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HR Director Addresses Benefits Questions

Director of Human Resources Judith Muñoz recently contacted the Alcalá View about concerns and questions being expressed throughout campus regarding employee medical insurance and the new telephone enrollment system. Her answers to some of those questions follow.

Q. Was changing insurance carriers and switching to telephone enrollment originally planned to happen at the same time?
A. This year's open enrollment period was an interesting one to say the least. The university did not anticipate changing health insurance companies at the time we made the decision to install a new telephone enrollment system. Unfortunately, changing insurance carriers and installing the telephone enrollment system at the same time proved confusing and frustrating to some employees. We thank you for your patience.

Q. How does the university decide to change medical insurance carriers?
A. We recognize that changing insurance companies can be disruptive for some employees, so the decision to change is not done without considerable deliberation and consultation. As you know, benefit-eligible employees receive a BenUflex allocation of $180 per month. Employees may either use this money toward the purchase of health insurance or take the distribution as taxable income if they are insured through another group health plan.

Barney and Barney, the university’s insurance broker, oversees our benefit insurance needs. One of the first considerations during the renewal period is the price. The BenUflex allocation covers the cost of an employee's health coverage. We are also concerned about having affordable dependent coverage. Other considerations are the doctor and hospital networks that provide care, as well as the specifics of the plan.

The broker markets our insurance needs and presents the different quotes to the benefits advisory committee. The committee makes a recommendation as to which plan to use. The committee is composed of faculty representatives from each school, the College of Arts and Sciences, the University Senate, and staff and administrative personnel.

Q. What made Health Net a better deal than Prudential?
A. The recommendation to change to Health Net was based on the fact that Prudential’s rates increased 10 percent. Both plans have similar (but not identical) coverage. Health Net offered a two-year rate guarantee. In addition, Scripps Clinic was included in Health Net's selection of primary care providers. Scripps Clinic is not available through Prudential's tier one (HMO) level.

The rate difference between Kaiser and the other plan offered is also a concern. Staying with Prudential would have meant a $42 per month rate difference for single coverage. With this difference, many employees might have migrated to Kaiser. If that happened, the university might not be able to provide an alternative plan to Kaiser because the pool of employees in the three-tier plan would be considered too small by potential insurance companies.

Q. How was the telephone enrollment system chosen over the process used in previous years?
A. The decision to implement the telephone enrollment system was also one that (Continued on page four)
Benefits Brief

- Employees who signed up for health insurance should have received their health ID cards by now. Employees enrolled in Health Net and Kaiser should have received an ID card for each member enrolled. DeltaCare PMI sent one ID card to the employee for the whole family. Delta Preferred (DPO) sent one card to the employee and one card for dependents, for a total of two ID cards.

If you have not received your health ID card(s), please call the following membership service number and request them: Health Net, (800) 676-6976, and ask for Health Net Select; Kaiser, (800) 464-4000; DeltaCare PMI, (800) 422-4234; Delta Preferred, 458-1340.

- Congress extended the federal regulation that excluded the first $5,250 of an employee's graduate tuition remission benefit retroactively to Jan. 1, 1995, through June 30, 1996. Amended 1995 W-2 C tax forms will be mailed on March 10, 1997. The university has also issued refund checks to employees for overpaid 1995 social security and state disability taxes. Employees will be required to file amended federal and state tax returns in order to recover any overpaid federal/state income tax.

- An informative 13-minute video, entitled 12 Tips for An Easy Retirement, is available through human resources. Please call ext. 8764 or 8762 to reserve the video for viewing.

- Scudder has changed the name of several funds. The Capital Growth fund has been renamed the Large Company Growth fund. The Quality Growth fund is now the Large Company Growth fund. Please make a note of these changes.

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Planting Advice From USD’s Gardening Guru

By Jill Wagner

Rain has been abundant this winter and our city's hillsides are greener by the day. It's only a matter of time until the wildflowers start to bloom along the roadsides and front yards come alive with the brilliant colors of spring.

It's no secret Alcalá Park is considered one of the prettiest spots in San Diego, largely because of the lush grass and seasonal landscaping that is seemingly always in bloom.

