

# A CONFLUENCE OF *Women's Voices*



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®  
St. Louis District

# FUN FACTS ABOUT OUR PARTICIPANTS

Can you guess who's who?

## **One of our participants:**

Was the Small Business Deputy of USACE for 2018?

Was selected as an electrical engineer to work on the space shuttle?

Became one of the most recent Senior Executive Staff members?

Was the first female Deputy Chief of Operations in MVS?

Showered with giraffes and slept with lions in her early career?

Started a nuclear reactor when she was in college?

Led the confirmation process for three Chiefs of Engineers and two Assistant Secretaries?

Was the first female branch chief in EC Division in MVS?

Had an early career as a physical trainer before coming to MVS?

Was granted a Distinguished Toastmaster award?

Was 2017 USACE Civilian of the Year?

Was the first female Maintenance Officer in USACE?

Served as the Operations Project Manager at two different St. Louis District Lake projects and as Deputy for a third?

Is the middle of three generations of logistics specialists?

Was the first female Construction Inspector in MVS?

Recipient of an award actually named after her?

Was featured in an article in Essence magazine?

Taught GED classes in her free time for many years?

A CONFLUENCE OF  
*Women's  
Voices*



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
St. Louis District



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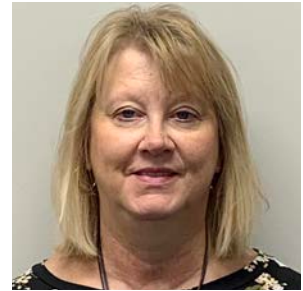
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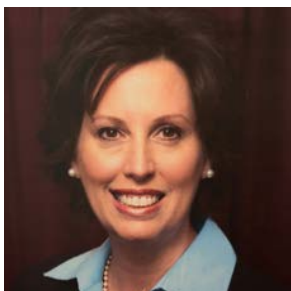
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## FOREWARD

### Major General Diana M. Holland



History matters! Documenting history REALLY matters! Without such documentation, “it didn’t happen” or someone else tells their version of events. It is for that reason that I am proud of the St. Louis District for providing a platform to share the stories found in this volume. I am honored to have crossed paths with many of the women in this book and, after reading all of the interviews, I wish I had the opportunity to know every contributor. I am awed by their accomplishments and resilience, and thankful for their service.

The Army has presented me with many opportunities. I cannot imagine having done anything else in my professional life. Afterall,

how does someone from Santa Barbara, California find herself decades later as the Commanding General of the Mississippi Valley Division? That journey was possible largely because of the countless women who filled roles in the Corps of Engineers, the Army, and other professions in American society in the years and generations before me. Every female pilot, engineer, economist, police officer, elected official, nurse, doctor, small business owner, Soldier and others, did their part to blaze a trail for current and future generations, sometimes against great odds, skepticism and challenging circumstances. Each one of those women changed opinions, in small or big ways, that ultimately influenced the culture and environment where they worked. While most of those women may not have received media attention as they went about their daily business, they were instrumental in making possible the opportunities given to me and many others.

I believe it is also important to acknowledge that many successful women had mentors, champions, and role models who made a difference in their career progression. Countless men and women in USACE take seriously the responsibility to raise the next generation of female leaders. Such mentorship and advocacy has long been the secret to increasing diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace and it will continue to be the key ingredient as we move forward in that endeavor. Thank you to the many mentors

and role models highlighted by the women interviewed in the pages that follow.

Again, I appreciate the St. Louis team that went above and beyond to write the history of these amazing Americans. No doubt, this will be an important source document for future generations who will want to know more about the amazing people who did great things in the St. Louis District. Like me, they will be impressed by their achievements and appreciate their service.

Essayons! Building Strong!

MG Diana M. Holland  
Commanding General, Mississippi Valley Division  
President, Mississippi River Commission

## PREFACE

### Colonel Kevin R. Golinghorst



This book is a tremendous example of the hard work, teamwork, and initiative of the incredible employees of the St. Louis District (MVS). I was honored to join this team in July 2020 as their new Commander and District Engineer as this project was being finalized but am grateful to be able to highlight the importance of this volume that follows. What you'll find is a compilation of narratives from a select group of forty women who have served honorably at MVS and shared some of the key experiences for the benefit of others that will serve alongside of them and follow in their footsteps.

Some key themes that you'll discover include

that these women, just like men, sometimes just had to find the best roles for them to grow and excel in and MVS often gave them these opportunities. Also, mentors are important to a person's success and in many of these stories, this occurred without a formal mentoring program, so leaders at all levels are encouraged to help mentor someone or ask to be mentored. Next, it is still not the norm to see as many women in leadership roles at all levels, but this continues to improve. Lastly, MVS celebrates the success of women if they found it in MVS but also as they have moved on to other Corps offices or into retirement and continued service in other ways.

Throughout my career, I have enjoyed the opportunity to serve with and for many outstanding leaders, both men and women. As a younger, company-grade Engineer officer in mostly combat focused units, I was primarily leading and being led by other males as Commanders and leaders. However, later on as a field grade officer, I was proud to serve for both an outstanding female Battalion Commander and later, another fantastic female Brigade Commander.

Therefore, I was elated to join a District within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in which I'd be leading with a female Deputy District Engineer (DDE) and serving together for the first female Commanding General of our higher headquarters, the Mississippi

Valley Division (MVD). These leaders have all provided great examples for me and countless other Soldiers and Department of the Army Civilians, regardless of their gender. With a continued focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in our future, we can listen to and learn from these voices. Their stories show how gender and race tend to be key factors to focus on. But please note that other more subtle factors such as what school someone graduated from, a person's age, and whether one is an Engineer or not, can also either hinder or encourage full inclusion.

While my primary focus and appreciation goes to the women who shared their experiences and stories that you'll read, I would like to extend a special thanks to key team members who worked tirelessly to produce this valuable resource. These champions include Natalie Drew, Ryann Willis, Tammie Bush, George Gonzalez, Phyllis Thomas, Tan Gates, Dave Busse, and Susan Wilson.

We do hope that you'll enjoy this manuscript as much as those of us who have seen it come together. We are proud of our teammates, women and men - past, present, and future. Both women and men can read this book and learn from others that their career paths are not always simple or straight forward, much like the important work that we do to monitor and manage the confluence of the major inland waterways in the region.

We are getting better all the time at providing opportunities for all to serve, learn, and grow at MVS and it is likely why people would recommend the St. Louis District as a great place to work. That is also why we are known to be the Gateway to Excellence!

Kevin R. Golinghorst  
Commander and District Engineer  
St. Louis District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## PROLOGUE

Within this volume, you will meet an amazing group of people—many of whom are trailblazers, trendsetters, and pioneers. These individuals are smart, talented, dedicated and have achieved much over the course of their careers, whether they be retired, in mid-career, or just starting their careers with the US Army Corps of Engineers. These people have three basic things in common—first, they are women; second, they spent all or some part of their careers with the St. Louis District; and third, they positively affected our District and the rest of the Corps with their presence.

