

Ms. Patricia Kirk-McAlpine Wins Presidential Rank Award



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People get awards every day. They get awards for specific acts, for work during a particular year, or on a specific day. However, on April 20, Ms. Patricia Kirk-McAlpine, director of the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Ground Systems & Munitions and Space & Missile Systems Divisions, both headquartered in Carson, Calif., was presented an uncommon award for an uncommon body of work that spanned more than five years.

Ms. Kirk-McAlpine, a member of the Senior Executive Service, was presented a Presidential Rank Award by her former employer, the Air Force, for work she accomplished while director of contracting at the Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center in El Segundo, Calif.

The Presidential Rank Awards recognize career Senior Executive Service and senior professional employees who exemplify the highest level of integrity, leadership and personal conduct and who have demonstrated exceptional performance over an extended period of time.

The process of evaluation and review of the awards spans at least six months and often longer. Ms. Kirk-McAlpine was submitted for the award long before she accepted her current position with DCMA.

A total of 15 men and women were honored at the ceremony, which was held at the Women

in Military Service for America Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery. Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne and Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. John D.W. Corley cohosted the event.

Ms. Kirk-McAlpine was recognized for her leadership, which contributed to an unprecedented 41 consecutive successful military space launches over a five-year period. As part of that effort, her initiatives in contracting procedures contributed to cutting very large amounts of red tape — and tens of millions of dollars — from the contracting process.

Perhaps her most significant initiative was the development of the “PK [Contracting Directorate] University” at the Space and Missile Systems Center. Ms. Kirk-McAlpine is very proud of the University. “Our most important asset was human capital,” she said. “Our incoming Air Force officers were young and inexperienced, and we had to ensure the contracting workforce of the future. So we developed a curriculum that taught those officers on the fly.”

Over time, the University was shaped into four schools — the Buyers’ Institute, Procuring Contracting Officer (PCO) Preparatory School, Contingency Contracting Administration Services (CCAS) Boot Camp and the School of Pricing. The CCAS curriculum teaches contracting in the field, the type of work done by deployed DCMA contracting officers. “Students were taught everything from leasing to how to shoot,” she said. Due to the needs of the government, some

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Air Force and Navy personnel are now being trained to fight on the ground. From the time the university was established until Ms. Kirk-McAlpine left in the fall of 2005, more than 400 people had graduated, more than half of them newly warranted contracting officers.

Another series of initiatives concerned developing alliances with the Air Force's contracting partners, including DCMA and the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA). One of these initiatives led to the signing of an agreement between the Space and Missile Center (SMC) and the former DCMA West District (now the Agency's Space & Missile Systems and Ground Systems & Munitions Divisions) that allows for exchange assignments of up to 90 days for DCMA's and SMC's contracting interns.

Ms. Kirk-McAlpine was also instrumental in ensuring that DCMA's and DCAA's customer liaison representatives have seats and participate in SMC senior staff meetings and program deliberations. According to her former boss, Air Force Lt. Gen. Brian A. Arnold, then-commander of SMC, "She has built a strong coalition of support to the space programs with these agencies. ... This has resulted in the early involvement by these agencies and

corresponding increased responsiveness in providing key support to all space programs. The result is a significant reduction in the time program offices receive proposal evaluations and audits from these agencies, from 45 days to an average of less than two weeks." Results depend to a large extent "on the customer liaison representatives' personalities," Ms. Kirk-McAlpine said. "They have to be aggressive and proactive. They have to engage the customer and keep the door open."

In addition to her numerous contributions to the Nation's defense while in the workplace, Ms. Kirk-McAlpine has many contributions to America's well-being outside the office. She has served as a cabinet member of the Combined Federal Campaign, executive member of the Greater Los Angeles Federal Executive Board and advisory board member for Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles, where her leadership resulted in the construction of 125 homes for inner-city families in need.

With her current duties, which often include traveling 20 or more days a month, how does she find the energy to work in the community? "I believe that the cost of freedom isn't free. We all ought to find a way to give back to the community and the Nation. Besides, I get so much personal satisfaction from it; I find it energizing."

President George W. Bush, who signed the award certificate, is quoted in the ceremony's program. Speaking of all the award winners, he said, "Their work covers a tremendous range of issues, yet they share some things in common: an outstanding work ethic, commitment to public service and pride in a job well done." A job well done, indeed. Congratulations, Ms. Kirk-McAlpine.

(Above) Ms. Patricia Kirk-McAlpine, DCMA Ground Systems & Munitions and Space & Missile Systems Divisions director, was honored with the Presidential Rank Award for work she accomplished while director of contracting at the Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center. The award was presented by Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne (left) and Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. John D.W. Corley.