Fred Rocha, manager of grounds maintenance, is the man behind most of the decisions about when to plant, how to fertilize and what will grow best in certain areas of campus. His knowledge can also be applied to yards much smaller than USD's, and so he passes on advice to all the gardeners preparing to plant for the season ahead.

Rocha recommends planting in early spring (and early fall), essentially any time this month. He cautions that soil preparation is key to successful gardening, especially when growing flowers. Amendments found at any local nursery, such as humus mulch, pre-plant fertilizer and perlite, should be worked into the soil before planting.

He also advocates using fertilizers, but prefers organic over chemical, for better plant, shrub and flower growth.

“Organic fertilizers are safer to use during hot weather,” Rocha says. “Chemical fertilizers can burn easily and disturb the natural biological processes of plant growth.”

When choosing what to plant, remember to make note of how much sun the plot will get throughout the day. Once at the nursery, take note of the best climate zones for the particular plant or flower you are buying. Rocha notes that some plants suffer in coastal humidity while others like the damp air. If you live in Clairemont, your plant choice may be different from someone living in Escondido.

For sunny areas of the garden, Rocha recommends roses, zinnias, marigolds, delphiniums, lobelia, dwarf dahlias and supertunias. In shaded areas he suggests using impatiens, fibrous and tuberous begonias, and bacopas.

Still other flowers, such as geraniums, cyclamen, gazingia, ranunculus and alyssium, are great for adding color to any garden.

Rocha also has his favorite drought-resistant plants, always wise choices for a Southern California yard. For ground cover, he recommends acacia redolens, juniperus, pyracantha, gazingia species and bougainvillea. Shrubs that need very little water to grow include nerium oleander, acacias, calliandra and cistus species.

Many of the plants already mentioned — acacia, calliandra, nerium oleander, bougainvillea and pyracantha — also make Rocha's list of hearty plants that will easily last through the season.

Finally, trees often add a nice finishing touch to a yard and more green to a neighborhood. While a few of Rocha’s suggestions for good trees that won’t wreak havoc with their root system may sound familiar, you may need to consult your local nursery to find the others. His recommendations include jacaranda mimosifolia, magnolia grandiflora, cinnamomum camphora and koelreuteria bipinnata.

Once everything is planted and your yard is bursting with color, remember that insects can be a problem. There are beneficial insects and the harmful ones, Rocha notes, and any chemical used to kill the pests should be chosen so that the good critters won’t be killed in the process of spraying.

Laughlin Express

The SEA's most popular event of the semester is just around the corner. Join fellow employees in Laughlin, Nev., for a day of gambling at the casinos and shopping at the factory outlet center.

A $21 per person fee includes bus transportation and a buffet at the Edgewater Hotel. Reservations for the 24-hour turn-around trip are due by March 20. A bus will leave the UC parking lot at 7:30 a.m., April 5, and return by 8:30 a.m., April 6.

For more information call Kay Norton at ext. 2033 or Frank Holcomb at ext. 2302.
Parking Fees Still Under Negotiation

An ad hoc parking committee of staff and students has proposed its first alternative for permit fees. Vice President for Finance and Administration Fred Brooks, Director of Public Safety Rana Sampson and Director of Budget and Treasury Jim Pehl met with committee representatives last month to consider a plan that would have employees pay between $75 and $450 per year for a permit, based on their salary bracket.

The sliding scale for employees is one part of a package that includes charging resident students $100 and commuter students $150 per year, and visitors $2 a day to park on campus. The total proposal is estimated to raise $920,950 in revenue, about $180,000 short of the $1.1 million needed in the 1997-98 budget year to pay for the new parking garage and maintenance expenses.

Formed in response to the proposed increase to $240 a year for main campus parking, the committee is working on several alternatives to make the fees more equitable for the various groups on campus.

University officials expressed concern about the viability of implementing wage-based fees for employees, but aren’t opposed to the entire package. At the same time, the administrators agreed to look seriously into charging summer conference attendees and continuing education students who are currently considered visitors and do not pay for parking.