In September 2019, a team was assembled with the intent of creating a volume of oral history vignettes of some of the outstanding women who had worked in the St. Louis District. This idea was presented to senior leadership, who enthusiastically approved the project. An interview team consisting of Tammie Bush, Curation and Archives Analysis Branch; Ryann Willis, Environmental and Munitions Branch; and Natalie Drew, the District Knowledge Manager, was assembled.

The team gathered together to determine what the final product was to be, who should be invited to participate, and how the work was to be conducted. When compiling the list of possible participants, the team was cognizant of the many outstanding women in the District, the organizational placement of them, and where they were in their careers.

The team attempted to be as all-inclusive as possible, knowing there would be people who would not be considered in this first go around, for whatever reason. The team also decided they did not necessarily want to focus just on the “big” names, but also on hard-working individuals whose efforts contribute daily to the success of the St. Louis District’s mission. Ironically, many of the individuals who declined to participate were people who fell into this category. Ultimately sixty-eight (68) women were asked to participate and forty (40) of them did. The stories of those 40 women are presented here for you.

Historians must remember not to judge the past by today’s standards—must not be ethnocentric—when they describe the past. Some of the stories in this volume describe behavior that would not be tolerated in today’s work environment and may even seem unbelievable, but remember, these events occurred in the 1960’s, 1970’s, 1980’s, 1990’s, and 2000’s. It seems the workplace (i.e., the St. Louis District) was indicative of the culture at the time. Not so very long ago, it was common to treat minorities and women as less than equal to men. Women were thought to be less competent in the workplace and some of the comments shared in these stories reflect the belief women should be at home taking care of children rather than taking some man’s job. The struggle for cultural change has a long history in this country; indeed, even the women’s suffrage movement can be traced back to the Seneca Falls, New York, convention in 1848. The struggle for African-American

suffrage began almost immediately after the Civil War in 1865. In today's climate it is all too easy to forget that these and similar struggles began long before our lifetimes. It is easier to recall the 1960's and 1970's as times of great cultural change in this country. These decades saw the birth of the Civil Rights Movement, the Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights Movement, and the Women's Movement. From there, the United States has seen an increased awareness and tolerance for several minority groups and for women. Even today, as evidenced by the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements, the struggle for true equality continues. These overarching cultural changes have been reflected in the District's workplace and unanimously our participants agreed that things had changed for the better. Culture is one of the hardest things to change and improvements are always desirable, but true equality has yet to be achieved. Some vestiges of sexist (and other) behavior remain, but it is hoped these stories will highlight some of these more subtle slights, increase the awareness of them, and, ultimately, eliminate them.

It is ironic that during the course of this project, it was suggested that some of the more "negative" stories be struck because it made the participant seem "petty." Given that the intent of the project was to highlight St. Louis District women, their accomplishments, and some of the challenges they overcame, this might seem a little odd to some. Truthfully, this has happened again and again with historical pieces—do we need to highlight some of the harsher realities in order to show

we've improved? Are these experiences truly integral to these women's stories? Because we are all the product of our collective experiences, the project team would argue that these negative stories are absolutely imperative to record and share.

Perhaps one indication of how things have improved for women in the district is the "upward mobility program" that gave many of these women the opportunity to move into roles not traditionally held by women. For those looking to increase their grade because they were supporting their families or simply wished to do "more," however, this program was invaluable during the 1970's and early 1980's to ensure women could move to job series that allowed them more upward mobility. Today, this program is rarely used and there is less need for it because the hiring done is much more equitable now. We believe this is a wonderful indicator of positive change in the district.

Without some of the challenges encountered, who knows what some of these women would have become? For many of them, these challenges helped shape their determination to succeed in their chosen fields...and succeed they did. So the project team chose to let these "negative" stories stand. They represent the very real experiences and challenges overcome by these women and are part of what makes these women remarkable. In an environment where things were stacked against them, these women persevered and saw their bravery and steadfastness rewarded with cultural

changes that make these behaviors less likely to occur to women today. And even today, women continue to face the subtle slights and challenges as described in some of the younger women's stories in this volume. More changes are needed and will come as each new generation of people enter the work force and continue to do amazing things in the St. Louis District.



## INTRODUCTION

### *A Note From the Interviewers*

#### **Natalie Drew**

There are a lot of firsts represented in this volume—the first female Executive Assistant, Resource Management Chief, Contracting Chief, Operations Division Deputy Chief, Engineering and Construction Division Deputy Chief, Engineering Branch Chief, Deputy of Project Management (DPM), Construction Inspector—just to name a few. These are all strong women who were raised to believe in themselves and their abilities. They are life-long learners, selfless public servants with a passion for helping their communities and country, and forward thinking employees who never hesitated to take a chance to better themselves and the work environment of those around them. Not all of these women encountered the same challenges during their career and because they are from different time periods; their experiences in the workplace were varied and vast. Without exception, however, these individuals left an indelible mark on the workplace and the St. Louis District is better because of them.

Certain traits became immediately apparent after the interviews were completed. These women are life-long learners and their stories often reflect that. Virtually all of those interviewed described the Corps of Engineers as an environment full of opportunities and

recommended those be taken advantage of by anyone and at any time in their careers. With the varied missions the Corps is responsible for, it is virtually impossible not to find a fulfilling fit. Many interviewees pointed this out and advised people not to be afraid of taking these opportunities and sometimes getting into a completely different career field.

Not all challenges encountered were simply because they were female; one of the other major challenges described in this volume is much more subtle—the difference between Engineers and Engineering Technicians, and even sometimes non-Engineers. Some of our participants are higher graded Engineering Technicians, who fought (and not always successfully) for promotion in a culture that did not value them for their knowledge, instead rather keeping them at lower grades and treating them with some disdain simply because they were not engineers. One non-engineer participant laughingly stated she felt she had been treated differently simply because she was not an engineer. And another participant jokingly stated she felt she was treated differently because she did not have a degree from the University of Missouri at Rolla (previously the Missouri School of Mines and now Missouri University for Science and Technology). All jokes aside, these were (and sometimes still are) very real challenges. We all know that our organization is called the Corps of Engineers and where the focus of our missions lie. Still the engineers do not succeed on their own. They are surrounded by a myriad of other professionals who all play

a vital part of mission success. To be fair, it has gotten easier for Engineering Technicians and non-engineers to get promoted to higher grades and for people to be valued for their knowledge and expertise rather than their possession of a degree in Engineering, but it was a long, hard battle to get to where we are today. And we owe gratitude to some of the women within these pages for that improvement.

It has been a privilege to be part of this project. I have been truly inspired and delightfully surprised by some of the things I have discovered while talking with these women. So much so that the team decided to provide a list of trivia questions on the front cover. See how many of them you can guess correctly. You might find the answers surprising. Did you know one of the women in the district was a BMX racer from before there was even a women's division?

