WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER!

We recently updated our newsletter to better communicate and serve the State’s workforce. We hope you like our new design and welcome any suggestions, comments, or recommendations.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for updates on testing, job announcements and more! Search for “State of Alabama Personnel Department.”

The State Personnel Board will meet on June 17, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. in the Board Room on the 3rd Floor of the Folsom Administrative Building in Montgomery.

Deals are always in bloom with PerksConnect! Learn more on how you can save locally, nationally, and on the go with PerksConnect. To access these savings and more go online to alabama.perksconnection.com and register or log in to your account.

We recently started a new and more creative content series highlighting State employees just like you. We recently interviewed Tom Barbarow from the Banking Department. 30 Questions. 30 Minutes. Let’s get to know Tom!
Dear Fellow State Employees:

We hope this newsletter finds you healthy and safe during these uncertain and unprecedented times. You may notice the newsletter has an updated appearance, thanks to one of our employees using her time teleworking to learn a new program. In recent weeks, our workplaces have been turned upside down and we wonder if things will ever feel “normal” again. Understandably, there is a lot of anxiety and concern surrounding the coronavirus (COVID-19) and how it affects the workplace. In addition to the regular newsletter content, we have included several resources related to COVID-19. On Page 9, you will find answers to a few of the most Frequently Asked Questions State Personnel has received, along with a link to the full list of questions on our website. Please remember this situation is still new to all of us and we appreciate your patience and understanding as our State leaders continue to work towards the best solutions.

COVID-19 has disrupted many of our plans, including celebrating State Employee Recognition Week during the month of May. While we wish we were able to celebrate as usual, we are following the lead of the National Association of State Personnel Executives and plan to celebrate at the end of September instead. We will never truly be able to thank our State employees enough for continuing to provide vital services to the great people of Alabama during this time. We are grateful to each public servant who is going above and beyond to serve our fellow Alabamians.

Finally, keep in mind that many State agencies participate in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as part of the benefits program available to State employees. The EAP is a short-term counseling and referral service designed to help employees by providing professional, confidential assistance to problems that may affect family life and job performance. More information about EAP may be found here. Please contact your agency personnel manager if you need additional information.

Thank you for all you do for our State, today and every day.

[Continue with articles about Employee Recognition Month and Employees’ Suggestion Incentive Program Reminder]
Tom is wonderful. He’s the type of employee everyone hopes to have.
-Mike Hill
Superintendent of State Banking

30 IN 30:
TOM BARBAROW

Rather than our typical Q&A styled format, we plan to conduct interviews with fellow State employees and use this feature as a way to spotlight their unique stories. Our guinea pig, Tom Barbarow, was recommended by State Banking Superintendent, Mike Hill. He informed us that Tom was retiring soon, after a remarkable 40-year career in State government. Mr. Hill believed Tom would be an excellent employee to feature as we started our new content series. Since none of the Personnel Newsletter staff has a journalism background, we were unsure of the best way to go about interviewing Tom. Fortunately for us, Tom’s laid-back personality and broad smile put us at ease immediately and made it feel more like a friendly conversation (the formal picture to the right belies his affable nature). 30 questions. 30 minutes. Let’s get to know Tom!

During the initial “tell us about yourself” questions, we learned that Tom earned three degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, and Information Systems from Auburn University in Montgomery but is a devoted Alabama fan. Isn’t it funny how that topic always seems to come up first in this State? Sometimes you can share a “Roll Tide” or “War Eagle,” but if you pull for the opposite team, it’s good to know which type of enthusiast is sitting across the table from you. Tom had scholarship tickets to the Alabama football games for a long time and even met Bear Bryant’s son and Gene Stallings once. Following a stadium expansion that moved his seats higher and his parking further away, he decided to trade one hobby for another and spend his money and free time traveling instead. Tom is excited about post-retirement travel and already has a few trips in mind.

When asked about his role model, Tom opined that he was inclined to say his mother but did not feel that was an interesting answer because a lot of people might say that. However, during the follow-up questions, it became quite clear that Tom’s mother is not like everyone else’s mother. At 88 years old, she still goes bowling three times a week and has an affinity for traveling to Las Vegas, where she’s been known to get a second wind that keeps her going well past midnight. He described her as a fun and positive person, traits that Tom obviously inherited. Born in Tokyo, she moved to small-town Alabama at age 20 after marrying Tom’s father while he was stationed in Japan. According to Tom, she retained little knowledge for how to prepare Japanese-style dishes, but she did learn some southern traditions from her mother-in-law. Luckily for them, there are plenty of places to go for a taste of home, thanks to the numerous Japanese restaurants in the Montgomery area. The military took the Barbarow’s to a new post every couple of years, which included an adventurous stint in France. Tom and his two sisters were recently, a supervisor encouraged the Personnel Newsletter staff to “step up our game” with more creative content, so we’re attempting something new. We would love to hear what you think of this continuing series. Please send comments and feature employee recommendations to newsletter@personnel.alabama.gov.

