Fraud And Misconduct Don’t Stand A Chance
Surviving OKDHS’ Office of Inspector General

By Kevan Goff-Parker
Inside OKDHS Editor

What do you get when you mix a former social worker, supervisor of social services, county administrator, assistant county director, county director, field representative, insurance expert, hospital administrator, assistant director for Field Operations, interim HRMD director and interim associate director of what is now Vertically Integrated Services?

You get OKDHS’ Inspector General Dan Fitzgerald, part Inspector Gadget, skilled administrator and always a frontline soldier for OKDHS.

But unlike many of the employees in his division, Fitzgerald doesn’t carry a gun and isn’t certified by the Oklahoma Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training. He’s armed instead with 33 years of OKDHS knowledge and expertise. His experience spans from his first job as a social worker in 1970 serving OKDHS Carter County to administrator of OKDHS Cotton County in 1975 to administrator of OKDHS Caddo County in 1976. He became a Family Support Services Division field representative in 1977.

But it was during 1978 when Fitzgerald was working as a FSSD field representative at State Office when he was recognized by his peers for successfully creating expenditure reports that eventually produced additional federal monies for OKDHS.

He said that he was soon “told” by then OKDHS Director Lloyd E. Rader to learn billing and collections and move to Oklahoma Children’s Memorial Hospital in Oklahoma City.

“Mr. Rader didn’t ask, he told,” Fitzgerald said, laughing. “I learned insurance and the ways of the hospital. One of the best things about the hospital was the food. That’s when we had farms under OKDHS, and we raised cattle. We had a cafeteria that served only the best.”

And Fitzgerald would need his strength. The next year he returned to Ardmore and became administrator of Carter County, where he served until 1984.

“It was the hardest job I ever had in my life because we were so incredibly busy,” he said. “We had so many clients and services. It was just crazy – an unbelievably busy and difficult time.”

Despite the challenges of serving as a county administrator, Fitzgerald had plenty of work looming ahead. In 1984, he returned to State Office to work as assistant director for Field Operations where he set up and managed the staffing of five regions. He joined the Office of Inspector General in 1993. Since then, he’s also stepped up to serve in three temporary assignments, including stints in HRMD, Vertically Integrated Services.
The Chaplain’s Corner

Preserving The Spirit And Tenderness Of Children

By Kent Ritchie
Noble County OKDHS Chaplain and Minister of Music and Education for First Baptist Church of Perry

I was reminded recently of the incredible tenderness of children. It was a Monday morning and I had been up most of the night feeling ill. My 4-year-old son, Jess, having been informed by my wife that I was not feeling well, came to me and asked me if he could stay home and take care of me. This was quite a sacrifice as he enjoys being with his friends and learning at his day care.

It was a stark reminder to me of the sensitivity found in children. Perhaps you have seen it in the eyes of a child — that moment when correction goes from administering understanding to administering a broken spirit. You are making your case about what wrong has been done and how it can be prevented in the future. You can see the child understands, but you decide to state your case one more way until it becomes harping and sometimes hurtful.

For each child that moment is different, but it is almost always there. When the spirit of a child is broken, it must be built back up. I have had to do some rebuilding myself at times. I know that I want to be a parent that can stop when I see understanding in my child’s eyes. I want to preserve the spirit of my children so they can do the same for their children.

Please remember our OKDHS co-workers and their loved ones serving in the U.S. Military. Our hearts and prayers are with you, and we appreciate your continued sacrifice to protect the freedoms we enjoy. Bless you!
Newly released statistics show that Oklahoma’s investment in child care is showing major dividends, and that’s good news for the state’s preschoolers.

The Early Childhood Collaborative of Oklahoma (ECCO), a research partnership between the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University, initiated the “Reaching For The Stars Center Validation Study,” a longitudinal research project. Early results from the study reveal that the quality of child care for all preschool-age children in Oklahoma Department of Human Services’ licensed centers is better today than in 1999.

Nancy vonBargen, director, Division of Child Care, OKDHS, said it is important for parents or caretakers of preschoolers to know that strides are being made as a result of OKDHS’ Stars program – a quality improvement initiative launched by OKDHS in February 1998.

“Choosing quality child care may be the most important decision a parent or caretaker can make for their preschool-age children,” vonBargen said. “I want parents to use the tools available in making that decision, one of which is the Stars program. It is one more way for parents or caretakers to evaluate and choose quality child care.

“Stars criteria focus on those aspects of child care that make the biggest difference in quality. This research tells us that our criteria on teachers with higher educational qualifications, the learning environment and parental involvement have the greatest impact on the quality of care. As a result, centers at the higher two- and three-Star levels scored significantly higher on quality-rating scales.”