## Ryann Willis

The Women's History project began as an attempt to shed some light into the lives of the many successful women who have worked in the St. Louis District over the last 30 years. This project has quickly become far more educational, enlightening, and inspiring than it was ever intended to be. Throughout the interview process, strong patterns in work ethics began to emerge. Despite the differing career paths and personality traits of each interviewee, the same consistent work ethic shone through: every person wanted to be the best they could be in the position they were in.

The collective interviews are all differing, individual experiences that have led these women to their success here in the St. Louis District. Some careers have had more ups and downs, while others have had a steady incline, and some have had almost instantaneous success, while others have had to battle for it. No matter what career field you are in, or are headed for, there is at least one lesson applicable to your experience within each of these women's stories.

## Tammie Bush

I've always had an interest in the stories of strong women, so it was very easy to say yes to helping with the Women's History Project for our district. I was honored to bear witness to and capture the essence of women's influence on one of the largest most influential rivers in the world: how women are central to the St. Louis District which is central to the Mississippi River. St. Louis is poised between the north and the south and carries a complex history due to this location, much like these women's stories captured at the cusp of and poised over the flow of social change. There are many triumphs over challenges and not a few tragedies where social change in its slow evolution played out in individual women's stories.

History is woven of many stories and threads and these women's stories are the weft, woven over the warp of the needs, challenges and times surrounding them. History and time flow like the river and pass on – the shape of the banks, the constraints of this moment in time are very different from that of many of the women's stories told here. And yet, something remains the same, some shape of the riverbank, a younger woman's story echoing back to resonate with her sisters lived history.

Please come wade in the water, feel the power, challenge and need expressed in the stories told in each woman's voice, as seen through her eyes, as woven through her hands.



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# TERI ALLEN

*Planning Division, Environmental Compliance  
Section, Chief*

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Teri Allen had a varied career path before coming to USACE in 2001. “I worked in banking for about five years, then I went back to school and worked as a biology teaching assistant there. While working on my Master’s degree, I worked for a consulting firm, Coastal Planning and Engineering that did mostly beach re-nourishment in South Florida. Later on I worked for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.”

When she interviewed for her role at the District, she was working on her dissertation in South America and didn’t anticipate a long career at USACE. “I always wanted to be involved in ecosystem restoration in the federal government or a non-governmental operation or a state level agency. I wanted to do big ecosystem restoration projects. I was doing my dissertation in Guyana. I lived out in the rainforest, or the savannas, in a tent. Including the research for my master’s degree, and my initial dissertation research, I spent seven summers living in the rainforest and I loved it! When I came in to interview for this position downtown, I saw so many people walking into the building, and everybody walking in and out at the same time. I thought, ‘I can’t do this. There’s no way I can work here. I need to be outside.’ So I didn’t plan on staying here, but it has worked out.” Teri credits Tom Keevin for helping her determine a direction for her USACE career. “He is the one that suggested that I do a dissertation study on

the Mississippi River because it was work that needed to be done for the Biological Opinion. He helped me develop that project, and he was also on my dissertation committee. He also provided career guidance and told me, “You can go in this direction and be a supervisor; or you need to go in this direction and be a regional technical specialist, or go somewhere else. He was very influential at that point in my career, and still is now.” Teri was able to provide similar guidance to a high school student interested in becoming a biologist. “She was a daughter of one of the administrative assistants, and she wanted to be a biologist. So we encouraged her to go out in the field with us. We were able to get the paperwork done and have her go out as



*Teri at Mel Price with a blue catfish.*

a volunteer to see if she really wanted to be a biologist because it's different when you're out in the field than what people may perceive it to be. So, we took her out with us several times, and there were some pretty brutal field seasons. She did an incredible job, absolutely excellent, but decided she did not want to be a biologist. That experience was great for her and for us."

When Teri first began at USACE she was treated differently as a woman. "My first week here, I think I was the only female in the branch at the time, other than maybe one admin. One day I was kind of bombarded in my cubicle by a few "gentlemen" who were rather abrupt and said, 'We hope you don't turn this place into a lacy, perfumed place with pink everywhere and pink fingernail polish.' I'd never, ever experienced this type of behavior anywhere else. I was totally shocked by their conduct. They obviously did not know me! The way I usually deal with that type of adversity comes from a line from a song, which is to 'quietly make noise.' I don't get upset. I just think, 'watch me, watch me succeed, watch me do what it takes to excel.' That's what I've done throughout my life."

Despite her experiences earlier in her career, Teri has seen that there is tangible proof of how the Corps has become a better place for women to advance in their career. "Being a scientist, I'd want to see all the data. However, we have a branch that has three female section chiefs and

a regional technical specialist. You look in the front office and HQ now and you see women in high level positions. Just by looking around, the results seem to indicate that, yes, USACE has become a better workplace for women."

Teri credits taking on other responsibilities outside of the workplace as the way she maintains a balance between her professional and personal life. "Sometimes I tend to work too much, but I think there's become more of a balance in the last four years because I've taken on another responsibility that's outside the workplace. I am a director of a program that gives clothing and supplies for babies, infants, and toddlers. It's called the Baby Bank, and it's through the church that I go to. In the last four years, we've served over 500 children. It's becoming pretty well known in the area, and it keeps growing."

In addition to helping her find balance, Teri sees the impact the Baby Bank has on other women in her community. "We had a lady that came in several months ago who just started crying. I spoke with her and found out she had just lost her baby. We talked quite a bit. She did okay. She came back some time later and said she was thrilled to be pregnant again, but unfortunately, she had another miscarriage. I hear so many women say how much our program helps them. The program enables families to help care for their children if they don't have enough resources. It makes their lives easier, better. That

has a huge impact on them.” Moments that stand out to Teri in her career are the impacts she saw from working on emergency projects. “We had to do an emergency rock removal project down in the Thebes area. So, I did the environmental compliance as part of the Middle Mississippi Low Water Team. We received the Excellence in Government Award Professional Team Level Two for that project. Another emergency project was a scour problem at Lock and Dam 25. Again, it was a threat to shutting down the inland navigation system. So, we were able to go through coordination and do the environmental compliance and get that program going immediately to get the repairs done. It was right on the verge of winter, when they wouldn’t be able to use the equipment required for the emergency repair, but we worked relentlessly and got it done in time. Both of those projects were significant because shutting down the inland navigation system would have huge impacts on the nation, both in the supply chain and economically.

While Teri feels proud of her career, she laments some opportunities she was not able to take. “When I was a Department of the Army intern, interns were supposed to rotate around to

different sections. We put together a schedule to do that, but I was told by my supervisor at the time that I could not do it because I was needed in the job that I was in. I wasn’t permitted to go to those other sections because I always had



*Teri (in front row in light blue shirt) with her Planning Division colleagues.*

a heavy workload, which I executed. I wish I had gotten the opportunity to do the rotations because it could have been very beneficial for me to see how other branches and divisions operate.” The other thing, “I wish I had been able to do regional or international details, but it just has not been feasible”

Teri advises young women on their career at the Corps “to be confident. Don’t be intimidated by anyone, no matter their rank, how long they’ve been there, male, female, or otherwise. Get to know people, reach out to people, explore different opportunities and work hard. That’s probably the same advice I’d give to anyone, but definitely for women. I think sometimes we as

women tend to be intimidated by people and are sometimes not as confident as we should be.”

