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This issue of *Jornada Post* is brought to you by Jeanne Gomoll and Scott Custis, who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53704. 608-246-8857. Jeanne's email is: Jeanne@unionstreetdesign.com; Scott's email is Scott@unionstreetdesign.com. This is *Jornada Post* #3, Obsessive Press #280, Peerless Press #147. *Jornada Post* was created using a Power Macintosh G5, InDesign 2.0, Illustrator 10.0, Photoshop 7.0, and a Xante AW1200 printer. Display font is Rennie Macintosh. All contents copyright © 2003 by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, October 2003 for the Turbo-Charged Party Animal #208.

▣ Union Street Design LLC

[JG] Two and a half months have passed since my layoff and the start of my new business, and I'm feeling fairly good about life. I like working at home, and as long as enough jobs come in, I'm in it for the long haul, i.e., no serious job-hunting. It turns out I don't have to worry too much about keeping focused on my work. In fact, I realized with horror a couple weeks ago that I was still reading Margaret Atwood's book, *Oryx and Crake*, three whole weeks after starting it. Yikes! Apparently I forgot to build reading time into my schedule. Well the day after I noticed that, I scheduled a whole hour at lunch-time for reading and finished off the book that night, but was nonetheless surprised at the unconscious way I had allowed work to take priority over most other choices. Not all work is billable work. There was a huge amount of organizing and networking to do at the beginning, which I'm less frantic about now, but still takes a significant amount of my time. And the class for writing a business plan has turned into a big project too. But I like the sense of control I have over what and how I do work. I had to laugh the two days ago when I decided I needed to buy an upgrade of a piece of software. Moments after making that decision I went on-line and bought it. It arrived today. I laughed because that process at the DNR would have taken 2-4 months. I'd have had to put in a request, gone to a meeting to justify it, and then waited for the paperwork to go through.

Working on my new Mac G5 is fun too. It's really, really fast. The day before I began using it, I was working on a map with my old G3. The base map had been originally created with GIS (database) software, which creates horrendously huge files. Millions of data points, dozens of layers, all of which are essential in a database, but that translate to ludicrous redundancy in a graphic format. Anyway, it took at least 5 minutes just to open the file, and would often take more than that to do a normal save. The screen refreshed very slowly. The next day, after I'd transferred my files over to the G5, I opened the file, and I didn't even see a progress window. It just opened instantaneously. Saves also happened instantaneously. Screens re-drew in a second. Lovely. That plus the fact that I finally switched to a DSL Internet connection makes me feel way more efficient. I like that.

I wrote an email to the editor of our local weekly newspaper, *Isthmus*, in mid-June, soon after I received my at-risk notice at the DNR. Many of the local Madison folks will have already seen it. I told the editor, Bill Leuders about the situation at the DNR, and my situation in particular and suggested that there might be a story here. Bill decided to do a feature article on the loss of expertise in state employment, and the state's growing reliance on outside contractors. The writer assigned to the story, Tom Laskin, contacted me in August and asked me if I would be willing to do an interview for the story. OK, I said. As it turned out, they apparently had a hard time finding folks willing to speak on the record. There's been a lot of fear among state workers lately. Everyone's afraid of losing their job or being bumped by their co-workers. So I guess I can understand why this is true, but at the time I assumed that they would do many interviews and that my story would be one of many. As it turned out, I was the protagonist of the story, which came out on October 9. I'm going to include the draft of the story at the end of this zine (and apologize to Madisonians who've already seen it). Tom sent it to me a week before the issue came out, which was really nice of him, I thought. I've gotten many, many compliments about the article from for-

mer co-workers at the DNR. It seems every time I'm out in public around town, at the grocery store, on the street, someone comes up to me and says something nice about the article. There was a good picture of me in the article, so people recognized me who might not otherwise have known me. The photographer had to keep reminding me that she didn't want a "happy Jeanne" photo, so I had to keep repeating aloud, "I'm pissed, I'm pissed, I'm pissed!"

■ Turbo 208
Lisa Freitag

[JG] There's a place on Lake Michigan that occupies a similar place for my family as does Boothbay Harbor for your family. It's the seashore around and a specific campsite at Kohler-Andrae State Park on Lake Michigan. We camped there many times when Rick, Steve and I were young, before Julie or Dan were born, which means I was 10 years old or younger the last time. We've all returned a couple times as adults, with and without other family members. One of the last times Rick vacationed with my folks before he died, they went to Kohler-Andrae, from which a favorite family story, "the finding of the keys in the lake" was born. Dad once found a watercolor painting in a gallery of two sand dunes overlooking Lake Michigan that reminded us all of "our" campsite. We all think it is our campsite, in fact. Looking at the painting can bring me close to tears. All my associations with this place are utterly joyful.