The ad hoc committee agreed at its Feb. 20 meeting to summarize the various alternatives considered in the last two months and present the plans to the university-wide parking committee in early March. That committee will ultimately send its recommendations to the board of trustees.

Board Hears of New Review Process

The SEA board of representatives had its first look at a proposed new evaluation process when Becky Gilbert briefed the group on a revised performance management evaluation system at the February meeting.

The current process of evaluating staff job performance and awarding raises on an employee’s anniversary date would be replaced by the new system. All staff members would be reviewed in March of each year. If approved by the President’s Advisory Council (it was scheduled to go before the PAC in late February), the new process would go into effect in March 1998, according to Gilbert.

The University Staff Compensation Committee, chaired by Director of Human Resources Judith Muñoz, has spent more than a year discussing alternatives and hashing out the proposal. Gilbert, library secretary and immediate past president of the SEA, was the staff employees’ representative among a group of faculty and administrators.

Performance management evaluation is goal-based and designed to encourage dialogue between an employee and supervisor, Gilbert explained. It is a system widely used in the corporate sector, which allows the employee to assess his or her role in the department and decide on goals for the next year.

The employee and supervisor mutually agree on goals for the upcoming year. Subsequent evaluations of job performance will be partially based on achievement of those goals.

The new system streamlines the assessment ratings to simply “acceptable” or “unacceptable” job performance. Merit raises are awarded if the employee receives an “acceptable” review.

Bonus awards will be available for outstanding employees and for meritorious performance by employees at the maximum of their pay range.

If the PAC does not accept the proposal, the committee will resume its effort to develop an alternative evaluation process for the more than 500 USD staff employees.
Thank You
I did not know until now just how much cards of support mean at a time like this. To each of you who have touched me so deeply, I sincerely thank you.
— Calista Davis

Psst...
Bits and Pieces from the Readers
It seems the popular news magazine U.S. News and World Report thinks very highly of USO. In its annual rankings of colleges and universities, USD's school of engineering ranked 15th in the nation! Only thing is, we don't have a school of engineering. But hey, the professors and students in our engineering program are obviously impressive folks. ...

Do you ever just smile at snippets of conversation you overhear, things that endear you to strangers? One reader couldn't help but like the young woman who spoke matter-of-factly to her friends as they strolled toward the bookstore. "If I go back to Michigan and tell people I came to California and now believe in ghosts, my parents..." As the student's voice trailed off, our reader was left to fill in the blanks. ...

Logo Police are On Patrol
In a decade when attracting students is increasingly competitive, colleges and universities have to be diligent in promoting their programs and earning name recognition among the nation's pool of college-bound students. A school logo is integral to communicating the image of the university and is instantly recognizable if used consistently.

USD's logo is printed on everything from admissions catalogs to T-shirts to World Wide Web sites, and while generally used correctly, occasionally the affectionately named "logo police" in the publications office uncover an inappropriate use.

Following are some reminders of what can't be done to USD's logo (no matter how tempting in order to make it fit on your publication).

• At no time can the letters USD and the cross be used without the words University of San Diego. Both elements make up the logo. Without one or the other, the logo is incomplete. When university officials developed the logo standards, foremost in their minds was creating a graphic that clearly separates USD from our neighbors UCSD and SDSU.

• The configuration of the elements within the logo cannot be changed from the two acceptable uses. For design flexibility, the logo has been designed with the words University of San Diego either underneath the letters USD or on the right-hand side of the letters.

• While the entire logo can be used in varying sizes depending on your needs, the size of a single element cannot be altered while the other part remains the same. For example, the words University of San Diego cannot be reduced without proportionately reducing the letters USD and the cross.

Direct questions and requests for camera-ready logos and a copy of the university's Logo Standards Manual to the publications office at ext. 4684.

The examples above are the two correct ways to use the university logo.

Benefits
(Continued from page one) was not made lightly. The intent was to make enrollment easier and more convenient for employees. Well, it was for some, but unfortunately not for all of us.

There were several technical difficulties and unexpected interruptions that were out of our control (such as phone lines down due to bad weather) and we apologize to those who were inconvenienced. Many employees told us how much they liked the concept and we expect the process to go more smoothly during future enrollments.