In her youth, Teri was a champion BMX racer, both before and after a separate girls/women’s division was created.





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# KARLA BABB

*Contracting Division, Services & Commodities  
Branch, Chief*

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Before Karla Babb came to MVS in 2016, she worked at Scott Air Force Base for US Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) for 2 years. “I decided to come to the Corps because it was closer to home. I’m down in House Springs right now, but at that time, I was in St. Peters, so the distance was quite far. Whenever I would go home, it took me about a couple of hours, because the traffic was so jammed up.” Ever since her first job with the Corps, she says, “I knew it would turn into a career. I’ve always been career oriented and career driven. I take any mission I’m given with a job very seriously, so I put a lot of passion into it. I planned to stay here till retirement unless there wasn’t an opportunity for me to grow in my career.”

Her first job was as a GS-12 Contract Specialist, “awarding contracts for construction, AE (Architect and Engineering), services, and pre-award to post-award administration. I did a lot of negotiating as well.” After that, she became the Small Business Deputy for the District. “That was kind of twofold, as I had to educate and basically mentor small businesses to help them get their footprint in the government and the Corps. I also had to educate and train our District on the latest small business policies and how to help the industry and the community grow.” Karla has always been a teacher at heart, which explains her long-term goal “to be a supervisor, be able to lead others, and share what

I had learned in my career in private industry and with the government. I love to mentor and coach others,” she says, “so my biggest goal was to at least be in a leadership position before I retired.”

Karla says that she’s been in contracting “all my career, except when I did the small business position,” but that “small business has been my favorite. I’ve never been in a position that’s been so rewarding. I got to see small businesses prosper and grow. I got to be a part of that.” When she started that position, “the program really needed to be more robust and redeveloped, and I was able to turn it around and have the program gain the respect and the trust of the commander and all senior leadership. That was a challenge at first, because it was a one-man office. So, I had two hats, one to wear for industry and one to wear for our District. Not crossing those lines was a challenge, and so was gaining the trust that the industry had lost in our District and turning that around. But I enjoyed doing it.” She’s been recognized for her work in Small Business too: “Last year [2018] I received the Small Business Deputy of the Year award. That award is not the easiest to get. It’s USACE-wide, and I accomplished that after only a year and a half as the Small Business Deputy. That was one of my proudest moments.”

Now, Karla says, “I lead a team of seven” as Branch Chief in Contracting, “mentoring and coaching them and reviewing their contract actions.” When she first took the detail in Contracting Division as a Branch Chief, which later became permanent, “I was still wearing the small business hat,” she says, “doing my detail with, at that time, six employees, and in the LDP (Leadership Development Program). It was a lot to juggle at one time.” Such challenges seem to feed Karla’s success, which she attributes to “being a strong independent woman. My mom raised me to never give up, to always work for the goal you want to achieve, and to not let anything beat you down. That fight in me comes from her, and from raising three boys.



*Karla with her grandson.*

Part of my success is being able to be a full-time mom, go to college, and work a full-time job while raising three kids. I carried the strength that developed in me into my professional life.”

Balancing family and work has changed over time for Karla. “Now that I’m in the Branch Chief position, there’s a lot more responsibility,” she says. And while her own children are now adults, “I do have two grandsons. I definitely look forward to spoiling them, and then I can go home.” She also has hobbies. “I love working out, so I still find time to do that. I love to bowl. And then I love to bow hunt. I hunt everything, but mostly with my bow, it’s deer.”

Karla struggled with having been treated differently because she’s a woman—“more so in my earlier career,” she says. “I had an industry job where I worked with the Purchasing Agent, and he believed that women should not be in any type of higher position. I was a Senior Contracts Manager at that time. Even though he was four cubes away, he would only talk to me by email. When I was responsible for helping with the audits, DCAA (Defense Contract Audit Agency), and DCMA (Defense Contract Management Agency) and I needed his assistance that became very challenging.” She tried confronting him by going to his cube to work face to face, but she was met with a “very unprofessional, blow-me-off type of attitude. So, I just had to work with what I had,

to make sure we were successful as an industry, and to get through these audits.” Although the challenges of her position itself have grown, she says, “being a woman working has gotten easier. I think it’s more accepted now that women are leaders, and some are really good leaders.” One program she feels has made an impact on women’s lives is the Small Business’s women-owned small business program. For women starting in small business, “sitting down and talking with other women who started in that program has been really helpful. There’s a lot of support out there for those women.”

If she could choose to have done something differently, she says, it would be teaching. “One of my big strengths is working with children, and I really wish I had gone back to school to be a teacher.” She was particularly inspired by

her pastor in St. Peters. “He showed me one of my true talents—working with children. I was able to go to Africa on a mission trip, five years ago in January [2014]. It was an experience I’ll never forget. I mean, the children would flock to me, and we would just laugh and play. That inspiration came from him allowing me to be a youth leader and show one of my true talents.” Teaching has “always been my dream,” Karla says. “I have also done some volunteer work with the woman’s shelter here in St. Louis, and I would watch the children while their moms sat through a program to help them recover from being abused. I started getting attached to some of those children.”

Karla’s other inspirational mentors include Pat Filer, “my supervisor at TRANSCOM at Scott Air Force Base, and then my supervisor here

for a short time when I was a Specialist. He made a huge impact on my career by teaching me how to do contracting and how to do the position, as well as giving me a lot of personal guidance from his history of contracting. Another mentor I should mention is Nancy Porter, who was a



*Karla in Africa in 2014.*

strong mentor while I worked at TRANSCOM. She taught me so much about Government contracting and I can still reach out to her today for guidance. Not only has she made an impact on my professional career but has been a strong woman that has made me stronger personally.” In the Leadership Development Program, she says, “I chose June Jeffries. I had admired her ever since I started the Corps. I had sat in meetings with her, and when I became her mentee she gave me a lot of good history about the Corps. When I was struggling to get more of my career into leadership, I applied for different positions and got discouraged when I didn’t get them. She helped me overcome that, to look at the positive and keep reaching for that goal.”

Karla has done her own share of mentoring, both inside and outside the Corps. “I’ve mentored in the past in private industry, and as a youth leader I had mentored a lot of young students. Currently I have someone on my team who I have mentored, and I’ve seen a complete turn around from when I started the position, a very positive change.” She would recommend the Corps to young women looking to start a career, and would advise them to “stay strong, and just be passionate about what you do.”

Karla’s passion and drive have taken her through a career that even she finds surprising. When she received her small business award last year,

she says, “My heart was beating because I was so shocked. I had no idea that I was going to receive that award. I knew I was recommended for it, but as I mentioned, it’s USACE wide. There are many Small Business Deputies probably more deserving of that award. However, the write up for my award—I didn’t realize all the things that I did or the impact I made until I read it. That’s probably been the most memorable moment of my career.”