■ Isthmus Cover Story

State workers on the ropes
For former employees like Jeanne Gomoll, the state's budget cuts are not an abstraction.

Tom Laskin reports
Cutbacks have saved money -- and cost the state a few good employees

By Tom Laskin

Jeanne Gomoll loved her 23 years at the central Madison office of the state Department of Natural Resources. She took pride in producing the art and layout for everything from state pheasant hunting regulations to full-length books for fellow DNR employees around the state. After being vested in the state's pension plan, she figured she'd remain in the

department until retirement. When there was talk that some DNR heads would roll due to the state budget cuts, she never expected that hers would be one of them.

"I never thought I had any chance of being laid off," says Gomoll, whose job was eliminated this August along with that of every other DNR graphic artist. "That was naive, but I think for many, many state workers, that was the expectation."

Now pursuing freelance work, the 52-year-old Gomoll has lost her naiveté. So have a lot of other current and former state workers. Their dreams of secure employment leading to retirement have given way to the nightmare reality of Wisconsin's \$3.2 billion deficit, plugged in part by Gov. Jim Doyle's decision to eliminate 2,900 state jobs. In the resulting brave new world of state-employee relations, dedication to a job doesn't matter, nor does mastery of a specialized skill set. What matters is the state's need to erase a lot of red ink, and getting rid of personnel is one obvious way to do it.

Most of the cuts have not involved layoffs but rather the loss of positions through attrition and "the elimination of already vacant jobs". Karen Timberlake, director of the Office of State Employee Relations (formerly the Department of Employment Relations) says there will be 2,815 fewer state positions for this fiscal year than last. So far, she says, 125 permanent fulltime employees have been "let go to the street," with another 740 declared "at



'I never thought I had any chance of being laid off.'

risk” of lay off.

These numbers don't tell the whole story. Under complex civil-service rules, many employees facing layoffs have “bumped” workers in similar job classifications within their departments, leading to more dislocation, if not outright job losses. The rules also stipulate that limited-term employees (LTEs) with the same job classifications as laid-off permanent workers must be shown the door as well.

Timberlake's office doesn't track the comings and goings of LTEs (who have no job security and **few** benefits), but she admits some of them are receiving pink slips as a result of the mandated job cuts. And the pain doesn't end there. Deputy State Budget Director Dave Schmiedicke reports that state agencies still have to find ways to achieve more than \$40 million in cuts included in the budget passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor. As a consequence, even more state positions will need to be cut over the next two years.

And this, remember, is only the beginning: Doyle, during the campaign, promised to cut 10,000 jobs from the state's 66,000-employee payroll over the next eight years.

Then there are negotiations over job benefits, including health care coverage, which for Gomoll and the other three-fourths of state workers who signed up for the state's preferred group plan came free of charge, save for small co-payments on prescriptions. Under the state's new system of health coverage, non-union employees seeking full family coverage could end up paying more than \$600 a year for the cheapest HMO option.

Yes, a tsunami of change is occurring in state employment, and it's the kind of change that could alter the quality and commitment of state workers forever. Wisconsin government has long prided itself on providing top-notch services, for which it's aspired to have top-notch workers. But as workers feel the crunch, and state government is seen as a less secure and less desirable employment option, the quality of those services will be eroded.

Dedication, devotion

When Jeanne Gomoll came to the DNR in 1980, she had a degree in geography from the UW-Madison and a small portfolio of free-lance graphic arts work. She planned to give the job about five years, then move on to her own freelance business.

But, during the early part of her tenure, the department began to produce more high-end publications, and soon Gomoll was hooked on the challenges of the work. In the late 1980s, she began toying with computers at home in her spare time, bringing new skills to the DNR and convincing the rest of the artists to become computer literate.

Pamphlets, books, posters, maps for the state parks: Gomoll did them all, gaining the respect of hundreds of DNR “clients” in the field and at the Madison office who

engaged her for their projects. What had been a good career move out of college quickly became a career, and working for the DNR became part of her identity.

“Besides being a dream job because of what I did, I really liked working for the DNR,” she says. “I liked working for an environmental organization, and the people I worked with were passionate and committed and really amazing people. That was a big plus, too.”