The report, funded by OKDHS, highlights findings from a sample of 336 child care centers from around the state taken during the fall and spring of 2001-2002. Possible scores ranged from 1-7 (with 1 representing inadequate, 3 representing minimal, 5 good and 7 excellent quality). Findings show that the quality of child care available to all preschool-age children is better today than in 1999, with the study’s Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale average rising from 1999’s score of 5.19 to 2002’s 5.75.

Another major finding showed that 80 percent of the preschool classrooms had global quality scores of 5 or higher (5 represents good to excellent care) and that most caregivers interact sensitively with children regardless of the Star level of their center. Additionally, the study states that many centers have raised their Star level since 1999 and staff turnover rates were lower in 2002 than in 2001.

vonBargen said the goal of Stars is to improve the quality of child care in Oklahoma, especially for children receiving child-care subsidies. Its enhanced quality criteria focus on improving staff education and training, compensation, learning environments, parental involvement and program evaluation.

“Stars is designed to encourage child care facilities to reach beyond regular licensing requirements in order to receive recognition and higher rates of reimbursement for the provision of child-care services,” vonBargen said.

Child care programs may earn
Martin Named New McCurtain County Director

Editor’s Note: At OKDHS, many have accepted the mantle of leadership at county offices and for programs statewide, through the years. We often find that such leaders have spent two or three decades caring for Oklahoma’s most vulnerable, the disenfranchised and the neglected. Former Pushmataha County Director Terry Martin recently stepped back into the role as a county director after being named the new director of McCurtain County. With permission, we present a story recently printed in the McCurtain Daily Gazette written by News Editor Jeff Holladay. He adeptly captures the spirit of just one of our many outstanding and dedicated leaders at OKDHS.

By Jeff Holladay
McCurtain Daily Gazette

Veteran supervisor Terry Martin has been named director of the McCurtain County office of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Martin replaces Sharon Helms, who retired early this year. A big fellow with a down-home manner, Martin has spent most of his 21 years of OKDHS service in McCurtain County – except for almost two years he spent as county OKDHS director in Pushmataha County.

He went to work for the McCurtain County OKDHS office in 1982 as a family support services social worker.

In 1991, he became a supervisor as the agency underwent one of the most dramatic transitions in its history.

As a family support services supervisor, he presided over the wrenching changes that took place in the OKDHS’ primary welfare aid programs of AFDC and TANF – reducing the number of clients in those programs by some 75 percent during the past decade. His supervisory duties also included food stamps and implementation of the electronic welfare food stamps program.

But the biggest challenge for the amiable, soft-spoken supervisor was trying to line up jobs and training to help clients get off welfare. And he says it remains one of his toughest tasks.

Helms, his mentor, and top OKDHS officials have praised Martin as a compassionate social worker and a good manager.

“Terry has exceptional knowledge of the challenges facing citizens in McCurtain County and has made great strides in developing relationships to help OKDHS deliver its services,” said Area IV OKDHS director William Wilson.

His colleagues say he’s nothing like the image many have of a rough-edged oilfield roughneck – which he once was – but is a caring, compassionate social worker at heart who wants people on welfare to live up to their fullest potential.

A Long Way From Oilfields

When he was growing up, Martin never had an inkling that he would someday be a social worker or supervisor.

His father, T.J. Martin, was an oilfield worker who worked in various locations in New Mexico, California and other states before the family settled in Antlers. But even after he settled the family in Pushmataha County, he continued to work in offshore oil exploration.

After moving around almost as much during his childhood as a “military brat,” Martin found stability during his years at Antlers High School, playing tackle on the football team, forward on the basketball team and participating in a number of other extracurricular activities.

Following graduation, he attended Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant. After going to school a couple of years, he dropped out to work about a year and a half as an offshore oilfield worker to earn some money.

That experience convinced him more than ever of the importance of a college degree – particularly since he saw men maimed and injured in that occupation.

Martin continued on page 13
New Initiatives Address Early Childhood Issues

By Lori Linstead
Project Coordinator,
Division of Child Care

Editor’s Note: OKDHS’ Lori Linstead has been working closely with Oklahoma’s First Lady Kim Henry on school-readiness issues including the “Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness” and “Success By 6®.” Here, she shares her thoughts on why such strategic initiatives are key to the future of Oklahoma’s children.

The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness

While most would agree there are programs and initiatives within Oklahoma to support families with young children, many would argue that these same programs and initiatives seem somewhat fragmented and disconnected.

Whether it is a public agency, foundation or nonprofit, each entity tends to provide services or support to families with young children according to its own vision and mission, often without coordinating with others to reduce duplication and to ensure all gaps are filled.

In April 2003, Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry signed House Bill 1094 – the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act. The legislation established the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR), a 28-member public-private partnership, and gave it the task of promoting school readiness in Oklahoma. The new partnership is comprised of 13 state agency directors and 15 individuals from the private sector. OKDHS, under the leadership of Director Howard H. Hendrick, convened the first organizational meeting of OPSR, which was held in October 2003.

