

# Diversity — “Beyond the

By *Marc Bolton*  
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**P**oet Maya Angelou said: “History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but, if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”

History shared the spotlight with the Defense Contract Management Agency’s guest speakers on April 23, when DCMA Twin Cities

(Image courtesy of iStockphoto)

recognized multiple cultural events. In a five-site video teleconference, DCMA celebrated its third semi-annual Diversity

Day. This event encompassed Women’s History Month, Asian Pacific Islander History Month, African-American History Month and Holocaust Remembrance Day. Air Force Col. Rebecca Seeger, DCMA Twin Cities commander, hosted the event, welcoming Keith Ernst, former DCMA director, and introducing the topics and speakers.

Dr. Jennifer Lee Hoffman, research associate in the intercollegiate athletic leadership program at the University of Washington, served as the day’s first guest speaker. Hoffman began with a discussion of Title IX, Education Amendment Act of 1972, with a focus on athletics. She noted that Title IX is a federal law prohibiting exclusion or discrimination on the basis of sex under any educational program receiving federal assistance. This law, as Hoffman emphasized, continues to pave the way toward equality between men and women. The second speaker, retired Air Force Lt. Col. Steve Sato, is the

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 — Col. Rebecca Seeger



# History Books™



DCMA Twin Cities held its 2009 Diversity Day. The event celebrated cultural diversity, featuring speakers, from left: Air Force Col. Rebecca Seeger, DCMA Twin Cities commander; Margo de Wilde, Holocaust survivor; and retired Air Force Lt. Col. Steve Sato.

son of Japanese-American parents who experienced World War II in different ways. While his father, Shigeo Sato, a member of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, 100th Infantry Battalion, fought for his country in France and Italy, his mother, Sue Sato, was detained in the Heart Mountain,

Wyo., internment camp. Sato gave a candid and, at times, humorous history lesson, beginning with the immigration of Asians to the United States. Discussing his mother, Sato recalled her speaking of going to Heart Mountain, the camp for “bad people” and “troublemakers.” However, Sato

said his father and mother rarely discuss those experiences.

The 100th Infantry, or the “Purple Heart Battalion,” became the most decorated unit in the European theater with more than 20 Medal of Honor recipients, and Sato’s father received a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts. Sato concluded



On April 23, DCMA Twin Cities held its 2009 Diversity Day celebration. Shown here, front row, from left: Paul Karkainen, DCMA Twin Cities; Dr. Jennifer Lee Hoffman, featured speaker; second row, from left: Harris Schaier, DCMA Twin Cities; Brian Johnson, DCMA Twin Cities; Marc Bolton, DCMA Twin Cities; third row, center: Craig Strandberg, DCMA Twin Cities.

by remarking on how his parents' experiences affected his own life. He noted that Japanese-Americans in the military did not receive a hero's welcome when they returned from the war, where prejudices still existed and many Asian families had to start their lives over again. Sato's parents moved the family from Seattle to Minnesota's Twin Cities to escape the overt prejudice they endured on the West Coast and give their children a better life. "This is not a Japanese-American story. It is not a Japanese story," said Sato. "It is an American story."

DCMA's third speaker, Mitchell Howell, DCMA Ground Systems and Munitions Division director, gave his personal perspective on growing up as an African



DCMA Twin Cities employees discuss friends who were in Nazi internment and extermination camps. They are, from left: Duane Earlywine, Sharon Yaunker and Gary Cancel.

American in segregated schools in Gadsden, Ala. Rather than let discrimination be a barrier, he looked at it as an opportunity to grow personally and professionally, relying on five tenets to live his life successfully: How choices shape our lives; Taking responsibility — “Your word is your bond”; Family — “That’s who you lean on”; Friends — “People you really depend on”; and Religion — “A path has been laid out for me; it’s not my own.”

Howell emphasized that people are not in this alone. He noted the encouragement and advice individuals of different ethnicities gave him in recognizing his potential. Howell, a United States Military Academy graduate, had a successful Army career and learned from great leaders. He did not let himself become a victim, adding that DCMA should be inclusive, consider its differences, talk through them and plug the agency’s strengths into its weaknesses, because, “We all have something to bring to the table.”

The final speaker was Margot de Wilde, a Holocaust survivor. She gave a riveting and candid speech about her experiences before, during and after living in the notorious death camp, Auschwitz. She gave her insight on Hitler’s rise to power and plan to first restrict and, ultimately, to exterminate Jews. To de Wilde, the loss of certain freedoms, lack of public schooling or transportation and the requirement to place valuables in a separate bank did not initially sink in. It was not until Germany defeated Holland in 1940 that a clearer picture emerged. Eventually

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— Steve Sato

everyone needed registration papers, and the Jews had a large “J” next to their pictures. The Jews were rounded up and sent to collection camps.

de Wilde and her husband bribed a German officer for passage to neutral Switzerland. At their first stop in Cologne, they were arrested by the Gestapo, crowded into a boxcar and sent to a collection point in Berlin. Later they were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest concentration and extermination camp established in Nazi-occupied Poland. They were separated into groups: men, women, elderly and women with children. de Wilde was stripped and had her head shaved and tattooed with an identification number. The survivor revealed how she covertly stepped out of the line and used dirt to remove the first tattoo. When she was caught without an identification number, she was tattooed once again, this one still visible on her left forearm.

Since de Wilde was childless, she was taken to the barracks that held, she later learned, those who would undergo sterilization experiments. de Wilde conveyed the stark reality of the Nazi regime’s brutality by explaining that the women with children who were in the same transport as she and her husband were sent straight to the crematorium. “I had a guardian angel during the war, and by

following my instincts, I knew I would survive,” said de Wilde.

While in the camp, de Wilde heard that her husband was still alive but in the infirmary. She never saw him again, and she later learned of his death. To this day, though, she does not know if he died in the infirmary or was sent to the gas chamber. de Wilde concluded her talk by conveying that she does not hate those who inflicted such horror on an entire class of people. “Hate is just a waste of time,” de Wilde stated. “Try not to discriminate and look for differences.”

The overall theme among the speakers emphasized harboring no bitterness or hate. Their pride and dignity were evident as they related stories of personal courage, strength and the will to survive. They demonstrated the true meaning of diversity, and their individual triumphs over adversity are lessons to all.

“Today, we are going beyond the history books. We are furthering our own education on issues that are rooted in the past but remain in today’s headlines under new guises, shrouded in new rhetoric or rationalized with new excuses,” remarked Seeger. “Today, we are bridging the past and our present with hope for a more humane future throughout the world.”