in Oklahoma City, help from SSA's Employee Assistance Program is just a phone call away.

"The EAP is available to help employees cope with a major crisis through 'critical incident stress debriefings,'" said EAP Counselor Mike Parrish. Such a debriefing was held for Oklahoma City employees soon after the April 19 bombing.

"For most of us," Mike said, "a major crisis will overwhelm our normal coping ability and cause us to experience symptoms of traumatic stress. These symptoms often include insomnia, crying spells, feelings of guilt or helplessness, lack of appetite and thoughts of the incident that keep coming back to mind.

"The symptoms may last up to six months or longer," he continued. "They vary in intensity depending on how bad the crisis was, how we usually cope and other recent pressures. Our counselors are trained to help employees cope with these symptoms and to help them start the healing process."

"The employees involved in the Oklahoma City tragedy suffered from a great deal of trauma stress that, in turn, produced very

intense symptoms," said Kathleen Thomas, the SSA EAP contract counselor who conducted the debriefing. "Many of the employees suffer from recurring nightmares and memory loss."

Kathleen continued, "Most of the employees expressed a great deal of 'survivor' guilt during the debriefing session. They wondered why they had survived the explosion while co-workers sitting next to them were killed.

"On one level, they were happy to be alive and happy to see their co-workers who survived. And on another level, they were filled with sadness and depression about the people who didn't make it.

"Also, several employees experienced what I call the 'near miss' syndrome. For one reason or another, these employees were not on duty at the time of the bombing."

Mike explained the debriefing process. "At the beginning of a session," he said, "counselors ask participants to share the facts related to the incident—the who, what, when and where.

"Next, participants are asked to talk about how the crisis has affected them. We teach them about the symptoms associated with trauma stress. This sharing of information can be helpful in allowing people to feel normal about what they're going through.

"At the end of the debriefing, participants are referred to outside counseling resources or support groups that can provide extensive help."

In addition to crisis counseling, EAP offers grief counseling to employees after the death of a friend or co-worker. This was incorporated into the assistance offered to Oklahoma City employees.

"Grief counseling is very similar to crisis counseling," said Mike. "In both situations, the main objective is to allow people an opportunity to talk about what they are experiencing.

"Grief counseling may focus on the specific stages of the grieving process, which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance of the loss.

"Crisis debriefings and grief counseling sessions will not make the traumatic feelings and symptoms go away," Mike added, "but they can be helpful in conveying to participants that they are not the only ones going through this.

"Victims of trauma and grief basically have the ability to heal themselves. EAP counseling tries to enhance and encourage that self-healing process."

Managers and employees are urged to contact their local EAP to learn more, to arrange group or private counseling sessions or to seek referral services. ♦

Relief efforts

Organizations provide way to cope with tragedy

Many organizations have mobilized efforts to provide assistance and support to our employees and others who have been affected by the bombing in Oklahoma City. The following list contains groups that may be contacted.

- SSAOKC Relief Fund
c/o Dallas Federal Credit Union
PO. Box 50891
Dallas, TX 75250-0891
- AFGE Oklahoma City Relief Fund
c/o United Bank
Attn: Customer Service
4600 Southeast 29th St.
Del City, OK 73155
- Oklahoma City Federal Family Assistance Relief Fund
Oklahoma Federal Credit Union
517 NE 36th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105-2523
- Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund "OK Fund"
8441 W. Bowles Ave.
Suite 200
Littleton, CO 80123
1-800-323-4140
- Central Oklahoma Combined Federal Campaign
c/o Metro Oklahoma City
United Way
P.O. Box 837
Oklahoma City, OK 73101-0837
Attn: Chris Marshall
1-405-236-8441
- Salvation Army
P.O. Box 12600
Oklahoma City OK 73157
1-800-SAL-ARMY
- America's Charities
12701 Fair Lakes Circle
Suite 370
Fairfax, VA 22033
1-800-458-9505
- American Red Cross
PO. Box 37243
Washington, DC 20013
1-800-HELP-NOW
- B'nai B'rith Disaster Relief Fund
1640 Rhode Island Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20036
1-202-857-6600
- Catholic Charities
Oklahoma Explosion,
Disaster Response Office
1731 King St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
1-703-549-1390
- Children Charities of America
1111 oak st.
San Francisco, CA 94117
1-800-3741578
- Christian Service Organizations of America
1111 Oak St.
San Francisco, CA 94117
1-800-626-6349
- Independent Charities of America
1111 Oak St.
San Francisco, CA 94117
1-800-477-0733
- National Black United Federation of Charities, Inc.
1313 N. Capital St. NE
Suite 102
Washington, DC 20002
1-202-797-0407
- National Voluntary Health Agencies
1660 L St., NW
Suite 601
Washington, DC 20036
1-800-6540845
- United Way of America
701 North Fairfax St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
1-703-836-7100 ♦

Disaster response

Employees support co-workers in Oklahoma City

In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building employees in offices around the country are responding with their prayers, commemorative ribbons, blood donations, fund raisers and unstinting emotional support.