The OPSR creates a “table” where early childhood advocates from both the public and private sector join together to improve conditions for young children and their families. Some questions have been asked about the intentions of OPSR. Some are concerned that OPSR is another governmental agency designed to take over all early childhood programs in Oklahoma and administer and direct the funding for these programs. This couldn’t be further from the truth.

OPSR’s vision is that this unique partnership made up of both public and private experts will be the catalyst needed to create a seamless, comprehensive early childhood system within our state – a system where programs and initiatives work hand-in-hand to provide the resources families and young children need.

OPSR is a unified voice for early childhood issues within our state. While early childhood advocates work tirelessly on behalf of our youngest citizens, often their voices are heard from a distance as they each work from their respective agencies and organizations. Today, early childhood advocates can join together in a unified voice to advocate for the needs of young children and their families. Because of OPSR and the unlimited prospects it brings, at last, Oklahoma has a place for that one voice.

‘Success By 6®’

An early childhood movement taking place in communities across the state is the Oklahoma United Way’s “Success By 6®” initiative. This initiative is part of a national community-based movement of public and private partners that work together to ensure that children get the best start in life.

“Success By 6®” is led by United Way of America, which provides national leadership and support to these partners as they collaborate to deliver research-based solutions designed to ensure that all children, from birth to age six, are healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. Key areas include parent education and support, good health, quality child care and early literacy development.

“Success By 6®” brings togeth-
Wagoner County OKDHS employees proved that they certainly know how to make star employees feel appreciated. Just ask Monica Brumnett, who recently felt as if she had become queen for the day …

On Jan. 28, Brumnett, a School Based Services Worker serving Wagoner County OKDHS, received a bevy of gifts and recognitions during a special breakfast. Wagoner Mayor Josh Hughes came to the Wagoner County OKDHS office and proclaimed the day “Monica Brumnett Day.” Employees through their Employee Recognition Committee also named her “Employee of the Year,” and she was flooded with gifts, including a plaque, roses, a free vacation package to anywhere in the United States for three days and two nights, a week’s tanning, an Applebee’s gift certificate and other assorted items.

Wagoner County’s ERC gathered donations for Brumnett’s gifts by holding fund-raisers throughout the year.

Brumnett works at Ellington Elementary in Wagoner, where she ensures that students receive proper care and attention both at home and at school. From tackling everything from head lice educational efforts to making sure children are not neglected or abused, Brumnett keeps a steady eye on the students of Ellington Elementary.

Terri Nicholas, supervisor, Family Support Services Division, Wagoner County OKDHS, said Brumnett is a dedicated, positive employee who has a great attitude.

“She always has a smile on her face, and they can’t throw anything at her that she can’t handle. We are so proud of her and she is truly deserving of this award. Not only am I pleased for Monica to get her kudos, but also for the School Based Service Worker Program to gain positive attention. It is really invaluable.”

Some of Brumnett’s accomplishments include receiving an honorable mention in the OKDHS Director’s “Best of the Best Award” for her annual back-to-school health fair event. She is certified in marriage initiative training and recently completed two weeks of forensic interviewing training from the Children’s Advocacy Center in Huntsville, Ala.

In a thank you note to her coworkers, Brumnett stated, “I’m still a little shocked about the award, also shocked that my family kept this secret! Your guidance through the years has helped me become a better worker and I thank all of you for that!”

(L-R) Monica Brumnett, a School Based Service worker, accepts flowers after being named “Wagoner County OKDHS Worker of the Year.” On her left is Wagoner County OKDHS’ Marcia Means (another quarterly winner) and on her right is Rachel Lockwood. On far right is Camille Peck (last year’s “Wagoner County OKDHS Worker of the Year” honoree).
The excitement was evident not only on the faces of the students in the classroom, but also by the questions being fired back at the instructors.

From how to insert a photograph, change the color of text or add sound to a Web page, Terry Girton, application specialist III, and Rodney Davidson, application specialist IV, both with OKDHS’ Data Services Division, eagerly volunteered to help four teens understand the basics of Web design during a recent class held at MetroTech in Oklahoma City.

Opening the door to opportunities is nothing new to the students because they are a part of the “Play Matters” program. The University of Oklahoma’s National Center for Disability Education and Training oversees Play Matters, a program funded by a three-year grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Education.

Jeanette Doty, coordinator, Play Matters, said many of the students in Play Matters do not have any opportunity to make that transition from school-to-work or pursue further education.

“A lot of them are not exposed to employers,” Doty said, “and these kids really haven’t had very many advantages that I can see. What we’re trying to do is open up the possibilities for them just a little bit.”

