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Catherine Richardson works at her DCMA Aircraft Propulsion Operations- Kelly San Antonio office. A procurement technician who has been with DCMA for 20 years, Richardson was recently recognized as a Department of Defense Outstanding Employee with a Disability. (Photos by Robert Gallegos, DCMA APO-Kelly San Antonio)



DoD honors outstanding DCMA employee

Patrick Tremblay | DCMA Public Affairs

The Department of Defense recognized a Defense Contract Management

Agency procurement technician in Baltimore in December at the 31st Annual Department of Defense Disability Awards Ceremony.

Catherine Richardson, who works at the DCMA Aircraft Propulsion Operations-Kelly San Antonio contract management office, was named an Outstanding Employee with a Disability. She was among 20 civilian and uniformed DoD personnel honored at the Dec. 7, 2011 ceremony.

A life-long San Antonio resident, Richardson has been with DCMA for 20 years. She was born with neurofibromatosis, a disorder which causes tumors to grow on nerve tissue, and credits the federal government with giving her the chance to be productive.

"I lost an arm to the disease when I was 15," she said, "and later found that nobody would hire me." Richardson was connected to DCMA through an agency which helps people with disabilities find work. "They (DCMA) were ready to hire me right away.

I'm glad the federal government gave me the opportunity to prove that even though I'm disabled, I can still be an asset."

June Gowen, supervisory contract specialist at APO-Kelly San Antonio, said Richardson always endeavors to provide outstanding customer service. "She is very conscientious and works very hard to assure she meets her customers' needs," said Gowen, noting that even with the disability Richardson has the lowest level of absenteeism in their office.

Richardson doesn't see work as more difficult for her than others. "I'm on oxygen, so I have to drag the canister around, and it's usually easier for people to come to me than for me to go to them. But more challenging? Not really." She said people who have been working with her for years tend to forget about her disability. She describing herself even as "more handi-capable than handicapped."

Richardson asked Gowen to accompany her to the awards ceremony, and the two were able to do some sightseeing around the nation's capital prior to the event. There, Richardson was presented with a framed certificate signed by Secretary of

Defense Leon Panetta.

"Catherine is very deserving of this award," said Gowen. "When her citation was read at the ceremony and it stated that she worked on two indefinite quantity contracts which had a combined value of over \$10 billion, I noted a gasp from the crowd. DCMA APO-Kelly San Antonio is very proud of Catherine and all of her accomplishments."

Stephen King, the Pentagon's director of Disability Programs for the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity, presided over the ceremony. "At DoD, we know our strength is in the diversity of our people. By investing in workers with disabilities, DoD reaps the benefits many times over."

The awards program was started in 1981 to recognize DoD civilian employees with disabilities. Last year it was expanded to include uniformed service members. The ceremony also recognizes DoD organizations for achievements in employing individuals with disabilities. DCMA was among those honored in 2009. 