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# KAREN BAUTSCH

*Operations Division, Administrative Officer (Retired)*

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During her long career in the District, Karen Bautsch was a jack of all trades—she worked a variety of administrative positions in offices across the District including Operations, Engineering, Project Management, Human Resources, and then back to Operations Division. She was known throughout the District for her knowledge of all things administrative and her willingness to assist others.

Before she came to MVS, she worked for the Army Audit Agency for five years, beginning in the administrative typing pool. She left in 1977, after rising from GS-3 to GS-6, to deal with her newborn daughter's medical issues. After 10 years, Karen returned to work at the District. During the hiatus, she had worked at a fabric store, and as she tells the story, at her son's soccer game, "I was telling one of the soccer moms that the store was closing. She said, 'Oh, I've got a girlfriend who works for Army Corps of Engineers, and I'll tell her you're looking for a job.' The rest is history." When she returned in November 1988, she began in a GS-4 administrative position in the Construction and Operations Division at the St. Louis District and stayed with the district for 30 years. "I wanted it to be a career," she says, "Somewhere I could stay, because the lady that I spoke with said, 'It's like a big family.' It was that, even my very first boss who said, 'if you need to be home, you take off. If your kids are sick, you stay home with your sick kids.'" Shortly

after she returned, during Christmas 1988, the district was in the midst of a historic drought and continuous dredging was required to keep the Mississippi River open to navigation. "Our office was where they were coming to get on the dredges," she says. "I learned a lot in a very short time about what the Corps of Engineers did and why." While she herself did not have to work too many long days, "the dredgers were working 12 hours on and 12 hours off to keep the river open for that Christmas." The memory sticks with her.

Karen's training was mostly acquired on the job, but she also took some business courses. In addition, she learned by "just making friends with the field sites and helping them," especially about how important the district's work is. "Realizing what those barges have on them"—the nation's food and goods—"and what it means to commerce" is crucial. She attributes her success to "great friends. I established a friend probably in every office, so when I had an issue I was able to talk to them. They knew who to go to." Cleverness clearly helped as well. From 1988 to 1995, when she worked at a field site in Construction and Operations, she ran into problems with the knowledge assessments when she applied for other positions. "You had to turn those in with your application, and you had to ask your boss to rate you. Every time, my boss would rate me low or second on just one" category, even though she got high

ratings overall and during annual assessments. “I had that happen about five times,” she says. “I mentioned it to somebody, and they said, ‘That’s because he doesn’t want to lose you.’” So when an opportunity arose in the Engineering Division, and her boss was out for the day, she asked someone else to grade her. “I graded high, made the list, made the selection, and then interviewed and got the job.”

Karen is particularly proud of the Superior Civilian Service Award she received upon retirement. And she is proud of the MVS district and its excellent reputation throughout the Corps. While Karen was in the Engineering Division, she often helped the other administrative assistants in other offices within the division. Because of this, “I was approached and asked to be a Corps of Engineers Financial Management System (CEFMS) ‘train the trainer.’ I was one of the initial ‘train the trainers’ for the CEFMS program.” She was also one of the five trainers for LEAD training, a leadership development program established at the time, as a five-day standalone course. Karen was also tapped for another position, this one unique. Jerry Barnes, the head of Project Management, decided that because of the central location of the St. Louis District, all of the regional meetings for all of the districts within the Mississippi Valley Division should be held in St. Louis and one person “would be in charge of every meeting held within the

division,” and be funded by contributions from all the districts. “He developed the position, got it approved, and I won it. Think of all the meetings MVS has, and multiply that by all the districts. Every meeting within the division—and I had that position for three years—was held in St. Louis.” Karen says, “I planned every meeting that went on within the division for three years. So yeah, that was fun.” But funding problems were the position’s downfall. “The division finally said, ‘Jerry, you’re not going to get any money from the districts. Look at how much money St. Louis district is saving by not sending anybody TDY.’” When Jerry left, the position was terminated. After that, she spent three years in Human Resources, four months of it in Iraq. “In both Iraq and Afghanistan,” she says, “they knew who we were. MVS has a reputation outside of being a very high sustaining district, and I was proud to be a part of it.” Peggy O’Brien, Chief of Operations, then snapped her up when Human Resources had a funding shortfall during regionalization. “I already had a reputation within the district for getting things done, being the go-to admin person. I stayed there for 12 years. That’s where I was the longest.”

It was also her favorite position. “We had five lakes, five locks and dams, every one with an administrative assistant. When something new came up, if they didn’t understand it, it was my responsibility to help them until they fully



understood.” Karen says she was also responsible for “all the extra things that come in. For the first three or four years, that’s all I did. We had a new telephone system come in. Karen was in charge of it. We had new computers. Karen was in charge of it. I was always in charge of those large projects.” She thinks people did not treat her differently as a woman, mostly because she didn’t let them. They might’ve tried, a couple of them. You always have a male bully that says, ‘It’s the Corps of Engineers and you are not an engineer and you’re a woman.’ There’s always one in every group.” But she didn’t let that bother her and overall the district’s environment was always supportive. When asked if she felt women at the district were given the same opportunity as men, she responded, “I know for a fact in operations they are. I can’t speak for the other divisions, but because I was in operations so long I know it’s even across the board.”

While Karen herself managed well, she tells the story of Debby Trimble, a friend who had been tasked with the new financial management program. Her manager “gave it to her thinking she’d fail, as a woman,” she says. “We had several managers like that.” About a year after CEFMS was up and running well, Debby left. “She couldn’t get a promotion here. ‘No, you’re not good enough.’ And she ended up going very high in the Federal Government by leaving. Sometimes you have to go.” From Carol Matthews, “one of my biggest influences,” she

learned that “you help the people the best you can and you go for it.” And she has been friends with Esther Banks, who “always had a smile on her face, always a positive attitude,” since they met at a joint river commerce meeting. “If we go through Jackson, Mississippi or Vicksburg, then I stop and see her.” But mostly, Karen says, “I was always the trainer.” Karen mentions two other people who inspired her at the Corps: Rosemary Craig and Marianne Swift. Rosemary Craig, she says, “was always one very positive person,” someone Karen always sought out in Resource Management. With Marianne, Karen shares “a love of crafting. We made porcelain dolls for several years together on Friday nights—painted and sanded our porcelain dolls. I made my doll clothes on a machine; Marianne stitched all of hers by hand and did hand smocking across the top.” Two pieces of advice have guided her: “Be as helpful as you can” and “go with the flow.” She would advise young women beginning in the Corps to “be helpful, be supportive if you can, and as you walk down the hall, greet everyone along the way, even if their head is down. Then you know they’re grumpy or you know they’re the most obnoxious people in the world. You say ‘Good morning’ or ‘Good afternoon,’ to them loud enough, because a lot of times they’ll act like they don’t hear you. Say it again, till they respond. Most of the time you’ll get a ‘Good morning’ out of them and they’ll raise their head. It’s just treating people the way you want to be treated.”