The program uses recreational and leisure activities to create a learning experience, but all sessions are driven by four key components – leadership, advocacy, networking/sponsorship and peer mentoring. Students have even been able to fly with flight trainers from the Sooner Flight Academy in Norman. At the end of its three-year grant period, Doty said she hopes to have a total of 180-250 graduates, and a Play Matters program that is fully self-supported by community funds.

Davidson said he felt rewarded by the students’ interest, but said the class is also important for another reason.

“It reinforces my understanding about how people are different and how they may not look at a Web site the same way as other people,” Davidson said. “They may not be able to read or they may have to go on visual cues. It really emphasizes to me the importance of building a Web site that is accessible to all people.”

While the goal of creating a Web site for the Play Matters program was not completed in the first of several sessions, Doty said she is convinced that the visit laid the framework for success.

“Just your very presence says to them, you’re somebody who cares,” she said. “Here’s somebody that’s open to teaching us, and they’re successful, role-modeling adults. A lot of these kids don’t have successful role models. How can you expect a kid to go to work successfully without ever having an example?

“I think their presence here makes a difference for them.”

“Service the customer. At one time or another we’re all customers. Give the kind of service you want to receive. It pays the best dividend …”

– George Earl Johnson, Jr.
More Than 250 Attend Partners Conference

Don Pryor (above), known affectionately as the “World’s Worst Waiter,” delivers a portion of his memorable keynote address during the 2004 Partners Conference for Oklahoma Families’ awards ceremony held Feb. 19-20 at the Clarion Meridian Hotel and Convention Center in Oklahoma City.

More than 520 employees from OKDHS, other governmental agencies, private companies, non-profit agencies, schools and communities attended the two-day event. Three groups were honored during the awards luncheon, including the Across Ages Intergenerational Mentoring Program, How to Better Serve Adult Learners - the Zoe Literacy Project and the Eufaula Inspiration Garden. – DD

Inaugural Child Abuse Prevention Conference Set For April 22-23

The OKDHS Pontotoc County Child Welfare Office will champion a conference titled “Linking Together to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect, Inaugural Child Abuse Prevention Conference” on April 22-23 at East Central University located at 1100 E. 14th St. in Ada.

The conference is open to any agency that provides advocacy for children, including teachers, law enforcement, medical professionals, social services agencies, mental health, court appointed special advocates, attorneys and others. The goal of the conference is to promote a better understanding of the systemic issues concerning child abuse and neglect and to create stronger partnerships with external agencies.

The keynote speaker will be police Detective Mike Johnson from the Plano Texas Police Department. He is currently assigned to the juvenile division and is considered an ambassador for child advocacy. He is a founding member of the Collin County Children’s Advocacy Center, where he was named the Center’s “Child Advocate of the Year” in 1996. Johnson was appointed to the National Board of Directors for the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) in 1998. A well-known speaker, Johnson frequently lectures at national and state conferences and community programs focusing on multidisciplinary team building and intervention in child maltreatment.

The conference will feature various topics, including Unintentional Injuries, Effects Of Substance Abuse On Children, Fatherhood And Accountability, Parenting Skills Classes, State And Tribal Jurisdiction, Child Abuse X Files, Firearm Safety, a Juvenile Court Mock Trial and more.

The conference will also feature a Resource Fair that will allow agencies to promote their services. A public forum will present “Shaken Baby Syndrome – A Personal Story” from 6-7:30 p.m. on April 22. Additionally, a “Making a Difference in a Child’s Life Award” will be presented to a child advocate nominated by his or her peers.

Conference sponsors include Pontotoc County OKDHS’ Child Welfare Services, the Chickasaw Nation, East Central University, Caring for Ada’s Children, OGE Energy Corp., CARE Cottage Multidisciplinary Team, Child Abuse Training & Coordination Program.

Registration for the conference begins at 8 a.m. April 22 and will be held in the University Center and Memorial Student Union at East Central University. The conference will run from 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. on April 23.

For more information, please contact Pontotoc County OKDHS’ Rita Hart, a Child Welfare supervisor with the Permanency Planning Unit, (580) 310-7025. – KGP

News Briefs

State Agencies Strengthen Ties To Faith Community

State social service agencies are teaming with the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in launching an initiative in four Oklahoma counties to help foster relationships between state agencies and local congregations.

The initiative will focus on the faith-based communities in Carter, Cleveland, Love and Major counties. Staff from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Oklahoma Department of Health will work to build new relationships while bolstering existing partnerships within the faith community.

In leading this effort, the State’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is making contact with the faith leaders and ministerial alliances in each county.

“We will be planting the seeds for future collaborative efforts,” said Brad continued on page 12
Dear OKDHS employees,

Greetings! I am personally asking for your help to help curb wasteful processes that can potentially jam up our e-mail system. The OKDHS e-mail system periodically receives an influx of e-mails due to employees using “reply to all” when replying to messages they did not want to receive, or messages where they are intending to reply directly to the sender.

