

“Fireproofing” DCMA Throu

By Jaclyn G. Pitts, Staff Writer

The Defense Contract Management Agency’s recently named General Counsel Nicholas P. “Chip” Retson says he wants to “fireproof” DCMA, and he isn’t talking about fireproof safes or filing cabinets.

Retson wants to “fireproof” DCMA against litigation by helping the agency learn how to execute processes and procedures correctly the first time while defending its positions at the same time. By fireproofing DCMA, enterprise value is added and costs stay low, allowing more time and resources to be devoted to customers.

Retson, who served as deputy general counsel and acting general counsel for DCMA prior to being named general counsel, explained his role as director of legal services for the agency. “As a counselor and adviser to the agency’s leadership team, I give legal advice and policy advice and try to make sure that I make it clear which is which,” he said.

According to Retson, a lawyer’s primary role in advising management is to ensure that managers understand the full range of legal options available and the risks associated with each one and

Retson wants to “fireproof” DCMA against litigation by helping the agency learn how to execute processes and procedures correctly the first time and how to defend its positions at the same time.

can articulate why they chose one option over the other.

Retson also is responsible for making sure his lawyers carry out their duties in a professional, ethical way and that they adhere to the rules of professional responsibility in the states in which they are licensed. If any complaints arise against agency lawyers, it is his responsibility to manage them.

Additionally, Retson works with his general counsel senior leaders to develop skill training needs for lawyers at all levels throughout their careers. He provides an annual training seminar, which he tries to structure in such a way that the classes can be certified by state continuing legal education

programs, as well as training guides and plans for new agency attorneys.

Retson places particular value on training those in positions of leadership. “I think training leaders is a really important part of the agency and every supervisor’s job,” he said. “I believe every leader’s job is to train the agency in leadership at all levels so we can always be training someone to do our job.”

Like any organization, Retson believes that DCMA has room for improvement. One issue he wants to focus on is training employees to protect against improper release of data. With increasing use of automation for transferring and collecting information, it’s important to develop more innovative ways to protect this kind

“As a counselor and adviser to the agency’s leadership team, I give legal advice and policy advice and try to make sure that I make it clear which is which.” — Chip Retson

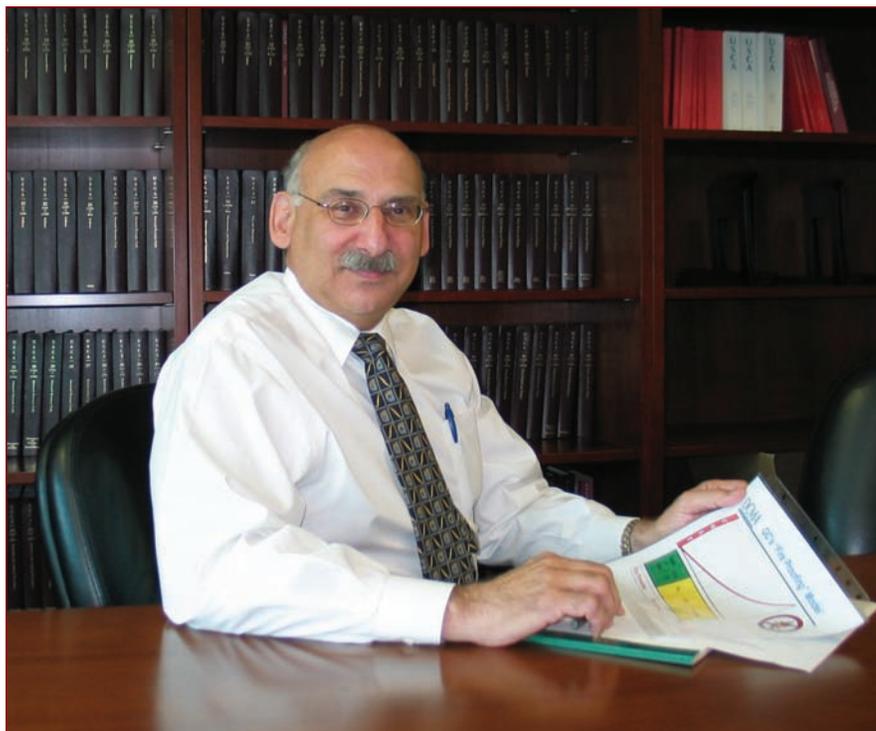
gh the General Counsel

“I don’t want ethics to be seen as a lawyer responsibility. I want it to be seen as an employee responsibility and as a leader responsibility.” — Chip Retson

of information. “In the past, if you had stuff in a file cabinet and didn’t want anyone else to use it, you would lock the file cabinet drawer,” Retson explained. “Now we have portals, Web pages, and e-mails and attachments, and how do we rethink the use of those tools in a way that helps employees recognize

their responsibility to protect information?”

Another one of the major challenges Retson is facing as general counsel is helping the agency maintain its legal, ethical structure as it goes through realignment to performance-based



Chip Retson in the Law Library at DCMA Headquarters in Alexandria, Va. (Photo by Katherine Crawford, BRTRC)

management and the National Security Personnel System. “Part of it is to say, ‘Go out there and analyze and be predictive of the future,’” Retson said. “That’s a harder and different way to do business.” And as organizations adapt to new ways of doing business, Retson believes that it’s important to ensure that all employees, managers and leaders maintain the core values of a government agency.

As a firm believer in the axiom the only constant is change, Retson considers the best way of maintaining these core values is to improve negotiation skills and promote ethical leadership for employees throughout DCMA. “I don’t want ethics to be seen as a lawyer responsibility,” he said. “I want it to be seen as an employee responsibility and as a leader responsibility.”

Retson’s commitment to training and leadership development is consistent with his view of a lawyer’s role as one of helping other people to be successful. He considers himself to be in the service industry, providing service to the rest of the agency so it can be successful. **C**