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# PAULA BELL

*Programs and Project Management Division,  
Program Analyst*

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A native of Carbondale, Illinois, Paula Bell attended both undergraduate (in Electrical Engineering) and graduate (in Business) schools at South Illinois University at Carbondale (SIU-C). In her first job as an undergraduate, she worked for SIU-C, recruiting for the engineering program. “I was just a student and they would have you cold-call this list of students who had expressed interest in SIU. We talked to them and let them know what the advantages were of going to SIU – what engineering programs were offered and provided information about the minority engineering program.”

After graduation, in 2001, a federal workforce recruitment program led Paula to the Corps. Being from Carbondale, Illinois, with limited private sector jobs, Paula took the opportunity to move to St. Louis. When Paula started with the District, it did not initially align with her career goals. “There were not any available Engineering positions when I got here. Even after I’d been here for a while, there wasn’t any way for me to really cross over because there weren’t any electrical engineering positions open. So my initial reaction was that a USACE position was a stepping stone.”

Opportunities to apply her electrical engineering degree were limited but Paula embraced the opportunity to try different professional paths. Important lessons from Paula’s childhood helped shape her career at USACE, “I was very

lucky that even with my disability my parents mainstreamed me. I didn’t have to go to a special school. That has given me tough skin because you’re always going to have some bad incidents in your path because of race and disability. I fit the bill with being a woman, African American, and having a disability.

I learned to be flexible, which bled over into my work life. When I first started with the Corps, I did not know anything about EEO. When I went to emergency operations, I didn’t know anything over there, but I’ve always been good at picking things up and learning quickly.” This ability and flexibility served her well as she worked in different offices and different roles, including but not limited to: Equal Employment Opportunity in 2001, Emergency Management in 2002, Information Management in 2002, Project Management in 2006, and eventually Program Management in 2007, which became her permanent home.

She currently works as the Senior Program Analyst in the Programs Branch of the Programs and Project Management Division. As a Program Analyst, she is responsible for civil works projects, including preparation, review, and submittal of current year and program year budget documents. She uses several complex automated financial management software programs and develops other computer-based methods for tracking project execution.

Despite a satisfying 18 years with the district thus far, there is one missed opportunity she laments. “I went on a job interview at the Kennedy Space Center with Northrup Grumman. It was an electrical engineering position, but I didn’t know exactly what I would be doing at the time. Later, I found out it was actually to work on part of the Space Shuttle. With a disability you don’t know whether to tell them ahead of time that you have a disability or not. I didn’t tell anybody. There was a phone interview, then I was invited to come down to the space center. I got down there, and the job required being able to get into the space shuttle. My hopes were dashed. The opportunity to touch a piece of history, even if it was not long, and to be able to do it, to see the inside and how it worked and be a part of that whole mission would have been amazing.”

While Paula was not able to take that position in 1996, her interview experience still left her in awe, “They took me on a tour. The launch was supposed to be the following week, so they already had the shuttle out on the pad. We got to get not super close but closer

than you’re probably supposed to get to it. The shuttle was huge. It was standing up there and there was a huge water tank not that far from the shuttle. When you see it on TV, it looks like the stands where reporters are is close but oh no. It’s like a mile or more back. The whole thing is bigger than you would imagine when you see it on the screen. Just see it in front of you. Then, security came in a car with tinted windows and made us leave. I would have never gotten that close to the shuttle. It was one of those once in a lifetime opportunities. I did get that out of it.”

In addition to self-determination, mentors helped Paula as she carved out a new career path. “Tan Gates helped me learn about EEO, and when I was leaving EEO, she and Kathy Tober helped me find another position. There was a Black Employment Program Council



*Paula and colleagues during her early career in EEO.*

(BEPC) in St. Louis that I was able to become part of, and it broadened my perspective on diversity. Sheila Burnett, Vivian Arthur, Naomi Miles, and Kathy Englemann all helped me make the transition from IT to an Analyst position. Over the years, they, as well as many others, all participated in helping me become a better employee.”

Although Paula felt supported while quickly adapting to new roles at the Corps, the slow moving culture of change at USACE created challenges. “I grew up in Carbondale, which is a diverse community because of SIU and has a relatively large international population. When I came here, it wasn’t as diverse. There weren’t a lot of people with disabilities working here either. I’m not sure that some people knew how to act around a person with disability or at least they weren’t sure what I could do. They saw the disability first, and there were some preconceived notions.

I also noticed that when I first got here, there weren’t a lot of women in high positions, but I attributed that to the fact that in the past, it was a male-oriented organization. I figured that was still holding on, and it was probably hard to get to the higher positions. I might have been desensitized to that because all through college there were mostly men in my classes. There weren’t a lot of women in our electrical engineering program at all, and engineering is

a male-dominated field.” Paula also struggled to find balance between her work and personal life earlier in her career, “When my dad became sick in 2011, it was out of the blue, and I was killing myself driving back and forth between Carbondale and coming to work and driving my mom back to Carbondale. Then, he passed away suddenly. After he passed, I think I looked back at what I was doing, and it made me wish I had put the work down a little bit more. That bothered me for a while. It changed me a bit. I’ve been sick a couple times on my own since then, so I try and pull away more. It’s just inherent in me that I need to do my work. I have to fight with myself.” As a woman with a visible disability, Paula believes her interaction with colleagues has improved the work culture to create a more empathetic and inclusive workplace. The continuing support of her colleagues has allowed her to balance her personal and professional balance better. “When I got sick back in 2010, Joe Kellett came to see me in the hospital. He didn’t have to take his time to come see me, but he did. When my dad passed, Kathy Englemann, who was my supervisor, drove to Carbondale for the funeral. I felt much taken care of with that.”

She also feels the culture at USACE has changed from the male-dominated world of its early years and she recommends it as a place for young women to begin their career. “Not to say that the Corps is a perfect agency, but I enjoy



*Paula and some of her colleagues in Project Management.*

it here, and I really do think they try and take care of you and treat you like you should be treated. There's always going to be issues, so you can't expect any kind of perfect office, perfect location, or perfect anything, but I think this is a better agency than some of the others." Paula advises young women just starting their career to "listen and think for yourself. Whether you're coming from a different agency or you're just coming out of school, you don't know everything so listening is extremely important. If you have a good idea for improvement, then offer it in nice way."



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# KELI BROADSTOCK

*Office of Counsel, Assistant District Counsel*

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Keli Broadstock applied for a GS-13 attorney position with the St. Louis District in April 2012—when she was eight months pregnant. “While working at a private law firm, I worked with one of the attorneys with the Corps. He called and said, ‘We have an opening; you should apply.’ It was probably not the best time to be looking for a job, but he suggested that I go ahead and submit to see what happens. I interviewed when my first child was two weeks old, so I pretty much left maternity leave and came right on.”