It is the responsibility of every OKDHS employee to understand the e-mail system and to whom they are responding when they select “reply to all” as a response to a received message.

To be a responsible e-mail system user, each employee should:

1. Ensure your message is an OKDHS work-related or authorized message. (Should an employee have questions about what can or cannot be sent via the OKDHS e-mail system, please contact the OKDHS Office of Communications.)

2. Reply only to the sender when receiving messages and requesting to be taken off of distribution lists. (Please do not “reply to all” with these requests.)

3. Know how many people are in the e-mail group you are using, when sending or replying to e-mails. (To find out the number of people in a mail group, click on your “Address Book,” go to the mail group name and right click to pull up “Properties.” Realize that there may be other “mail groups” included in the main mail group and they contain even more people).

4. Use the “Bc...” field (blind copy) within Outlook, when sending an e-mail to a large audience, instead of using the “To ...” or the “Cc ...” fields. (By using the blind copy field, when someone does “reply to all,” it will not go to anyone that’s been blind copied. To display the blind copy field on your Outlook message, click on “View” from the menu bar and then click on “Bcc ...” field.) Please be aware that the OKDHS e-mail system is provided as a tool for employees to better conduct government business for which they are responsible, and it is important that each of us use e-mail responsibly. We need every computer user to accept a role in ensuring optimum network performance for our core business needs. Please aid us in maximizing network performance by following these instructions.

Thank you!

Marq Youngblood

Marq Youngblood
Chief Information Officer
OKDHS Data Services Division
OKDHS Shines
On Black Heritage Celebration 2004

By Kevan Goff-Parker
Inside OKDHS Editor

Four respected black dignitaries were recognized with awards as approximately 400 attendees enjoyed spirited musical, dance and dramatic performances during OKDHS’ Black Heritage Celebration 2004 on Feb. 27 at the Omniplex in Oklahoma City.

During the event, former OKDHS Commissioner Emilykaye Lomian was honored with a “Community Service Award.” Special District Judge Charles Hill and KWTV-Channel 9 News Director Blaise Labbe were each honored with the “Trailblazer Award” and Merit Protection Commission.
OKDHS Builds On e-Business Issues

By Douglas Doe
Associate Editor

The work of e-Business is one of the most difficult and challenging issues facing federal and state governments. For OKDHS, the burden rests not with the Department’s technology arm, but with a diverse group of business leaders.

The OKDHS e-Business Committee originated four years ago with a commitment to use emerging Internet technologies in the Department’s business practices. Members include OKDHS Director Howard H. Hendrick, OKDHS’ officers, division directors and other designated information technology employees.

OKDHS Chief Information Officer Marq Youngblood said coming together in such a diverse group has driven the desire to better serve Oklahomans and make things more user-friendly, convenient and efficient for all.

“The technology division is not really dictating where and when we use technology for business functions,” Youngblood said. “It’s really an asset to have the business leaders determining when, where and how OKDHS uses information technology for its benefit.”

He said during monthly meetings, the committee focuses on the identification, selection and sequence of information technology and business solutions for implementation, offering input on potential projects and monitoring the progress of OKDHS’ e-Business strategy.

Recent reports to the committee include the successful agency-wide router deployment, the near completion of the rollout of Windows 2000, the launch of the functionally rich Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Web site, an update on system health checks and a document scanning project.

Additional initiatives that are underway include:
- Applications for Adult Protective Services, Child Care Licensing, Aging and Home and Community Based Services;
- The Joint Oklahoma Information Network eligibility wizard;
- The use of Microsoft Content Management Server in the deployment and management of the OKDHS Web site; and
- Creation of universal customer-friendly modules that can be applied to future products.

For more information about the OKDHS e-Business committee, visit its Web site at http://s99web01/ebusiness/.

April 2004 OKDHS Calendar Of Events

Editor’s Note: Details about these events may be found on the OKDHS InfoNet Calendar of Events. Dates are subject to change.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, Physical Wellness Month and Alcohol Awareness Month. Administrative Professionals Day is April 21 and Administrative Professionals Week is April 18-24.

April 5
Executive Team Meeting (a.m.)
FOD Area Director Meeting (p.m.)

April 5-23
FSSD New Worker Academy

April 6
Passover (first day)
Advisory Committee On Services To Persons With Developmental Disabilities

April 6-9
New Supervisor Academy 22

April 7
Level 1 Substance Abuse Training

April 9
Good Friday

April 11
Easter

April 13-16
Experienced Supervisor Academy E

April 15
Field Operations Division/County Administrator’s Association Executive Board Meeting
Oklahoma Partnership For School Readiness
Oklahoma Silver Haired Legislature

April 17
Older Women’s Initiative

April 20
Court Appointed Advocates For Vulnerable Adults
Safetown

April 21
State Volunteer Awards Ceremony

April 27-30
County Director Academy 7

April 27
Oklahoma Commission For Human Services Meeting

April 28
APS Field Liaison Meeting
FSSD Field Liaison Meeting

April 29
Area V County Director And Field Liaison Meetings

News Briefs

continued from page 8
Yarbrough, director, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. “The goal is to foster relationships that will allow OKDHS, the State Department of Health and faith leaders to address unmet community needs.”