A central mailing address has been provided for employees to send personal messages and condolences to employees and to the families of those who died. Messages can be sent in care of SSA Area I, 8524 S. Western Ave. Suite 111B, Oklahoma City OK 73139.

Also, at the request of many SSA employees/ a special relief fund has been established by the Dallas region to help the victims of the bombing. (See accompanying article listing various organizations and funds.)

Following are some of the efforts employees have undertaken.

Memorials

● Employees at the Birmingham Teleservice Center paid tribute to former co-worker Bob Walker, who died in the Oklahoma City bombing. Bob's widow, Judy, also worked at the TSC, but was not in Oklahoma City at the time of the bombing. (See related article, page 10.) TSC employees wore yellow ribbons on the eve of Bob's funeral, which was held in nearby Leeds, Ala. The funeral

home and graveside services were filled with friends and co-workers. Elizabeth McCormick, Birmingham TSC Unit Manager and friend of the Walker family initiated a fund raiser to provide meals at area restaurants for the family while they stayed in a local motel.

● The Auburn, Wash., TSC collected \$230 for a floral wreath that was delivered to the federal building in Oklahoma City the week after the bombing. Many of Auburn's 500 employees continue to wear ribbons in remembrance of the bombing victims.

● Employees in the Kingston, N.Y., District Office wore ribbons in purple, blue and yellow in memory of their lost co-workers in Oklahoma. Purple symbolized federal workers; blue, Oklahoma state; and yellow, the children. Larger ribbons in the same colors were on display in the office. Staff members sent cards and condolences and wrote poems expressing their sense of loss. Claims Rep Ann Papelian arranged a memorial service for the staff, and employees donated \$264 to the Red Cross.

● The staff of the South Boston, Va., Branch Office planted a maple tree at the office entrance in a memorial ceremony dedicated to the victims of the bombing. A local landscaping firm donated the



Employees in South Boston, Va., plant a maple tree with a special memorial plaque.

tree and will maintain it, and employees placed an inscribed marker at the site. Federal employees from other agencies and community residents attended the ceremony which was featured in local newspapers.

● A "Scrapbook of Care" was placed in the lobby of the Mid-Atlantic Program Service Center, accessible to all 1,200 employees. The book, filled with expressions of hope and sympathy for their co-workers, was delivered to the new office in Oklahoma City when it reopened.

● Staff in the Puyallup, Wash., BO placed a floral display with a black ribbon in the reception area. The display was later replaced by a "dish garden," which will serve as a permanent memorial.

● Eugene, Ore., DO employees participated in two memorial tree plantings—one at a local grade school and another organized by federal employees in the community. Employees also donated



Claims Rep LaVonne Sellers (l.) and Service Rep Nancy Lewis, Puyallup, Wash., with flowers.

blood and sent contributions to various relief agencies.

● Employees in the Wilmington, Del., DO dedicated Public Service Recognition Week to the memory of the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing. A special memorial message was displayed in the reception area and signed by members of the staff before being sent to Oklahoma City.

Donations

● Employees in the Office of Acquisition and Grants held a non-denominational memorial service, after which more than \$700 was donated to the AFGE Oklahoma City Relief Fund.

● Employees in the Winter Haven, Fla., BO purchased items for the new Oklahoma City DO breakroom. Items included three pictures of Florida landscapes, a silk flower arrangement, a toaster, a can opener, flatware, paper goods, coffee and dishwashing supplies. Also, individual donations totaling \$250 were collected for the DO to use as needed. A specially designed card was signed and sent from the entire staff.

● GlenRock, NJ., BO staff contributed \$200 to the FEEA OK Fund. Claims Rep Sandra Baran arranged purple, blue and yellow ribbons that were placed on one corner of each TAP terminal. She also created a large wreath decorated with the same colors, using ribbons and flowers, for the recep-

tion area. A small sign by the wreath expresses sympathy and explains the meaning of the colors to those visiting the office.

● On Tuesday, April 25, the Kansas City Regional Office sent six TAP terminals and a printer to Oklahoma City.

● Employees in the Mount Vernon, Wash., BO learned that one of the SSAers who survived, Claims Rep Katie Wreggit, is a native of the Mount Vernon area. Office contributions will be donated to a relief effort in her name.