Keli’s drive to find a more meaningful career opportunity motivated her to begin her new position shortly after giving birth. “From 2006 to 2012, I was primarily doing real estate work, and at that point, it was taking people’s homes away during the Recession. It was not a fun time to be in real estate banking and commercial transactions. I just didn’t want to do that anymore, and I wanted something that was more fulfilling, something that I felt like I was making a positive difference in the world. With having a child, I knew that going to work for the government was going to be a better lifestyle than the private practice for me, and I wasn’t really sure what I was getting into or what I would be doing, but it was definitely the best decision I’ve ever made in my life.” While Keli could not anticipate what her new role at the Corps would entail, she believes her first year was pivotal in introducing her to

the mission and the value of the work of the Corps. “In 2012, I was a new attorney just kind of getting my feet wet, and all of a sudden Bill Levins, my boss, tells me that there is a pretty important meeting that he needs to attend in September and that he needs me to sit in on it.” The meeting concerned the low water on the Mississippi River, which was due to the worst drought the region had seen since the historic 1988-1989 drought. During the earlier drought, there were channel restrictions that interrupted supply chains and cost the navigation industry tens of millions of dollars. The drought also made it difficult for Midwest farmers to ship their goods to markets. Taken together, these impacts, which are largely invisible to the average American, are borne primarily by the American consumer who has to pay more for goods. Because of the potential economic impacts of the low water, the issue became a national news story and these concerns were elevated all the way up to the White House.

Ensuring that navigation restrictions were averted and the Mississippi River remained open for navigation became the district’s number one priority. Keli recalls how she “spent the next four months working on the drought, the low water issues, and removing the rock pinnacles and getting the contracts set in place and all of the issues that went with that. As a brand new Corps Attorney, I got thrown in the deep end, but it was a really great experience.



I got more of an understanding why what we do is so important.” Keli values Bill Levins’ leadership and credits him for her growth as an attorney. “He has been a mentor for all of us in our office as well as probably many other people in the District. He’s been here a long time, so he’s a wealth of information and knowledge, but beyond that, he also has really taught me a lot of what it is like to be an effective attorney, communicating appropriately, recognizing personalities, and how to handle situations that, sometimes, aren’t the easiest to handle.” Keli feels that in contrast to her experience

the room. Sometimes I still get that, but it’s not tolerated. It’s not accepted, and people know that. Because now I know my career will not be jeopardized if I speak up, I know I can say, ‘Hey, that’s not appropriate’ or ‘that’s crossing the line,’ and they’ll back off because they know that something will be done about it. That makes a huge difference.” She speaks of the double challenge of being young and in a traditionally male-dominated profession: “I was fortunate that there were female attorneys here before me, but I still had that feeling of doubt from other people of my competence and ability.



*Keli and the Office of Counsel Crew.*

I think as females because of our more sympathetic or empathetic nature that a lot of times proving our competence is a lot more challenging.”

Keli sees potential for female leadership at the District. “I’ve been very impressed with the female leadership that has been appointed. Deanne

working in the private sector, there is a culture of accountability that has made working at the Corps a better place for women. “I remember going into a middle Missouri courtroom and having a judge calling me “honey” and “sweetie” because other than the law clerk or any of the parties to a lawsuit, I was the only female in

Strauser was on my hiring panel, and even during my interview I had an immediate connection to her and an admiration for her. At her retirement, people talked about what she had to go through. She had to work really hard to get to where she was. We’re still a heavy male leadership district, but women are being recognized, and they are

being shown as potential leaders. There is always room for improvement and growth, but as time passes, we are becoming more equal to our male counterparts.”

Seeing women in leadership at the Corps like Deanne Strauser serves as a source of inspiration for Keli in her career. She is also inspired by a woman from her hometown. “Linda Bloodworth Thomason, who was the writer and creator for *Designing Women* and *Evening Shade*. In spite of being from a small town, she pushed through barriers along with other women that were pushing through in the 1970s and 1980s in fields that were not female dominant in that area. She is a very vocal advocate and a supporter for standing up for what she believed in and believing in what was right. She developed a program in my hometown that provided me with a lot of opportunities when I was in high school to see the world and see the world in a different light and to realize that there are differences of opinions and cultures and beliefs, and there are things outside of my small town bubble.”

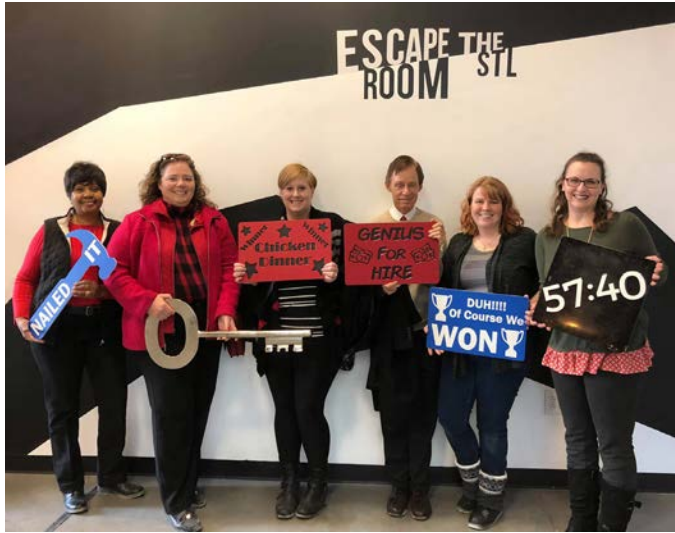
The experience Keli gained during the 2012 drought set up her next big project: the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the regulating works project. The only reason the Mississippi River remained open to navigation during the drought, and the only reason the middle Mississippi remains open

to navigation year-round period, is because of the success of the regulating works project. The project’s genesis dates back to 1872 and work under the project has been carried out more or less continuously since 1881. Opposition to the project began to grow, however, as some groups claimed that the river training structures raised flood stages and harmed the environment. The opponents of the project wanted all work halted until the SEIS was completed. This threatened to shut down critical work for years. Moreover, coming on the heels of the drought, this project was more essential than ever. Thanks to Keli’s efforts, the court rejected the request for an injunction and the district was able to continue this critical work while the SEIS was being completed.

Keli’s invaluable effort led to what was both her proudest and most memorable moment: “I worked really hard when the district made the decision to supplement the Environmental Impact Statement for the regulating works project. The district still had a mission to carry out...My greatest memory was the day we found out the judge had denied their request to stop that work...It was a Friday afternoon close to around Thanksgiving time. And nobody was here, like my boss wasn’t here. My best friend in the office wasn’t here. A lot of the main technical personnel I worked with on the case weren’t here. And I’m like ‘I have nobody to celebrate with!’ And I’ll never forget Dave Busse

coming into my office and giving me a high five ‘cause I sent the email out letting them know, letting everybody that was working on the case, that the injunction had been denied. And so I was like, ‘Somebody! Finally somebody I can celebrate with!’” Keli recalls a Maya

are frustrating, but young women should keep persevering to make their own future. There are going to be struggles, but women can put their future in their own hands.”