In the past, the state has worked with faith-based organizations to help provide assistance to those persons who are facing life’s toughest problems. Today, however, government officials recognize the importance of increased collaboration to adequately meet client needs, Yarbrough said.

“The church has a heart to help, but sometimes needs direction to know how to express its desire when working with a state agency,” he said. “The success of any collaboration depends on the strength of the relationship.” – DD
Martin himself somehow miraculously escaped death when he and a crew were working on a rig near Beaumont, Texas, preparatory to it moving out into the Gulf of Mexico.

Lightning struck a pipe Martin and another man were carrying – knocking Martin about 30 feet and causing burns to his hands and feet.

After several weeks of hospitalization, he was more convinced than ever of the importance of a college degree.

He later returned to Southeastern State, majoring in business administration and minoring in recreation and business.

That’s where Martin met his wife, the former Regina Wyrick of Idabel, and when he graduated in 1982 they moved to Idabel.

His wife has been a third-grade teacher at Central Elementary School in Idabel for many years, and the couple have a daughter, Mallarey, now 15 and a student at Idabel High School.

Discovered He Liked Social Work

Martin was asked why somebody with a business administration degree would want to go to work for OKDHS as a social worker.

Partly, it was because he needed a job.

But Martin quickly discovered that he liked working with people and helping OKDHS clients.

That’s what he did for nearly a decade before moving into the ranks of a supervisor in 1991.

As he handled more and more supervisory jobs, he finally began to think that he should set his aspirations higher.

So in the last couple of years he began to think more and more about someday trying to become a county OKDHS director.

Such jobs entail a lot of responsibility and require a knowledge of many programs, not to mention skills in dealing with people and business savvy.

But in the case of Martin and his wife, there was a special problem. They’d have to make a joint decision whether they wanted to move or not.

It was serendipity when the county OKDHS director’s job came open in McCurtain County, where he has lived longer than at any other place he’s ever resided and where almost all of his experience has been.

Another blessing, he said, is that he knows the staff of the county OKDHS office and counts many of them as not only colleagues but good friends and like family.

“I have worked with many of the staff for more than 20 years and found them to be extremely dedicated to the citizens and families in McCurtain County,” Martin said. “I look forward to working with the staff in this new role.”

Jobs For Clients Top Priority

With state budget constraints, the county OKDHS office is having to do more with less, Martin said.

But the priority of OKDHS will continue to be to try to help welfare recipients make the transition to jobs and work to make the county a better place to live, the new OKDHS county director said.

Unlike the past, today’s welfare recipients are not only limited to 60 months of benefits but they must actively seek jobs if they receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

TANF recipients are typically young, single mothers. And many have never held regular jobs or had any job training.

So the biggest challenge to help them make the transition from welfare to work is to help them get job training or a job, Martin said.

That means partnering with other agencies or city, county or state entities and private businesses on job training for welfare clients.

“The strength of any community is dependent upon the relationship of the local partners and the organiz-
“It has been very, very interesting work because I’ve been able to work with different divisions and different perspectives,” Fitzgerald said. “The Office of Inspector General works throughout OKDHS. Many people don’t have time to see the big picture and just look out for and worry about their own division – it really makes you appreciate the incredibly difficult job Director (Howard H.) Hendrick has overseeing all of our diverse divisions.”

Like Fitzgerald, the division’s past reflects a distinguished history. Rader created the OIG in September 1962 after a need was recognized for increased accountability in the Aid To Families With Dependent Children program. A Special Investigations Unit was formed to work with federal General Accounting Office auditors in Oklahoma in prosecuting client fraud and reducing error rates. By February 1979, the unit was reorganized forming a new division known as OIG.

“OIG started in 1979 as the electronic age came in and more and more people got on assistance. There were more and more cases of people figuring out how to cheat the system by applying for duplicate benefits and committing out-and-out fraud,” Fitzgerald said.

The Single Audit Act of 1984 added OIG’s Internal Audit Unit by 1985. The addition helps the division to review, coordinate and oversee audits of OKDHS contractors that receive state and federal funds.

“OIG consists of approximately 85 professionals dedicated to preserving the integrity of OKDHS and the programs and services it administers,” Fitzgerald said. “We have stand-alone offices in Tulsa that cover the northeast section of the state, a two-person office in McAlester that covers the southeast portion and a two-person office in Lawton to better serve the southwest part of the state. We also have Administrative Review Unit employees who travel all over and have responsibilities for certain areas of the state — often, their head-quarters is the home.”