Gomoll could have made more money in the private sector, but that was okay. After living rent check to rent check as a student and young adult, serving the state's high-profile environmental agency paid well enough to help her secure a mortgage with her partner (who works for the Department of Transportation) and amass some savings. Since she'd rarely taken a sick day, she'd also managed to save nearly 1,000 hours of sick leave, all of which could be converted to health care payments upon retirement. She wasn't getting rich, but she was financially secure. What's more, she'd gained that security doing something she believed in and doing it well. The dream job had led to a very satisfying life.

But secure, satisfied state workers don't mean much in hard financial times. At least not to politicians. Gov. Doyle tried to ease the pain at the DNR by including increases in hunting and fishing fees as a way to pump up revenues. But the GOP-led Legislature rejected the fees. Adding insult to injury, it also made deeper cuts into the DNR's budget which, according to agency budget director Joe Polasek, could mean the loss of 230 positions.

“For example, they took \$2.7 million out of the department's administrative functions,” he says. “They just wanted the cash, and they didn't mandate how it would be taken. But in our administrative area, it's primarily people-oriented. We are going to have to cut more positions.”

And those positions aren't simply fat. Polasek says they include most of the DNR's computer-support personnel, research positions, administrative assistants and, of course, all of its graphic artists. The result, he says, is that by the time the third round of cuts is finished in February (Gomoll's job was eliminated in the first round), programs the public takes for granted will be severely threatened.

“The classic example is when there's cuts to the parks budget,” says Polasek, who like Gomoll and others feels the Republican-led Legislature is deliberating targeting the DNR. “It's mandated they take the cuts, but closing parks is never an option. So there's those kinds of things. If we get into yet another round of cuts, we'd need to take a real good look at programs that we can and cannot deliver.”

Another consequence of these budget cuts and job losses, says Polasek, has been a severe decline in morale. Gomoll saw the spirit draining away from her old department, too, and in a way feels fortunate to have gotten her pink slip at the beginning of the bloodletting.

With the skills she acquired at the DNR and on her own, she can go out and pursue her freelance work -- some of which, ironically, will include contracting with the same DNR clients she used to serve as a salaried employee. The staff that remain, she says, must continue on with woefully inadequate support.

"I have the stress of losing such a good position," she says. "But the stress is also seeing what is happening to the DNR, not only as an employee but as a taxpayer. The image I have of the DNR -- as an editorial cartoon kind of thing -- is of a person bound and gagged struggling on the ground with some big industry person or legislator standing above them with their hands on their waist saying, 'Why are you taking so long getting those permits done?' ...We're handicapping the people who remain, stripping people out of key positions and support services. It's just going to be more difficult for them to get their work done."

Outsource this!

What's happening at the DNR and elsewhere bothers state Rep. Terese Berceau, a Democrat whose Madison district is home to many state workers. She says cutting jobs and benefits doesn't just hamper the state's ability to do its work. The slashing and hacking also makes it more difficult to attract and retain quality employees who are so dedicated to public service that they are willing to make some financial sacrifice in order to lend their skills to Wisconsin government.

Berceau lays the blame squarely at the feet of the Republicans in the Legislature.

"We have many people working for state government who would be making more if they were in the private sector," she says. "State engineers are a good example. They could make more in the private sector, but one of the tradeoffs if you come into the public sector is that you get a good benefit plan. The fact that their [health care] benefits are being reduced, the message to them is really, 'Tough. Go out into the private sector, get that better paying job. We don't want you working for government anyway.'"

Berceau fears that once professional and skilled workers are met with that kind of attitude, they will no longer consider state employment as a viable option. She adds that simply reducing the number of state workers won't guarantee savings in the long term. The reality is that while jobs are being cut, outsourcing of state work has increased considerably in recent years. And at great expense.

For example, a study of outsourced information technology costs prepared for the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by the Legislative Audit Bureau shows that spending on outside consultants increased from \$93.6 million in 1998-99 to nearly \$125 million in the fiscal year 2001-02.

"After 16 years of Republican control of state government," says Berceau, "there is a lot of contracting out

in our state agencies, more than I think a lot of people know. And from everything I've ever seen, this is costing us more than if these people were public employees. Cutting government positions isn't necessarily the answer. I think the answer is taking a look at what we're paying to maintain certain programs and services, and are the employees under the right umbrella? While contracting out has definitely been the Republican philosophy during the Thompson and McCallum administrations, I think we need to take a much closer look at that. No one's really shed light on the fact that it's costing us a lot more money, not saving money."