● Instead of going out to lunch for Secretary's Day, secretaries in the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Operations chose to donate what they would have spent. They put the funds toward the building of a headquarters memorial to the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing.

● Lawton, Okla., DO employees sent a large fruit basket to the recovery team based in the area's director's office in Oklahoma City.

● Denver Regional Office employees participated in a blood drive in May at the federal building. Blood donations signal support for the victims and families and assist any and all rescue operations where blood is needed.

● Claims Rep Sue Stubblefield, Sarasota, Fla., DO, canceled her vacation time to help out in Oklahoma City. She had planned to visit relatives in the Oklahoma City area during May. After she heard about the April 19 disaster, Sue volunteered her services to help out with the area's workload. Area Director Dick Allen asked her if she would be willing to work in the Moore, Okla., BO. Sue worked the week of May 15.

Fund-raising activities

● The Corinth, Miss., BO assisted Tri-State Bingo and Mississippi Committee for Prevention

of Child Abuse in promoting a benefit bingo donating the net proceeds to the injured children of the Oklahoma City bombing. A total of \$8,661.62 was raised.

● In a concerted effort to raise funds for Oklahoma City victims, employees in Wisconsin field offices sent all donations to the Milwaukee (Dwtn.) DO, designating their choice of charities. In all, \$7,500 was collected. Local TV news featured a visit to the DO and interviews with employees.

● Employees in the Pocatello, Idaho, DO raised \$1,053 through a community ribbon sale and forwarded the money to the Red Cross for use in the Oklahoma City relief effort. Their campaign received local media attention.

● Employees in the Effingham, Ill., BO have been collecting money for items needed in the new Oklahoma City DO. Claims Rep Linda Beyers reported that the office sent \$175 from the sunshine fund along with money raised from a book sale.

● To help publicize the Indio, Calif., BO auction, Claims Rep Nancy Holman called on community contacts that she has cultivated through years of being the wife of a coach at the local high school. Generous community response netted 120 substantial prizes and all inland area (including all of Arizona and southern Nevada) offices joined in the fund-raiser.

● Throughout the Boston region, employees dedicated Public Service Recognition Week activities to their co-workers in Oklahoma City. Fund-raisers were held to collect money for the victims and survivors. Regional office staff alone raised more than \$1,100 for the FEEAOK Fund.

● The Redlands, Calif., BO held a "white elephant" sale on April 28. Household items, toys, clothing and even a slot machine were

auctioned. Several employees provided baked goods for sale. A total of \$500 was raised from both activities and sent to Oklahoma.

*The Auburn TSC is raising money to purchase a replacement refrigerator and/or microwave oven for the breakroom in the new Oklahoma City office space.

- Wilmington, Del., DO employees are planning to sell tickets to a local minor league baseball game and donate the profits to help victims and their families.

- The Chula Vista, Calif., DO is selling T-shirts bearing the agency seal with the motto "We're here to serve you" on the front. The message on the back reads, "S.S.A. In Memory of our Fellow Social Security Employees, Oklahoma City District Office."

The shirts are produced locally and were designed by the son of Claims Rep Al Villasenor. The cost is \$15. Sizes can be ordered in medium, large and extra large. All proceeds above the production costs, shipping and postage will go to a memorial fund. Mail your order to Oklahoma City Fund Raiser, SSADO 436, Attn: A. Villasenor, 380 3rd Ave., Chula Vista, CA 91910. For more information, call Al, 619-427-1970.

*Benefit Authorizer Jose Roman, Northeastern Program Service Center, has designed a button to commemorate the victims. The button features a ribbon, a map of Oklahoma and the date of the bombing. Money raised through button sales will go toward the memorial planned for Oklahoma City, as well as toward a memorial plaque for the PSC lobby that will be inscribed with the names of SSA employees who died. The buttons cost \$2 each.

If you are interested in purchasing buttons, please contact Eleanor Jobbagy, 718-557-5001, or at E-mail address: I I NY ARC PCO (NEPC). ❖

Personnel matters

Benefits for those hurt or killed in the line of duty

The disaster in Oklahoma City brings to light the various types of payments that injured federal employees or the survivors of employees who die may be eligible for because of federal employment.

Each of the agencies involved in administering these programs has established expedited procedures for processing applications for payment to victims of the blast.

Workers' compensation

Workers' comp is administered by the Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs.

If an employee died, his or her surviving spouse and dependents may qualify for monthly compensation benefits. Compensation death benefits can be paid on behalf of dependent parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and grandchildren at various percentages according to the degree of dependence.

