

New *Communicator* Editor-in-Chief



by Ms. Katherine Crawford, Staff Writer

Ms. Dianne Ryder, Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Headquarters, was recently named editor-in-chief of Communicator magazine. We sat down with Ms. Ryder to find out more about her, both personally and professionally, as she embarks on this new role.

Communicator (C): Please tell us a little about yourself.

DR: Well, I'm the fourth of six children — I've got four brothers and one sister. [I was] born and raised in the Northern Virginia area, which is rare around here. I also "survived" eight years of Catholic school. And, I always love to tell people this, I met my husband, Joe, when we were in high school and he was only 14 [laughter] ... I was 15, robbing the cradle. I went to Hayfield High School just down the street [from DCMA Headquarters in Alexandria, Va.]. And I have three wonderful teenagers — teenage boys. That's it in a nutshell.

C: How did you get your start in Public Affairs?

DR: Well, all of my government experience since '84 has been, up until [recently], administrative, and to me that [experience] really tied in because I was doing a lot of editing and composing ... so certain steps leading up to getting into Public Affairs helped along the way. ... I had always wanted to get into the [Public Affairs] field because I enjoyed writing so much. [When I worked at the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)] I was actually assistant to the Public Affairs officer there, and yet my title didn't reflect Public Affairs, which frustrated me. It wasn't until I came here, really, that I began doing

Public Affairs work, and that's why I always have to tip my hat to Dan McGinty, my first boss [at DCMA], because he really took a chance on me. Basically, I had a friend tell me about the job. She recommended me to Mr. McGinty, and he kind of went on blind faith.

C: Where did you work prior to DCMA?

DR: The Defense Energy Support Center [DESC], which was formerly the Defense Fuel Supply Center, which is a field activity of DLA. ... So all of my government service up until I came [to DCMA] was with the DESC, and it was very much a family atmosphere. ... [However] it was very frustrating to me that I was basically doing Public Affairs work and yet my supervisor there would always tell me, 'Well, you need experience with the media [to get into Public Affairs];' but how do you get that experience if you don't just jump in and do it? ... I just wanted to write — that was my thing — and I thought I had proved myself, so it was time to move on because I wasn't getting ahead there.

C: Please describe your duties and responsibilities as editor-in-chief.

DR: I help organize and conduct the [*Communicator*] editorial boards; develop concepts, story ideas and themes; help plan the publication of the magazine; assign articles; ... research and write articles; assist [the Public

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Affairs contractor] in designing and laying out the publication; monitor the publishing contract and ensure compliance; and oversee the dissemination of the magazine. I would tie into that the News Service, because it’s the electronic companion, if you will, to the magazine; it has become an increasing part of what we do. And right now we’re so short staffed I’m still doing my old job [as Public Affairs assistant], still handling a lot of the administrative duties and timekeeping functions, distributing mail and such; but, as the office grows, I’ll hand those over. I also manage our credit card program, the [International Merchant Purchase Authorization] card. That’s a big duty that I’m hoping to hand off to concentrate more on the magazine.

C: What role does the *Communicator* play within and for the Agency?

DR: Well, the short answer is that it’s the primary tool to communicate information to the Agency at large. But, to me, it has really become a great vehicle for telling the story of people behind the scenes here [at DCMA] — not just human interest stories but really what they’re doing in their day-to-day jobs that the average person doesn’t know. ... To me, that’s the best way to find out what really makes the Agency work — what each individual’s piece of the puzzle is and how it fits in. Also, I think it helps identify the leaders as well as new people coming into the Agency. I think we’ve gotten better at identifying these people and writing articles to let others know more about them.

C: What is your vision for the future of the magazine?

DR: I think that we’ll be able to establish a better network of Public Affairs liaisons (PALs) so we



can keep getting these great stories from the field. It’s important that people see the human side of DCMA employees as well as what they do in their jobs every day. I think it’s headed in a really great direction; I hope we continue that and continue to get really great photos.

C: This new position is a significant step in your career. What are your future professional aspirations?

DR: To tell you the truth, it all happened so fast my head is still spinning. Basically, just short and sweet, [my aspiration is] to continue my education. I’ve taken kind of a long break. While it was wonderful to have gone to DINFOS [Defense Information School at Ft. Meade, Md.] back in 2004, that [was] almost two

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(Above) Ms. Dianne Ryder, *Communicator* editor-in-chief, in her work area at DCMA Headquarters. (Photo by Ms. Carolina Woods, BRTRC)

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years [ago], and so I really want to get back on track. With DINFOS I had so much concentrated education on being an editor and actually getting hands-on experience working in PageMaker and seeing what other editors, especially of military publications, are doing. ... I took the basic editor’s course, which had very few [prerequisites], and even though there were only two of us civilians in the class, it was very exciting and just exhilarating, really, because there was instant feedback on how well we were doing and obviously we had to take tests and do assignments. ...

I have a hodge-podge of education — I always say I have the equivalent of an associate degree — because I’ve participated in various DLA programs. They had one thing I wish DCMA would adopt, which was they had instructors from [Northern Virginia Community College] come to the building, and so you’d come into work a little early then afterwards take classes in the evening. That way I was able to complete my 24 hours of business, which was really a [Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act] requirement, but I just took it because I wanted to have that under my belt. And then I was also in the educational enhancement program, which allowed me to go to school during the day and also work a certain amount of hours each week. ... I enjoy the process of learning new things, it’s just that my plate has been very full with work, so I’m trying to find a good time to start up again and get back into the groove, but it is hard after you’ve been out of it for a couple years.

C: How does the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs contribute to and further DCMA’s mission?

DR: [The Public Affairs] mission is tied into the mission of the support staff, but, basically, we’re information brokers, that’s our job, and of course there’s the congressional piece. ... But basically I think it’s just to use whatever tools are at hand,

whether it be publications, brochures, the exhibit that we take around to trade shows, promotional items, etc., to communicate the message of DCMA — who we are, what we do. And I think for having such a small group, our [Public Affairs] team is top notch, because they all have different areas of expertise. I think it’s great how we all help each other in the furtherance of getting information out to the Agency. Julia [Wyant] has broadcasting background, and Tom [Gelli] not only has the congressional piece but he has a strong Public Affairs background himself. Ken [Ross] is our graphics person, and he helps tremendously with all kinds of things: posters, programs, you name it, and he has a wealth of experience having once been in business for himself. And Art [Forster] brings a unique perspective, because he was in the Service, and then he was with private industry, and I think he has brought a lot of new ideas, a fresh perspective to this organization and has increased the ways that we communicate. Plus he has made sure a lot of the information on the Web, at least that we have purview over, is current — [senior leadership team] biographies come to mind and the *Hometown News Service*, which is still kind of getting off the ground.

C: When you’re not at DCMA, what types of hobbies/activities do you engage in?

DR: My husband and I both like to go antiquing and to flea markets and such, but since our house is bursting, we’ve found other [pastimes]. We like to travel, and that’s something we’re able to do now that the boys are older. And, of course, writing — I try to keep up with a journal, and I have taken creative writing courses in the past to keep my skills sharp, plus it’s fun for me. I also enjoy listening to different kinds of music, but as evidenced by the “decorations” on my desk, the Beatles are my favorite! And other than that, just give me a bowl of popcorn and a good movie that I can kick back with my guys and enjoy.