

AGENCY HAS ‘GOLDEN’ ATHLETE IN ITS MIDST

By Mark Woodbury, DCMA Public Affairs

Tucked away in an inconspicuous office on the fifth floor of the Defense Contract Management Agency headquarters building may not be the first place a person would search for one of the most decorated gold medalist Olympians of all time — but this is precisely where one is located.

Beth Scott, Virginia Industries for the Blind employee and 10-time Olympic gold medalist, oversees all operations for the supply distribution office at DCMA headquarters. Born with ocular albinism and nystagmus, a non-corrective condition, Scott is legally blind with only 20/200 eyesight.

“The best way I can explain to people how much I am actually able to see is to reference the biggest ‘E’ on an eye chart,” Scott explained. “The big ‘E’ is the only letter I can actually see.”

Regardless of her degraded eyesight, Scott has always loved competition and stumbled upon a home away from home in the swimming pool at five years old.

“It was apparent to those who were teaching me to swim that it was just something that was natural to me,” Scott remarked. “I would

be taught something one week and then be breaking pool records in that particular skill the next.”

Using the large black line at the bottom of the pool, Scott is able to keep herself straight within her swimming lane. She then uses counted strokes from the end of the black line to make her turn off the sides at each end of the pool.

Excelling in swimming throughout high school, Ball State University came knocking on Scott’s door offering a full athletic scholarship. Having opportunities to swim at various colleges, Scott confessed the decision to attend Ball State was not just by chance. “Ball State, at the time, took, and continues still today to take, an innovative approach to assisting persons with disabilities in obtaining higher education,” she explained. “Because of this, I knew this is where I needed to swim.”

To no surprise to her college coaches, Scott also excelled in swimming at the collegiate level. Graduating from Ball State with both swimming accolades and a sports administration degree, Scott knew she could make her own splash at the next level



Beth Scott, Defense Contract Management Agency supply distribution office attendant, is a 10-time Olympic gold medalist. (Photos by Mark Woodbury, DCMA Public Affairs)

of swimming. Coming from a family where her father served in the Navy and later for the U.S. Department of Public Health for a combined 54 years, Scott wanted nothing more than to represent her country in the sport she loved.

As she had countless times before, Scott competed against her non-disabled peers, missing Olympic trials by only half a second. Not letting this hinder her goal of

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One of two gold medals awarded to Beth Scott, Defense Contract Management Agency supply distribution office attendant, during the 2000 Sydney, Australia, Paralympic Games.

representing the U.S., Scott set her sights on the Paralympic Games, where she eventually qualified and competed in three games — 1992 Barcelona, Spain; 1996 Atlanta, Ga.; and 2000 Sydney, Australia.

In the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games, Scott was one of the strongest women in the pool, winning seven gold medals and breaking seven world and American records. In the 1996 Atlanta games, she followed up her astounding Barcelona performance with a gold, silver and four bronze medals. In her final games in 2000, Scott garnered two gold medals, a silver and a bronze. Overall, Scott collected an astounding 10 gold medals, two silver and five bronze. Her 10 gold medals make her one of the five most decorated gold medalists in Olympic history.

It was shortly after the 2000 games, however, when Scott started experiencing extreme neck

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pain. She knew her body well and realized something wasn't right. After multiple doctors found nothing wrong with Scott, doctors at the Washington Hospital Center discovered the problem: thyroid cancer. Attacking her cancer much like she attacked her eyesight challenges, Scott took the cancer straight on. Crediting her great doctors, Scott lights up when she declares herself today to be "100 percent cancer-free."

Through her life's triumphs and trials, Scott found her life calling in promoting the abilities of individuals with disabilities. "As a nation, we are astounded when national unemployment

reaches more than 10 percent," continued Scott, "but, within the disabled community, the unemployment number is approximately 70 percent."

Scott believes people with disabilities often do not get fair opportunities to put their abilities to use. She encourages DCMA employees to keep their minds open to hiring individuals with disabilities. To her, it is always a good day for any person when he or she is able to transition "from tax recipient to tax provider."

For more information on the Virginia Industries for the Blind and its government services, visit www.vdbvi.org/vib. 



Beth Scott, Defense Contract Management Agency supply distribution office attendant, has not let blindness hinder her ambition and determination to succeed.