



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

USCIS TODAY



MESSAGE FROM ACTING
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
ROBERT DIVINE

DECEMBER 2005

Year In Review Annual Issue

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As we approach the conclusion of the calendar year, it is important for USCIS to take inventory of our accomplishments so that we may recognize those who have gone above and beyond to contribute to our mission and continue to make USCIS a model of excellence within DHS. We have reached and exceeded many of the expectations we set for ourselves at the end of last year, and continue to make steady advances toward our long-term goals. Highlighting our achievements also provides us with a solid foundation to begin our new year focused on fresh challenges ahead.

December's USCIS Today is our first annual Year In Review issue. 2005 was truly a "Year of Progress" marked by significant steps forward to eliminate the backlog, enhance national security and improve the delivery of efficient service for our customers. Within this month's e-newsletter you will find stories on progress made to implement paperless adjudication technologies and information on technology upgrades, security and fraud detection enhancements and how USCIS is working to make the immigration process more meaningful for new immigrants.

NEWS YOU CAN USE...

FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

[USCIS Reminds Applicants to Obtain Advance Parole Before Holiday Travel Abroad, 11/2/05](#)

USCIS reminds individuals with an application for adjustment of status to lawful permanent resident, an application for relief under NACARA 203, or an asylum application, that they must obtain Advance Parole by filing [Form I-131, Application for Travel Document](#) with USCIS before traveling abroad.

Travel outside of the United States without Advance Parole has severe consequences and individuals who violate this law may be unable to return to the United States and their applications may be denied. Applicants can apply for Advance Parole at a local USCIS district office or a USCIS Service Center. Applicants planning travel abroad should plan ahead due to the busy holiday travel season. For more information on Advance Parole see the [USCIS Travel Advisory Questions and Answers Fact Sheet](#) or contact the USCIS Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.

[USCIS Announces Interim Relief for Foreign Students Adversely Impacted by Hurricane Katrina, 11/25/05](#)

USCIS announced that the approximately 5,500 [academic students](#) (F-1 visa holders) adversely impacted by Hurricane Katrina to will become eligible to apply for immediate, short-term employment authorization; work additional hours on-campus, or work off-campus if granted employment authorization; and reduce normal course load requirements if granted employment authorization. For more information see the [FAQ for Foreign Students affected by Hurricane Katrina](#).



INTEGRITY . RESPECT . INGENUITY

2005: A YEAR OF PROGRESS

USCIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND HIGHLIGHTED STORIES

FIGHTING FRAUD AND STRENGTHENING SECURITY

NEW IMPROVEMENTS IN PROCEDURE FROM FDNS

The Office of Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS) was formed in May 2004 and over the past year, dedicated headquarters and field personnel have worked diligently to develop and implement the foundation needed to detect and combat immigration benefit fraud and enhance the background check process. In terms of building a team of qualified, experienced, and reputable FDNS personnel, more than 160 Immigration Officers (IOs) and Intelligence Research Specialists (IRs) have been deployed to USCIS offices throughout the Country. All five Service Center-based Fraud Detection Units (FDUs) have a cadre of IRs and background check resolution officers. Furthermore, at least one FDNS IO has been deployed to each of the more than 80 field offices.



Another notable achievement was the development of the Benefit Fraud Assessment (BFA) Program. This initiative was implemented in February of 2005, and is intended to help determine the fraud rate among various immigration applications and petitions. As a result of these and other combined efforts to target illegal activity, FDNS has assisted our partners at ICE in a number of successful indictments and prosecutions involving benefit fraud. Over the past year alone, several conspirators were indicted and convicted of labor and immigration fraud associated with thousands of false labor certifications, fraudulent employment or family based petitions.

Working with our CIA counterparts, FDNS reengineered the CIA Name Trace Process, by replacing paper based systems with the automated Interagency Border Inspection System (IBIS). FDNS also acquired responsibility for the receipt and initial review and processing of FBI Name Check responses and created a Headquarters Background Check Analysis Unit (BCAU) responsible for the direction, oversight, tracking, and processing of national security-related IBIS and FBI Name Check responses. FDNS also recognizes the significance of its data and operational support to law enforcement and intelligence communities. In that regard, on October 1, we began standing up the National Immigration Information Sharing Operation (NIISO), a centralized immigration hard copy file and automated systems data sharing operation at the USCIS National Records Center. NIISO is a model for future information sharing programs at DHS and within the Government.

CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS REPORT

WORKING WITH CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES TO ACHIEVE RESULTS FOR CUSTOMERS

The USCIS Office of Congressional Relations is the primary liaison between USCIS, members of Congress and congressional staffers regarding legislation and congressional casework. This year, the office hosted a successful Immigration Seminar for almost 200 new and returning congressional staffers. This seminar is held at the beginning of each new Congress to provide both a comprehensive overview of the immigration system, and practical procedural information about immigration laws and case processing. Because Immigration laws are complex and are the source of a large volume of congressional casework, this 2-day seminar was a useful opportunity for new staff unfamiliar with immigration issues to learn the basics.

In addition to hosting the seminar, Congressional Relations also eliminated the Congressional Correspondence Backlog!



VERMONT SERVICE CENTER STARTS PAPERLESS ADJUDICATIONS WITH CASEPRO



Officers at the Vermont Service Center (VSC) in St. Albans have been adjudicating applications for TPS re-registration without touching a single piece of paper. The system, dubbed CasePro (Center Adjudication System, Electronic Processing), was designed, built and tested entirely by VSC employees and Adjudications Officers to adjudicate I-765 re-registration applications entirely on their desktop computers - essentially e-adjudicating the applications.

By consolidating electronic data from several local and national systems, CasePro is able to deliver ready-to-adjudicate cases directly to officers. The information from the application and the applicant's immigration history is accessed by the adjudicators on their desktop computers, instead of searching through a paper file for the information needed to make a decision. The system also pre-processes the applications by pulling together fingerprint results, related A-numbers, aliases connected to those A-numbers, and the required security checks.

The use of CasePro to adjudicate TPS re-registration applications shows that that fewer people can complete more applications when technology replaces paper. In 2003 the TPS re-registration program took over 100 full time Center staff and substantial overtime funds to complete. Using CasePro, less than 25 Center employees were needed to handle the caseload this year.

The next step for the Vermont Service Center is to see if CasePro can be used to take the paper out of other similar application processes. While CasePro is initially limited to relatively simple applications, the success of the system shows that e-adjudication can work, streamlining processes, freeing up resources, and improving service.

OCIO EFFORTS IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE, ENHANCE SECURITY, BENEFIT EMPLOYEES

Goals of the Workstation Technology Refresh:

- Enhance productivity and system privacy controls
- Reduce operations and maintenance costs
- Support for DHS data sharing and data management initiatives
- Upgrade hardware platforms associated with critical legacy systems
- Enhance USCIS' ability to effectively manage the end to end IT infrastructure environment

The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) provides leadership in the delivery of innovative, reliable and responsive information technology (IT) services to USCIS and its customers. IT includes application development operations and maintenance, IT security systems operations, network operations, enterprise architecture development and compliance as well as day-to-day operations of USCIS IT systems for the Headquarters and the field.



The first phase of the Workstation Technology Refresh was completed ahead of schedule on November 9, at the California Service Center (CSC). The refresh was a comprehensive effort to increase reliability, stability, and security by modernizing and standardizing desktops and servers and implementing a more comprehensive network capable of supporting critical applications. More than 1200 new workstations, printers and monitors were installed on site, featuring up-to-date systems software applications.

The benefits for employees translate to increased reliability, enhanced productivity, modernized desktop computers, software, and peripherals. These improvements will help to improve customer service by allowing CSC employees to process cases more quickly, efficiently and securely. Following CSC, the team will be carrying out deployments at the Nebraska and Vermont Service Centers during Q1 of FY06. The Texas Service Center, the National Benefits Center and Baltimore District Office/Administrative Appeals Office deployment will occur in Q2 of FY06. Upgrades to the District Offices are also scheduled to begin in Q2 of FY06.