The Tom Barbarow Feature is continued on Page 4.
After several passes on our atypical interview questions, he looked at us exasperated, and said ”I’m an accountant! We’re not the creative type.” We laughed with him over his self-deprecation and moved on to other questions that were surprisingly easier for him to answer, such as “What would your colleagues say are your best qualities?” (a question the rest of us would surely stumble over). Tom’s response came easily though, saying his coworkers would probably use the words consistent and dependable, which are great characteristics for an accountant. It appears Tom’s self-assessment of being a “get the job done kind of guy” is accurate, based on comments from the boss. Mr. Hill spoke with us briefly as we left and summed it up by saying, “Tom is wonderful. He’s the type of employee everyone hopes to have.” He then joked that Tom paid him to say that, but after meeting Tom we know that’s not true because he really is wonderful. Besides, we’re certain he wouldn’t spend his travel money on nice comments from the boss when he’s about to retire anyway. At the end of the day, anyone who meets Tom can easily see he is exactly the type of employee that employers hope to manage and that we, as employees, should try to emulate - pleasant to be around, dedicated to doing the job, and willing to serve the people of this great State, no matter what it takes.

Congratulations to Tom on his retirement! We wish him luck and good fortune as he moves to Alpharetta, Georgia to be closer to family.

always the “new kids,” adapting to different languages and cities. Maybe that had something to do with Tom staying put in State government for so long, including 25 years at Medicaid and 15 years at Banking. He’s had the straightforward career you might expect from an accountant, steadily increasing in rank as time passed by. The most impactful project he’s worked on in his career was helping Medicaid convert from paper ledgers to computerized accounting. After hearing him describe it, we’re thankful we weren’t around during that endeavor!

In an effort to think outside the box, we peppered Tom with questions that were unusual for a typical interview. Knowing some of the questions might be difficult to answer on the spot, we told Tom to pass on questions if they stumped him.

Tom Barbarow, CONTINUED

TOM BARBAROW, CONTINUED

PerksCard Spring Savings

Deals are always in bloom with PerksConnect! There is the old saying that spring showers bring flowers, but spring also marks the beginning of concert season, warm weather travel, and baseball. PerksConnect has partnered with Working Advantage to bring you savings up to 50% on tickets to concerts, sporting events, movies, theme parks, hotels, and much more!

If the upcoming season has you fretting over your tax return, PerksConnect offers a 10% discount on tax preparation fees through TruPoint Tax Service. With TruPoint Tax Service, you simply download the TruPoint Tax Service app from Google Play or the Apple App Store, start a tax return, scan the bar code on the back of your driver license, snap a picture of your tax documents, and their certified professional will do the rest!

To access these savings and more, go online to www.alabama.perksconnection.com and log in or click “Activate your account now” above the login boxes to complete the registration form and start saving!

Disclaimer: The State Personnel Department does not endorse or recommend the individual vendors, products, or services promoted by PerksConnect.
A big congratulations to Mr. Adrian Casey for receiving an Employee Suggestion Incentive Award! Mr. Casey Serves as a Public Health Environmentalist with the Department of Public Health in DeKalb County. He submitted a cost-saving suggestion related to the Weiss Lake Holding Tank Program. The program gives permits for recreational vehicle holding tanks, which were being renewed and inspected annually. His suggestion was to inspect only new installations, replacements, and properties that have a change of ownership, rather than inspecting all 1,000 tanks that have been approved and inspected previously. This plan is also in accordance with the requirements specified by law. Reducing the number of inspections, while still complying with the law, will save man hours and result in lower travel costs. It will also allow employees to focus on other items and put their efforts where it is more needed. Thank you Mr. Casey for submitting a suggestion that will save the State of Alabama money. See on Page 2 for more information on how to submit your own cost-saving idea!