*Office of Counsel after their successful teambuilding exercise.  
Keli is on the far right side.*

Angelou quote often cited by Bitsy Sloan, the Mississippi Valley Division Counsel, that has been applicable to her sense of professionalism. “People don’t always remember what you say or what you did, but they’ll always remember how you made them feel.’ That is key. I couldn’t do my job without building relationships with people to trust me and to bring me into the circle to help solve a problem. I wouldn’t have that same job fulfillment without that.” Keli sees a bright future for young women at the Corps. “Women are getting more opportunities and looked at as equals in both the engineering and biology fields. There may be times that



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**SHEILA BURNETT**

*Budget Officer (Retired)*

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Sheila Burnett's government career, spanning almost 40 years, began in 1977 when she was 16. She was hired as a summer student aide for the Aviation Troop Command (ATCOM). She worked while she completed high school, and upon graduation, worked as a GS-2 Travel Clerk, then an Accounting Technician, and later as a Budget Analyst for ATCOM at a couple of different locations in St. Louis. By the time ATCOM was closed under the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) in 1997, she had worked her way up to a GS-11 Budget Analyst position. "I worked hard all my life. I always had the determination to go somewhere."

When Sheila accepted a GS-9 Program Analyst position in Project Management Division in St. Louis District, she immediately was struck by two things. The first thing was the Corps appeared to be severely lagging in technology—they did not have MS Word or MS Excel and were still completing some forms by hand rather than electronically. Secondly, she was struck by the dearth of African American women in positions of higher grades. At the time she arrived, the Corps was just transitioning to a new electronic management system for their financial records called CEFMS (Corps of Engineers Financial Management System). She initially had difficulties with transitioning to her new work environment, but the timing of her entry to the Corps meant that she wasn't behind in CEFMS implementation; the District

had just implemented it and everyone had to learn it. That made things a little better.

This did not deter Sheila. With leadership from Project Managers like Jim Zerega and Wayne Miller and with perseverance, she navigated the challenges of her new role and tempered the growing pains of the culture shift at USACE. Early in Sheila's tenure at the District, she did not have a clear idea of what direction her career would take, but seeing few women of color in positions of leadership motivated her to work hard. "When I first got there, I had previously been a GS-11 at ATCOM, but I was shocked at how many black women in the Corps of Engineers were low graded. I think there was a GS-11, and I was a GS- 9. Women were low graded at the time."

Sheila credits mentors for playing a significant role in her professional development. "There were many people that had impact on my career. When I first got there, Jim Zerega helped me understand the way the Corps worked. Tim Hiller [a former Chief of Resource Management] challenged me every day. Rosemary Craig took me under her wing, and she mentored me when I was the Budget Officer. Everybody says Rosemary's so sweet, but there were times that she could get rough, and I needed that. She challenged me to learn that operating budget, and she challenged me to go out, and we had this cut that came through in like 2001 or 2002

and we had to cut 10 percent. It was the first time the Corps had to do that in their overhead expenses. And she threw me out there and said, 'make it happen.' She and Tim Hiller. When I



*Sheila, right, at her retirement celebration.*

got through, a lot of people didn't like me, but I got it done." She also mentions Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Wolf, LTC Raimondo, and Colonel Mitchell as mentors who helped shape her experiences in the District.

Regardless of her hard work, Sheila experienced sexism and racism during her career. She feels that the women in the Saint Louis District were not always given the same opportunities for advancement or promotion as men. "I think it took years for women to become deputies,

and they weren't even considered for those top positions. I felt like a few of them deserved it a long time ago. I think in some projects or some things that I did, [I was treated differently]. I

think as time went on, it got better because the world changes, [but] the men in the district weren't used to women being chief at the time. They didn't give you the respect they gave another man. You definitely had to earn it."

Sheila discovered that being an assertive leader at a time when few women of color were in positions of

leadership would not come without opposition. "I had a DPM [Deputy for Program and Project Management] tell me one day, you know, 'I just think you were a little too aggressive.' As a black woman, I appeared to some people as being overly assertive. It's not assertive if it's factual. Very few men get accused of being overly assertive. As a woman, I had to try harder. I had to be better than some of the men, and I had to know what I knew because they challenged me. They would challenge me on the answers that I gave, so I knew I had to learn it and make



*Sheila (5th from right) and her award winning team in Vicksburg.*

sure I was right.” Fortunately, Sheila had allies that supported her. “Dave Busse helped me in just dealing with men at the district. I can remember Dave talking to me, and he’s always inspired me. Even when men might’ve said I was aggressive, Dave always stood by me.”

Hard work enabled Sheila to navigate a workplace slow to recognize and advance women, but she did not always employ some of the advantages of the job for balancing work and home life: “My job was my hobby. I had a son. I was a single mother, so it was challenging to make sure that I spent time with him, but I didn’t. I hate to say this, but I worked. I had my family, my son and work. I didn’t have any

other hobbies. Despite personal and professional challenges, Sheila had a rewarding career and received recognition for her service, “I’ve gotten the Civilian Award twice because I deployed for Hurricane Katrina. I’ve gotten many awards. I’ve been fortunate in my life.” She is proudest of the times that, under her leadership, her team was recognized. “RM got recognized, and I was so proud of them. I was so proud of the people that work in RM because it wasn’t about me. You know when you’re a supervisor, and you’re chief, it’s more about them than it is me. I was very proud of how they came together to become one good team.” Over the course of her career, Sheila witnessed USACE transition into a place where young women could thrive and advance.

Years ago, she might not have recommended the Corps as a place to work for a young woman who's just starting her career, "but now, yes, I would. There are equal opportunities for everybody. That took a very long time." She advises women to "learn your job. Just don't wait for people to give you information. Go get it, and be patient. With the Corps of Engineers and any job, you got to be patient. If you do the best that you can and learn your job, with time people will recognize that."

Finally, Sheila hopes her lasting impact will be that she "instilled work ethic and determination [in] all of those people that I mentored. I always tried to tell them, you do it the best that you can do, then don't worry about it, but give it your best."





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**FRANCES (BETH) COFFEY**

*North-western Division, Programs Director, (SES)*

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On December 13, 2019, LTG Semonite announced the selection of Frances (Beth) Coffey to the Senior Executive Service, assigned as Northwestern Division's Programs Director. Originally from Hannibal, Missouri, Beth grew up with the Corps; she even had a summer job out at Lock and Dam 20 for Rock Island District. She was pursuing her civil engineering degree from University of Missouri at Columbia when she was recruited by the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] in the late 80s: "There was a program that if you signed a reserve-only contract, you would also go and intern with the Department of Army. The program was set up so they could bring scientists and engineers into both the civilian workforce and into the reserve component. It was a really great opportunity. It was called the Department of Army Science and Engineering Program. I signed up and found myself at the St. Louis District, working on the construction site for Mel Price Lock and Dam [in 1989]. