REACHING BACK TO THE FUTURE

by Mr. Tom Gelli, Chief, DCMA Congressional Affairs

In experience there is wisdom — in wisdom there is value. Or, as your wisecracking Uncle Morrie loved to remind everyone, "Being past your prime doesn't mean you're over the hill."

Heeding such bits of classic thought and folksy insight, the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Office of Human Resources (HR) is stepping out smartly to create an inventory of federal retirees interested in returning to the work world and serving in selected hard-to-fill DCMA positions. Against a backdrop of an aging DCMA workforce, the initiative is DCMA's tailored approach to more fully benefiting from the government's Re-employed Annuitant Program, under which retirees may return to the federal workforce to perform specialized or high-demand work for a specified length of time.

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Though the initiative is dubbed the *DCMA Alumni Program*, don't go looking for tailgate parties, logo-laden sportswear and class reunions. That's not what we're talking about. Rather, the program is one of several HR initiatives designed to meet the human-capital challenges facing the Agency in the next five years. Specifically, the *Alumni Program* is a vehicle through which the Agency can create and maintain a talent pool that DCMA commanders and managers can tap into to meet certain work needs. The initiative is intended to augment, not supplant or circumvent, the standard job-application and personnel-selection channels. Its use is restricted to situations that meet at least one of four criteria. An individual retiree must be needed to:

- Serve in a position deemed hard-to-fill, one often hampered by high turnover and a shortage of qualified applicants;
- Complete an ongoing project;
- Serve in a position calling for hard-to-find specialized skills or formal credentials;
- Mentor less-experienced employees as needed to ensure continuity during organizational transition.

"The days of the gold watch and rocking chair are history," said Ms. Angela Bailey, executive director of DCMA Human Resources. "Many retirees are still quite capable of and interested in working, particularly under less demanding, more flexible arrangements. Today's social and economic realities are nudging retirees off the sidelines and back into the game. We want to make it easier to get those experienced players on our team."

But just who are these folks who may want to rejoin the trying realm of jammed copiers, hot suspenses and year-end reviews? To find out,

Among supervisory respondents, the interest in returning was high but with a clear preference for part-time, non-supervisory work.

DCMA HR recently conducted its *Survey 92*, in which it polled 1,800 DCMA retirees and retirement eligibles.

In case you're wondering, "92" is an unofficial benchmark often applied in the context of workforce planning. It represents the typical total of years of age and years of service a federal employee has on the day he or she enters retirement.

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The computer-based survey elicited an impressive 77-percent response rate, or nearly 1,400 participants. Of those, 49 percent expressed an interest in returning to DCMA in some capacity. While most respondents stated a preference for part-time work, 28 percent indicated that not only would they come back to work full-time, they even would agree to sign on for three years if the Agency would foot the bill for their relocation costs.

Among supervisory respondents, the interest in returning was high but with a clear preference for part-time, non-supervisory work. "It's important to keep in mind that re-employment through the *Alumni Program* is not an entitlement," said Mr. John Rayford, director of the DCMA HR Center. "Some respondents misconstrued *Survey 92* as a formal offer to come back to work, when in fact it was simply a tool to help us create a roster of prospective candidates for hard-to-fill positions."

Although no specific job series and skill sets have been officially tagged as hard-to-fill, there's an anticipated demand for engineers, quality assurance representatives (especially in the fields of aeronautics and nuclear propulsion) and various specialists in high-cost metropolitan areas, particularly in and around Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

While *Alumni Program* criteria place no restriction on the length of time an individual may have been in retirement status, it should be noted that the longer one has been out of the workforce the greater the likelihood of obstacles in terms of technical-skills requirements and security-clearance status. Moreover, positions are filled at the discretion of the selecting official and count against authorized position caps.

Nonetheless, the initiative represents an attractive and valid opportunity for DCMA and its former employees. "Too often we passively wait for tomorrow to come to us," said Ms. Bailey. "The *Alumni Program* is one way we're actively shaping our future, reaping the benefit of workers' experience and gaining legitimate value for the Agency."

No doubt, Uncle Morrie would be pleased.

For more information, visit **http://www.dcma.mil/careers/careers_annuitant.htm**.

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