STATE EMPLOYEE FEATURE RECIPE

MOLLIE’S ULTIMATE HASH BROWN

INGREDIENTS:
- 2 CANS CREAM OF CHICKEN
- 2 CUPS SOUR CREAM
- 2 CUPS SHREDDED CHEDDAR CHEESE
- 1 ENVELOPE DRY RANCH DRESSING MIX
- 1 PACKAGE (3 OZ.) REAL BACON BITS
- 1 PACKAGE (32 OZ.) SHREDDED HASH BROWNS

DIRECTIONS:
- COMBINE FIRST 5 INGREDIENTS AND MIX WELL.
- STIR IN HASH BROWNS.
- BAKE AT 400 DEGREES FOR 40-50 MINUTES.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ONE OF YOUR RECIPES BEING FEATURED IN OUR UPCOMING NEWSLETTERS PLEASE EMAIL US YOUR RECIPES AT NEWSLETTER@PERSONNEL.ALABAMA.GOV
FOR CORONAVIRUS, ALABAMARETIRE RELAXES YOUR LOAN LIMITS AND PAYOUT RESTRICTIONS

We hope neither coronavirus nor the public-health emergency has harmed you. And we hope you don’t need emergency money. But if you do, your AlabamaRetire plan relaxes loans and payout restrictions. A plan revision Alabama’s State Personnel Board adopted on February 19 includes these provisions:

Special loan and payout provisions are available if: you are diagnosed with the virus SARS-CoV-2 or with COVID-19 by a test approved by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; your spouse or dependent is so diagnosed by such a test; or you experience adverse financial consequences from being quarantined, furloughed, laid-off, or having work hours reduced, because of: the virus or disease, being unable to work because of a lack of child care because of the virus or disease, or closing or reducing hours, because of the virus or disease, or a business you owned or operated. No one will invade your privacy; instead, the Plan relies on your written statement that you qualify. If you’re coronavirus-qualified, you may get a loan up to 100% (instead of 50%) of your account, up to $100,000 (instead of $50,000). Those expanded limits apply for a loan from March 27 to September 22. If a repayment date is or would be from March 27 to December 31, you may delay it by one year. Repayments are adjusted for interest accrued during the delay and to fit the extended repayment period.

A coronavirus distribution made after January 1 and before December 31 up to $100,000 is an exception from a restriction on a payout before the severance from employment or age 59 1/2. Even if some of your coronavirus payout is from a portion of your account you rolled-in from a non-457 plan, the extra 10% penalty tax on a too-early payout does not apply. Your income from a coronavirus payout is spread over three years, unless you choose not to. You may, within three years after the payout, recontribute to the Plan the amount taken. No minimum distribution is required in 2020. While we urge you to continue saving and investing for your future, we know this a challenging time. Before you take or borrow money from your retirement savings, get help to carefully consider your choices. For help, visit alabamaretire.com or call 877-313-2262. Remember, you can talk with your Retirement Plan Advisor.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health celebrates Mental Health Month in May each year, promoting information and resources through social media, a news release, and a proclamation from Governor Ivey.

Mental health is essential to everyone’s overall health and well-being, and mental illnesses are common and treatable. While 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health.

Commissioner Lynn Beshear said, “COVID-19 has shown us that community and communication with each other are vitally important to our mental and emotional health. During Mental Health Month 2020 in particular, as we strive to “stay apart together” there is no better time to share resources and information with our loved ones, friends and colleagues.”

We also have a topical page dedicated to these challenging times of COVID-19 on our website. Please contact the ADMH Office of Public Information for questions or request for information at publicinformation.dmh@mh.alabama.gov.

Printed with permission from the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

May is Mental Health Month

For more information on Mental Health Month and to build your own Tools2Thrive visit: www.mh.alabama.gov
HOW TO REDUCE YOUR CORONAVIRUS-RELATED FINANCIAL STRESS

Start an Emergency Budget. Keeping a budget is the best thing you can do to gain control over your finances under normal circumstances, but it is even more important during this pandemic. Starting an emergency budget - a leaner version of your current budget - will show you the minimum amount you can live on and where you can eliminate debt. An emergency budget is completely stripped of extras, down to essential spending only. You can start by cutting subscription services, eating out and entertainment costs. Be mindful of online spending habits and only purchase items that are essential. Avoid things that trigger your spending. We all have a lot of time at home right now and boredom can cause some people to spend money. Add the stress from COVID-19 and the ease of online shopping, and you have a recipe for more money problems. Take some time to think about what triggers your spending and try to cut it out of your day.

Contact your mortgage company or landlord. Your mortgage or rent is possibly one of the biggest expenses you have, making it the hardest to keep up with during this crisis. You can call your lender or landlord and ask what options are available. Be direct about how COVID-19 has affected your finances.

Call credit card companies to lower rates. You have the ability to call and negotiate a lower rate, to avoid late payment or to temporarily defer payments.

Look for community assistance programs. You can find information about what is available in your area by contacting your local United Way (Dial 211). The coronavirus will have long-lasting financial implications on millions of Americans. It’s hard to tell exactly what the future will look like, but it’s safe to say this is going to be our new normal for a while. By adjusting your finances, you may be able to eliminate or prevent hardships.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential financial consultation with accountants and certified professionals. Contact your Behavioral Health Systems (BHS) Coordinator at 800-245-1150 to arrange for a confidential referral.

For additional information and assistance for your EAP please visit www.riskmgmt.alabama.gov/empasstprogram.
SYMPTOMS: People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported - ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pains, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.

TESTING: To find the closest testing location please visit www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/ or call the Alabama COVID-19 24/7 Hotline at 1-888-264-2256 for testing sites and hours of operation near you.

WHEN TO SEEK EMERGENCY MEDICAL ATTENTION: If someone is showing any of the following signs please seek emergency medical care immediately: trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, bluish lips or face. Call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility and notify the operator that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.

For additional information please visit: covid19.alabama.gov or www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCov.
Families First Coronavirus Response Act FAQ’s

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) is a federal law that was enacted to provide relief to American workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The applicable sections related to employees are the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSL) and the Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (FMLA+). The EPSL provides employees with up to 80 hours of paid leave for certain COVID-19 related issues. Governor Ivey has authorized that these 80 hours may be paid at the employee’s regular rate of pay.

01 Who is a covered employee under the FFCRA?

The EPSL applies to all state employees regardless of length of service. The FMLA+ applies to all state employees who have been employed for at least 30 calendar days.

02 Am I eligible for this leave if I am working from home?

Employees who are working from home or at an alternative workplace (teleworking) are not eligible for leave under the FFCRA, nor are they charged leave, as they are in work status.

03 Is an employee eligible for FMLA+ if he or she chooses not to send his or her child to childcare that is open and available?

No. The FMLA+ is available only when the school or place of care is closed, or the childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19. If the childcare provider is open and available, the FMLA+ does not apply.

04 What qualifies for FMLA+ leave?

This expanded FMLA leave is for parents who are caring for a son or daughter, under 18, whose school or place of care is closed, or a childcare provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions. Caring for a child over the age of 18 may qualify under certain condition, please consult your agency personnel manager or officer.

05 May both parents take FMLA+ leave at the same time?

No. The employee alone must be providing care for the child during the period for which the employee is receiving this type of leave. For example, if there is another individual present to care for the child, this leave is not available. If both parents work for the state, they will each be eligible for FMLA+ but cannot take this leave for the same time period.

06 Do you have more questions?

The State Personnel Department has been diligently posting up-to-date information regarding the FFCRA. We have additional FAQs on our website at:

http://www.personnel.alabama.gov/Covid19

Disclaimer: Certain Emergency Responders and Healthcare Providers may be excluded from coverage.
The outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include: fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones, changes in sleep or eating patterns, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, worsening of chronic health problems, worsening of mental health conditions, and increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people and the community you live in. People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include: older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19; children and teens; people who are helping with the response to COVID-19; and people who have mental health conditions including problems with substance abuse.

Tak care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger. These are ways to cope with stress:

- Take breaks from watching TV, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media (hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting);
- Take care of your body by taking deep breaths or stretching, try to eat healthy and well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs; make time to unwind and do activities you enjoy; and connect with others about your concern and how you are feeling.
- Know the facts to help reduce stress. Understanding the risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful. Learn and share the facts about COVID-19 and help stop the spread of rumors. When you share accurate information about COVID-19, you can help make people less stressed, make a connection with them, and help stop stigma.

For more information on health services you can visit the following:
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) or call 1-800-985-5990
- Alabama Department of Mental Health at [www.mh.alabama.gov](http://www.mh.alabama.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

About Us

The Alabama Merit System law created the Personnel Department to be administered by a Personnel Director who answers to an independent board. The Board currently consists of five members who serve staggered six-year terms. Two members are appointed by the Governor, one by the Lieutenant Governor, one by the Speaker of the House, and one member is an elected classified State employee who is subject to all Merit System rules and regulations.

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