An injured employee also may receive a scheduled award, a lump-sum benefit paid for a specified period of time, as compensation for the loss of or permanent impairment of certain parts or functions of the body (such as loss or use of an eye, or removal of a kidney due to injury); or for serious disfigurement of the head, face or neck.

Funeral and burial expenses up to \$800 may be paid.

Retirement system benefits

Generally, compensation benefits and federal retirement bene-

fits are not payable for the same period of time. Federal employees or their survivors must choose between the two benefits. In most cases, the primary benefits will be paid by DOL. Therefore, the Office of Personnel Management, which administers both the Civil Service Retirement System and Federal Employees' Retirement System, is coordinating efforts with DOL representatives.

Different rules apply to both retirement systems, but each one offers disability as well as survivor benefits.

Insurance benefits

Injured employees generally will receive medical benefits through DOL's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs. Dependents enrolled under a Federal Employees' Health Benefits plan will be covered by that insurance plan. Life insurance coverage and coverage for other losses also are available to enrolled employees and their survivors. Both the FEHB program and the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance program are administered by OPM.

Unless FEGLI coverage had been waived, survivors of employees who died in the Oklahoma City bombing will receive payment of the face value of the employees' FEGLI coverage, including accidental death coverage. Covered employees who lost limbs or eyesight may be eligible for accidental dismemberment benefits.

For more information, see your servicing personnel office. ❖

'A piece of me is buried with him'

by Warren Vieth
News Editor
Washington Bureau
Los Angeles Times

I last heard from Steve Williams on April 7, when he sent an e-mail computer message seeking help with a song he was writing, a song about overcoming stage fright and other emotional trauma. He was struggling with the verses, but had penned a chorus that he liked, ending with a call to action:

"Grab the world and shake it now, or maybe you never will."

Looks like the world reached up and grabbed Steve before he could finish his song.

Can anyone comprehend it, rationalize it, explain it? William Stephen Williams, 42, comrade-in-life since second grade, musical co-conspirator for 29 years, husband and father of three, suddenly buried-perhaps dead, perhaps alive-in a mountain of rubble created by a bomb. A piece of me is buried there with him.

Steve worked at the Alfred I. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, where he had some kind of managerial job with the Social Security Administration. I never bothered to ask him what it was.

His office was on the ground floor, north side, just a few feet away from the spot on the street where some embittered soul attained his 15 minutes of fame

by detonating a truck full of explosives. The bomber could have chosen any of a million other locations, even in Oklahoma City. For reasons that might go forever unexplained, he chose to park at Steve's doorstep.

Nearly 30 hours after Wednesday's blast, this much is known: Steve commuted as usual to Oklahoma City from the country home he built a few years ago on land farmed by his grandfather. His only sibling, Mike, built his home right next door, and the two families raised their children together, providing each other with the kind of parental backup that is rare these days.

Steve arrived at work after dropping off his wife, Barbara, at her office a few miles away. He was supposed to preside over a 9:15 a.m. meeting on the fourth floor of the Murrah building. Social Security officials are not sure where he was when the bomb exploded at 9:04 a.m.

Of 61 agency employees who reported to work, 46 survived the blast and have received treatment. Steve is one of the remaining 15 whose fates are still unknown as emergency personnel begin the process of retrieving bodies from the wreckage. A Social Security official said the 15 apparently worked in the area near Steve's office, where the bomb damage was extensive.

After learning of the explosion, Barbara headed for St. Anthony Hospital, where the first round of survivors was being treated. She then rushed to Baptist Memorial

after someone recalled seeing a bomb victim who seemed to fit Steve's description being sent there. But he wasn't there, and no one had any information about Steve. It might be days before everyone was accounted for, Barbara was told. Yet there was room for hope. Some people trapped in the wreckage apparently were still alive, and emergency crews were doing their best to locate and retrieve them.

Maybe one of them would be Steve. Maybe.

Barbara was sent home, where she joined her three daughters, who range in age from 15 to 22. By mid-day Thursday, she had received no new information about Steve. She planned to drive to an Oklahoma City church where the families of bomb victims were to receive updated information later in the day.

As a journalist, I have developed my profession's trademark callousness toward the horror and tragedy spawned by such events. How senseless, how sad, we say to each other, shaking our heads before turning our attention to the next big development.

But this was no ordinary earthquake victim, no routine battlefield casualty. This was my best friend, and I don't make friends that easily.

Steve and I grew up in the little town of Kingfisher, Okla., about as far away from the hot spots and nerve centers of the world as it's possible to get. We became good friends in grade school, but the relationship was cemented

when it became clear to us, at the age of about 13, that we had been put on Earth to be rock 'n roll sensations.