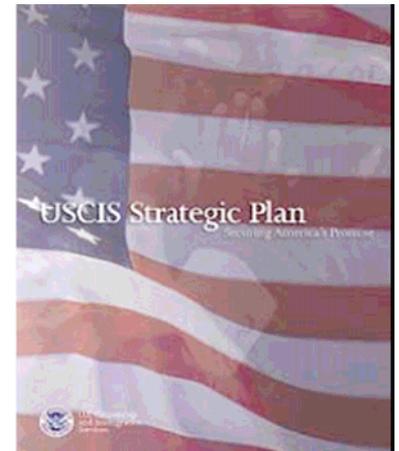
2005: A YEAR OF PROGRESS

USCIS OFFICE OF POLICY AND STRATEGY

CHARTING THE COURSE AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The USCIS Office of Policy and Strategy directs, prioritizes, and sets the agenda for agency-wide policy, strategy, and long-term planning activities, as well as for the conduct of research and analysis on immigration services issues. On behalf of the Director and the Senior Review Board, the Office of Policy and Strategy led the efforts of a inter-office working group in the development of USCIS' first strategic plan document.

The [USCIS Strategic Plan: Securing America's Promise](#) provides a total departmental overview and incorporates the USCIS Vision and Mission with key business objectives and goals. The twenty-page document provides a blueprint of the current organizational structure and sets a clear, consistent direction for USCIS into the future by providing an outline of upcoming initiatives and programs, such as the IT and business modernization plans, human capital strategy and management improvement plans. Completion of the Plan is the first step in a multi-stage process to establish a sound and effective performance management system and culture within USCIS.



The Policy Division has taken the lead role for USCIS on developing Temporary Worker Program (TWP) proposals. The division led monthly and weekly meetings in various USCIS and DHS working groups to develop issues on the implementation and impact of TWP. The division developed an assortment of papers and provided answers to numerous questions from the White House Domestic Policy Council (DPC), while working under short deadlines. The division was responsible for coordinating TWP issues within USCIS. The division also produced options for TWP implementation and provided analysis of multiple business models, including both federal and private models.

MAKING THE IMMIGRATION JOURNEY MORE MEANINGFUL

IMPORTANT PRODUCT RELEASES FROM THE OFFICE OF CITIZENSHIP

The Office of Citizenship promotes immigrant civic integration through instruction and training on citizenship rights and responsibilities. The Office of Citizenship develops educational materials and initiatives for new legal immigrants and those interested in becoming United States citizens. The Office also conducts extensive community outreach activities.

The Office of Citizenship recently introduced *Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants*, a landmark publication designed for new permanent residents and immigrant serving organizations. The guide contains practical information to help immigrants settle into everyday life in the United States, as well as basic civics information to introduce new immigrants to the U.S. system of government. [The guide is available for free](#) in English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, French and Haitian Creole.



The Office of Citizenship also developed the [USCIS Civics Flash Cards](#) and [Learn About the United States: Quick Civics Lessons](#). The *Civics Flash Cards* contain each of the questions and answers applicants may be asked during their naturalization exam, and can be used as a study tool to learn more about U.S. history and government. The *Quick Civics Lessons*, which also will be available in audio format, are short lessons that complement the *Civics Flash Cards*. The *Quick Civics Lessons* will help naturalization applicants gain a deeper understanding of U.S. history and government as they prepare to become U.S. citizens. Both products are available online, and the Civics Flash Cards can be purchased through the [U.S. Government Printing Office](#).



Christ Schoenduve taking the Oath of Citizenship

FACES OF AMERICA

NEW CITIZENS, UNIQUE STORIES

CHRIST SCHOENDUVE - VENEZUELA

The magnificent “Chiquy Boom,” whose real name is Christ Schoenduve, had her audience of about 500 new citizens singing and laughing at a recent naturalization ceremony in San Jose, CA. Schoenduve, a children’s entertainer who dons clown costumes and other finery in the line of work, was among those naturalized that day.

After the oath, the statuesque beauty from Venezuela took to the stage to address her fellow new citizens. She talked about bringing fun into the lives of youngsters in the area. Working for the City of Morgan Hill, she’s presently designing summer programs to teach kids mime, ventriloquism, stilt walking, and other skills involved with clowning around. During her speech, she sang, led singing, and put on a jester’s cap before boldly leaping off the stage into the audience.

“She’s the most entertaining guest speaker we’ve ever had,” declared San Jose Officer in Charge Warren Janssen.

ARE YOU ONE OF THE
“FACES OF AMERICA?”

[SUBMIT YOUR STORY TODAY](#)

DON’T WAIT IN LINE...GO ONLINE!!!

USCIS.gov features an evolving suite of internet based services that decrease waiting times for customers. The Infopass Online appointment system, our 24-hour customer service call center, the ability to file and check the status of applications online using our E-Filing and case tracking services, and other electronic media have improved our ability to both tackle the existing backlog of cases, while handling an ever-increasing number of applicants.

**Make an appointment to meet with a USCIS Immigration Officer using [INFOPASS](#)
File your applications for immigration benefits online at the [E-Filing Online Application Center](#)
The [National Customer Service Call Center](#) can be reached 24-hours a day, at 1 (800) 375-5283**

BY THE NUMBERS...BACKLOG ELIMINATION EFFORTS

The USCIS backlog increased by approximately 15,000 applications in October '05. Most of the increase was concentrated in two form types; the I-485 backlog increased by nearly 9,000 cases over the September figure, and the N-400 backlog also increased by nearly 12,000 cases during the same time period.

Since June '05, USCIS has temporarily detailed adjudicative personnel from its Central and Western Region offices with excess capacity to those offices in the Eastern Region where the magnitude of the backlog requires the infusion of additional resources. As part of this on-going effort to move excess resources to locations with the greatest need, USCIS Service Centers will also begin detailing some of their staff to Eastern Region offices.

| Date | Number of Backlog Cases | Percent Change |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------------|
| June | 1,183,099 | |
| July | 1,129,708 | - 4.5 % |
| August | 999,220 | - 11% |
| September | 1,003,869 | + .5% |
| October | 1,018,849 | + 1.4% |

“HOW DO I...?”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AT USCIS



I AM A PERMANENT RESIDENT...

HOW DO I...GET A RE-ENTRY PERMIT?

As the Holiday Season approaches, it is important for Permanent Residents to review the rules and regulations regarding travel outside of the United States and proper procedures for obtaining a Re-Entry Permit. A re-entry permit can help prevent two types of problems: (1) Your Permanent Resident Card becoming technically invalid for re-entry into the United States (U.S.), if you are absent from the U.S. for 1 year or more. (2) Your U.S. permanent residence being considered as abandoned for absences shorter than 1 year, if you take up residence in another country.

A re-entry permit establishes a presumption that you did not abandon status, and it allows you to apply for admission to the U.S. after traveling abroad for up to 2 years, without having to obtain a returning resident visa. Re-entry permits are normally valid for 2 years from the date of issuance.

You may also want to get a re-entry permit if you plan on traveling outside the U.S. and cannot, or do not wish to get a passport from your home country. Many countries throughout the world may allow you to use a re-entry permit much like you would use a passport—placing necessary visas, and entry and exit stamps in the permit—so you may use it as your main travel document. Be sure to check with the country(ies) you plan on visiting about their requirements before you travel. For more information on Advance Parole see the [USCIS Travel Advisory Questions and Answers Fact Sheet](#).

How do I get a re-entry permit?

If you want to get a re-entry permit, file **Form I-131**, Application for Travel Document. You should file this application well in advance of your planned trip.

The instructions on the form will give you more details. If you have questions after you read the instructions, just check our website or call customer service at 1-800-375-5283.

What will happen if I do not apply for a re-entry permit before I travel outside of the U.S.?

If you are a permanent resident who plans to travel outside of the U.S. for one year or more, it is important that you apply for a re-entry permit before you depart the U.S. If you stay outside of the U.S. for one year or more and did not apply for a re-entry permit before you left, then you may be considered to have abandoned your permanent resident status and may be refused entry into the U.S. if you try to return. If you are in this situation, contact the U.S. Consulate about a returning resident visa.

Can I apply for the re-entry permit and then leave, even though I don't have the re-entry permit in my possession yet?