The OIG is divided up into three units. They include:

- **Internal Audit Unit** conducts financial audits for compliance with state and federal laws, rules and regulations. IAU employs CPAs, accountants and other experts in OKDHS programs and services.

- **Administrative Review Unit** conducts quality control audits of the
tions in the community,” he said. “I hope to continue the existing community and business relationships and work to formulate new partnerships.”

Martin said that’s a particular concern now because the federally funded welfare-to-work job training program through KEDDO has been discontinued.

The new OKDHS county director says the agency has been fortunate to partner with such agencies as KEDDO, Little Dixie and Workforce Oklahoma.

But one of the biggest needs is new partners – city, county or state government, schools and private businesses – for the Work Experience Program, Martin said.

Under this program, OKDHS welfare clients with no job experience or training work several months for these agencies or businesses.

Martin said the program typically is for a 90-day period, though it can be extended.

But it is of utmost importance to welfare clients because it allows them to get some experience in the work place.

Martin said many clients have no work experience and have little or no chance of employment without this program. He says it gives them both an exposure to the workplace and some experience they can put on their resumes as they search for other jobs.

He encouraged businesses or institutions to contact the OKDHS about the program – and attacked a familiar myth in doing so.

“I have not come in contact with any client who does not want to work,” he declared.

Stars continued from page 3

one of four Star ratings. They include 1-Star, 1-Star Plus, 2-Star and 3-Star. The higher the Star rating a center holds, the higher the reimbursement rate received for children whose families receive child-care assistance.

Participation in the Stars program has grown steadily. During the last year, the number of 1-Star plus programs has increased from 973 to 1,254, 2-Star programs from 965 to 1,426, and 3-Star programs from 85 to 122. Today, 44 percent of licensed facilities, 62 percent of licensed slots and 86 percent of children receiving child-care subsidy are in child-care programs at the 1-Star plus or higher level.

“Stars is one of the first programs in the nation to establish levels of quality and provide the resources so that child-care providers can attain a higher Star level,” vonBargen said. “I believe much of the improvement can be attributed to Stars. I feel very proud we could provide the focus and resources to help child-care centers and homes provide better care.

“At OKDHS, we know child-care programs want to do the very best job they can, but often lack in opportunity and financial resources. Stars is helping to address these issues and assure that Oklahoma’s children and their parents have access to licensed, affordable and quality child care.”

OKDHS’ Division of Child Care manages the administration of the federal Child Care and Development Fund and the statewide licensing program that monitors child-care programs for compliance with minimum requirements. The “Reaching For The Stars Center Validation Study,” as well as information on locating child care, applying for child-care assistance and contacting OKDHS can be found at www.okdhs.org/childcare.
er community leaders, businesses, educators, advocates, faith leaders and parents to develop initiatives tailored to the needs of young children and their families in each community.

Oklahoma United Way’s “Success By 6®” is piloting a 14-member community-based network where local level public-private partnerships are focused on the needs of young children and their families. The work in these communities addresses a variety of school-readiness issues.

The 14 communities include: Ada, Bartlesville, Durant, Enid, Guthrie, Lawton, McAlester, Muskogee, Norman, Oklahoma City, Ponca City, Shawnee, Stillwater, and Tulsa. While the pilot project is being conducted within these 14 communities, it is the vision of “Success By 6®” to eventually offer services to each of the 77 counties in Oklahoma. Bank of America/United Way of America, AEP-Public Service Company of Oklahoma and OKDHS’ Division of Child Care provide funding to this initiative. “Success By 6®” is a project of United Way of Central Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association and OKDHS’ Division of Child Care.

For more information regarding the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) or “Success By 6®” please e-mail Lori Linstead at Lori.Linstead@okdhs.org or visit www.oklahomachildtrust.org.

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**Congratualtions And Best Wishes To Our Retirees!**

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<th>January</th>
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<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Family Services Division</td>
<td>Oklahoma County 55-G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janice Freeman, 25 years</td>
<td>Robert James Betts Jr., 11 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryan County</td>
<td>Oklahoma County 72-C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monny Lee Mullins, 15 years</td>
<td>Geary Phillip Souter, 13 years</td>
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<td>Cherokee County</td>
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<td>Danny Jack Carroll, 29 years</td>
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<td>Cleveland County</td>
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<td>Carla Sue Fry, 32 years</td>
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<td>Grady County</td>
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<td>Deanna J. Kirkes, 22 years</td>
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On an average day, Oklahoma County 55-G OKDHS is literally packed with people seeking services. Here, Inside OKDHS snapped a few members of its hard working staff as they were “Caught Working” helping clients lead safer, healthier, more independent and productive lives. From top center and clockwise are Social Service Specialist II Paula Burnett and Don Jones, Oklahoma County 55-G OKDHS County Director Nancy Thompson and Administrative Assistant II Pany Khounsavath, Customer Service Representative II Kathy Christian, Social Service Specialist IV Yomi Togun and Administrative Technician III Carlene Weber. – KGP
Agency’s largest assistance programs (Food Stamps and Medicaid). ARU employs state administrative reviewers who perform field investigations on sampled cases, quality control programs supervisors and various other support staff.

OIG Fraud Unit conducts fraud-related or special investigations completed for criminal prosecution or internal administrative action by OKDHS. Most of OIG’s fraud agents have professional law enforcement-related degrees at the bachelors, masters or juris doctorate levels. The average OIG fraud agent has had 12 years prior experience in police work or law enforcement. In recognition of this fact, the 1993 Oklahoma Legislature authorized OKDHS to commission OIG agents as peace officers, with the authority to carry firearms. As peace officers, OIG agents are required to achieve and maintain CLEET certification. Agents with program experience are also recruited from within OKDHS. All OIG agents are cross-trained through CLEET and through the Family Support Services Academy.

By the end of OKDHS’ fiscal year 2003, the OIG identified $1.1 million in the restitution of closed and fraud investigations for that year, with a projected savings of $300,000. Fitzgerald estimates approximately 2,300 investigations were closed in 2003, while 2,600 were opened.

Another accomplishment Fitzgerald is most proud of is the strides and progress the OIG has made in establishing good relations with county offices around the state.

“The county offices are our main source of referrals for client fraud and information,” he said. “We try very hard to be responsive to counties’ needs. There are just so many referrals, we have to have some kind of screening process. We try to be responsive by letting them know we have the referral, who it is assigned to and that we will be contacting them.

“We work with counties instead of dictating to counties. We want a partnership. We believe OKDHS employees want to do away with fraud and misuse.

“When someone is cheating the system, OKDHS’ staff members want to see that person brought to justice. I really like to think they like to see us coming, unlike in the past when they didn’t know we were coming. Now, they know we’re coming.”

Fitzgerald said that he believes his background as a social worker and county office administrator empowers him to let his employees be responsible and to “get out of their way and let them do their jobs based on the philosophy of the division.”

Because program monitors are often not experienced in examining financial records, internal auditors are frequently requested to look at new or problematic programs and they give feedback to the divisions on areas that need to be reviewed or where additional training is needed. Many of these audits have resulted in savings to OKDHS by identifying unallowable expenditures and over-billing.

Another area of particular pride is the fact that the OIG has a unit that exclusively audits child care providers.

“We’re probably the first state in the nation to audit subsidized day care providers,” Fitzgerald said. “We believe this has resulted in improving the integrity of the subsidized day care program for OKDHS.”

In the ARU, strict guidelines are required when auditing cases in the Food Stamps program. Fitzgerald said during recent administrative review periods, the ARU sampled and processed 2,435 cases and 794 were sub-sampled by the USDA.

“Not one case was found to be in error,” he said. “We’re very, very proud of that. Although the ARU isn’t the most popular unit in the state because we are checking the work performed in the counties, we’re not here to say, ‘Gotcha!’ We are here to help staff and work with them to improve their error rates.”

The Earned Income Reading Project, an initiative requested by OKDHS Director Hendrick and started in 1999, created a group of ARU staff to analyze the food stamp cases of households with earned income. The first year of the project resulted in a decrease in the error rate from 11.78 percent in 1999 to 7.02 percent in 2000, and the error rate has remained consistently lower ever since.

Fitzgerald said there are rare occasions where an OKDHS employee temporarily figures out how to beat the system.

“We’ve investigated during the last 10 years maybe five or six cases

Dan Fitzgerald, OKDHS Inspector General
Inside OKDHS is published for employees and retirees of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services as a joint effort of the Office of Communications, the Publications Section and the Print Shop.

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OKDHS 04041 Issued 04/2004
Publication of Inside OKDHS is authorized by the Oklahoma Commission for Human Services in accordance with state and federal regulations and printed by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services at a cost of $4,033.00 for 4,033 copies. Copies have been deposited with the Oklahoma Department of Libraries Publications Clearinghouse. Contents are not copyrighted and may be freely quoted unless otherwise noted.

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“When there is no rule in place, try to do something intelligent.”

– Ancient Proverb that still applies today

(L-R) Field Operations’ Larry Johnson and Kathleen KinKade and OKDHS Volunteer Coordinator Karen Jacobs display some of the baby items recently collected during the “Open Your Hearts To Newborns In Need” campaign – a statewide baby shower for newborns in need sponsored by the University of Phoenix Oklahoma City and Norman campuses, Walgreen’s, the Oklahoma City Blazers and OKDHS. The baby items are being distributed through OKDHS’ Office of Volunteerism. For more information regarding the “Open Your Hearts” campaign, please contact the University of Phoenix Oklahoma City Campus at (405) 842-8007.