Carol Weidel, president of Professional Employees in Research, a small union that represents research analysts, economists and other skilled workers, agrees. For example, members of her union used to compile patient data -- tracking illnesses, patients and so on -- for the entire state of Wisconsin. Recently, that work was outsourced to the Wisconsin Hospital Association, hardly an uninterested party. The irony is that while Weidel's membership lost work, the expense of compiling data didn't go away.

"I think it's a corrupting influence," she says of the trend toward outsourcing. "And I think it will eventually undermine the civil service." Moreover, she feels putting data analysis in the hands of private groups and businesses threatens the state's ability to guarantee public safety and health.

"Some people are pissed off by government oversight, of course," she notes. "But at times when there's food-borne illness out there, the same people are saying, 'Where's the government oversight?'"

Jeanne Gomoll knows all about the predations and peculiarities of outsourcing. She may have lost a state salary and state benefits, but as a freelancer she will still be doing graphic arts work for the DNR. The agency got rid of its graphic artists, but didn't eliminate its need for them. So now, the agency must contract this work out. And that, she notes, means additional work for the staffers that remain.

"They're having to pay attention to artists' contracts now," she muses. "Everything the DNR graphics artists did was paid for by the citizens of Wisconsin, so they owned the copyright. That's changed. And they're going to have to make sure the work of the outside artists will be accepted by the printers. The pre-press work that's usually done for high-end jobs can get pretty complicated and it has to be **done** correctly."

In other words, with a printing budget of about \$1.5 million a year, the DNR will still be turning out publications. There will just be, as Gomoll puts it, "another level of chaos" between the work she used to do in-house and the freelance work that she and other artists will now perform for the DNR on a contract basis. Where, she ask,

are the savings?

Paying up

What, if anything, can be done to ease the pain and stem the state employee brain drain? Karen Timberlake of the Office of State Employee Relations says the Doyle administration does not view state workers with a pitiless eye. She notes that the governor has instructed his appointees to make as many job cuts as possible through attrition and by cutting vacant positions.

To retain knowledgeable and skilled workers, the department heads have also been urged to place laid-off workers in other jobs whenever possible. Awareness of the PR problem that cash-strapped agencies are now suffering through is also causing **the Doyle administration**, says Timberlake, to “step up efforts to portray the state as a great employer.”

But is shifting workers from job to job or putting out a positive message going to be enough? State Rep. Mark Pocan, another Democrat whose Madison area district includes a large number of state employees, doesn't think so. He agrees something must be done about the state's multi-billion dollar deficit. But he argues that state revenue needs to be increased if services provided are to be maintained at the level to which residents have become accustomed.

“We never look at revenue,” he clucks. “We've only been cutting jobs in Wisconsin, and I think we have to be honest and have that debate be very open and very public about what we expect from government. If you expect certain things, you're going to have to pay for them. And if you have to pay for them, we're going to have to decide who's best able to pay and who should be paying for them. Maybe that means looking at who pays the taxes in Wisconsin and where exemptions are. That's all an essential component to making this fair and just.”

Barring a formal statewide, bi-partisan discussion of revenues, Pocan says the pain and the brain drain will continue. “If you only look at expenditures,” he warns, “all you're going to do is cut more jobs.”

What will finally drive politicians to have that discussion? Pocan thinks it may come down to complaints from members of the public who finally become fed up with eroding services. Until then, he feels the state can expect to find that more and more talented potential state workers will be avoiding government service.

“There's no question that if people don't feel there's job security or that they'll be treated fairly or paid adequately or given adequate benefits,” he says, “there'll be a less talented pool to choose from.”

As for Jeanne Gomoll, she's sad to see the dismantling of the system that supported her career and personal growth so well for 23 years. But she's content to move on. She does worry about some of her co-workers, though.

“I feel lucky, luckier than a lot of people who've been laid off,” she explains, her voice tensing with emotion. “I have cutting-edge skills that are extremely valuable to myself and potential clients. I don't have children, so I'm not worried about their welfare in terms of financial changes in my life. I've come out of the DNR with work that I love to do. It's not as if not working for the DNR is going to ruin my life.”

But can the DNR and other state agencies stand to keep on losing dedicated, inspired workers? While Timberlake says the state is still receiving plenty of job applications and lots of folks are still taking the civil service exam, it's doubtful that many can match Gomoll's positive, can-do attitude. In any case, it's a shame to lose her.

—Tom Laskin

We got behind this month. Sorry. Scott read the zine, but didn't get mailing comments written. Jeanne didn't even finish reading the apa yet. We'll try to catch up next month.

Jeanne Gomoll & Scott Custis