U.S. immigration law does not require that you have the re-entry document in your possession when you depart, but it does require that you apply for the permit before you leave the U.S. We may be able to send your re-entry permit to the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in the country you plan on visiting, but you'll need to specifically request this when you file your I-131. If you choose this option, you should contact the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in the country you plan on visiting when you arrive, to let them know how to contact you while you are in that country. The U.S. Consulate or Embassy may then contact you if your application is approved and your permit has arrived there.

If you are planning to use the re-entry permit as a passport, then you will need to wait for it before leaving the U.S. If you cannot wait, you may want to contact the consulate of the country you are planning to visit to find out if you can use other documents to enter.

The “How Do I...?” Section of USCIS Today contains answers to frequently asked questions from USCIS customers. The information provided in this section is available in English and Spanish on the [How Do I...? Section of the USCIS website](#).

REAL PEOPLE, REAL PROGRESS

USCIS RECOGNIZES EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

Background:

Dora Tamez Ratcliff is a native Texan, and a first generation daughter of immigrants. Born and raised in Harlingen, Texas, Dora began her career with Legacy INS in 1978 in Harlingen as a secretary to a Trial Attorney and Immigration Judge. Since then she has held the positions of Regional Exams Secretary; Deportation Clerk, Intelligence Assistant, Language Assistant, Legalization Adjudicator, Immigration Inspector, and currently, District Adjudications Officer. She is currently assigned full time as a Congressional Liaison, where she helps resolve immigration problems brought forward by Congressional offices. Dora is married to Jim Ratcliff and has two teenage children – her most significant achievements! She is active in her church, and works hard to keep up with her children, who participate in baseball, football, guitar, and choir.



Name: Dora Ratcliff
Position: District Adjudications Officer
Location: Dallas District

Which of your contributions to USCIS are you most proud of?

Serving in the capacity of Congressional Liaison Officer has allowed me to become a skilled problem solver and researcher. I find it very rewarding when I resolve a case where an error had been made, and I am able to get the applicant's case back on track. I want Congressional Staff members and others to know that USCIS does care, and we're here to do our jobs to the very best of our ability. I remind myself daily that each application we handle affects someone's life, thus they all need to be handled with empathy and justice, and the person needs to be treated with dignity and respect. It's the Golden Rule theory!

What's the most memorable moment you've experienced at USCIS?

Having worked for this agency for as long as I have, you know there are many! I've been exposed to so many contrasting areas within the Service, allowing me to gain more insights into the workings of our Service and its mission.

There was the man from Nicaragua, who cried when the Immigration Judge granted him asylum- this was in the 80's, and I was a court interpreter. When I was an Inspector, there was a woman who thanked me over and over for treating her so nicely as I was escorting her to her flight as she was being returned to her country. Then there was the fellow from California who was waiting to become a citizen, but his file had been mixed up with a felon's file of the same name. He was extremely happy when that was finally cleared up! I also remember helping a lady with terminal cancer who wanted to become a US citizen, but the process was taking over a year at the time. We managed to expedite her case, and a small, private oath ceremony was provided for her and her family. All of these people who enjoyed a happy experience because of what we do, have made my work memorable and delightful.

How has USCIS changed since March 2003?

Attitude. I believe our biggest change has been how we view ourselves, and that has made us better. I worked for private industry before I came to INS, and the word was always customer service. I am so glad that ideal came to USCIS. If you work conscientiously and treat people courteously, everything else will surely follow. I know everyone has noticed the difference – I hear it from our congressional staff, attorneys, and customers. Of course, with INFOPASS, our long lines have also diminished, and that is awesome. The security that is now required sometimes delays a case, but I get very few complaints when that is the reason for the delay. Most seem to accept that as a new way of life and feel that it is a good thing.

USCIS Position Profile:
Adjudications Officers determine eligibility for a wide variety of immigration benefits. They review applications and often conduct interviews of applicants. Adjudications Officers have the dual responsibility of providing courteous service to the public while being alert to the possibility of fraud and misrepresentation and usually perform their in USCIS offices nationwide.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WORK AT USCIS?

Visit [USAJOBS Online](https://www.usajobs.gov) for more information on openings and opportunities at USCIS and other federal agencies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT USCIS OCOMM 202.272.1200