Steve promptly got an old Fender guitar and amp; I got the world's ugliest drum kit, a set of used, champagne-pink Slingerlands that I later sold to Steve's little brother, who probably still bears a grudge. We played together in a succession of adolescent garage bands, regularly antagonizing neighbors and family members and occasionally performing publicly in Kingfisher and surrounding towns, where farm kids would pay \$2.50 apiece to hear bad renditions of old Stones and Creedence Clearwater songs while they pretended to dance, made out in the corners, or slipped outside to guzzle beer.

Our first official band was called Synthetic Image, its one public performance notable only because the bassist played a demented, 20-minute version of "Gloria" on his back, writhing around the stage of the local parish hall to the dismay of church officials and the delight of the eight-graders in attendance. Later came Flagship, a lineup that briefly included a black bass player who arranged for us to practice in the vacant gym of the town's abandoned "colored school."

We were joined now and then by old guys from the neighborhood who played harmonica or guitar and sang country blues.

The band survived several incarnations, until we suffered the collective misfortune of graduating from high school and going our separate ways, some to college, some to military service, all of us convinced by a succession of parents, teachers and counselors that there could be no future in music. Drums were dutifully packed away in the

attic, guitars consigned to dusty closets.

Steve received a degree in mathematics and landed a job with the government. He worked for a few years in Illinois before he and Barbara decided that living near their families was more important than career advancement. Steve arranged a transfer back to Oklahoma, where the family has lived since. Sure, he acknowledged when his family came to visit a couple of years ago, Oklahoma's hard-right politics and slow-paced lifestyle get old sometimes, but at least it's not a dangerous place like Washington.

I haven't seen Steve since last summer, when he and I and two other old friends got together for a short tour of Mississippi and Tennessee, where we gambled at riverside casinos, critiqued Nashville bar bands and fished for imaginary trout.

During the trip, Steve and I had an extended discussion about traits that distinguished one person from another. Suppose you were a battlefield general, he said, and you became convinced you could end the war and prevent the deaths of thousands of people, but only by ordering hundreds of soldiers under your command to march into machine-gun fire that was certain to kill nine out of 10. Could you give the order?

Steve thought he could; I figured I couldn't. I assumed that reflected a certain cowardice on my part. I can't help but wonder now whether it was a twisted form of battlefield logic that made someone load a minivan with explosives and park it outside Steve's office Wednesday morning.

Over the years, as Steve's domestic obligations multiplied and my job took me from one end of the country to the other, we managed to play music together



photo courtesy of John Hopkins, FEMA

Rescue workers search through devastated federal building in hopes of finding someone alive.

only once or twice. But we talked about it frequently, both of us apparently harboring the same unstated fantasy that one day we would pick up where we left off.

Steve broached the subject directly only a few months ago, sending me the garage-band equivalent of a Chamber of Commerce promotional video, his meandering narration and story-telling interspersed with howling guitar solos performed on the patio of his country home.

Steve, old friend, know this: If your heart is still beating under the weight of all that concrete and steel, if you're still able to reach out and grab the world and shake it, I swear I'll help you do it someday

(Editor's note: This article appeared in the Los Angeles Times on Friday, April 21. Operations Supervisor Steve Williams was confirmed dead on Tuesday, May 2. Reprinted with permission.) ♦

Dedication

Memorial garden established at headquarters to honor victims

On May 19, thousands of headquarters employees joined together to pay tribute to those SSAers who lost their lives in the Oklahoma City bombing.

During the memorial service, Principal Deputy Commissioner Larry Thompson asked employees to observe a moment of silence.

Commissioner Chater said, "You may think it unusual to gather to mourn people we did not personally know. But these were not strangers. . . . They were giving, caring compassionate people. People just like us. We know what was in their hearts."

John Gage, President, AFGE Local 1923 (a co-sponsor of the memorial fund) also paid tribute to the Oklahoma City District Office employees, And Witold Skwierczynski, President, AFGE National Field Council, read the Call of the Honored.

After the ceremony employees followed a memorial processional to the front of the Altmeyer Building where a redbud tree, the official state tree of Oklahoma, was planted in the memorial garden.

Commissioner Chater told the audience, "Each time we see this tree, we should take a moment to think about the families and friends of those employees who died and hope that their pain is easing. Also, pause and remember those who survived. Look at this tree as a reminder that life is precious." ♦



Employees participate in the planting by throwing dirt onto the tree bed.

**SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
BALTIMORE MD 21235**

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

**BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
DHHS/SSA
Permit No. G-11**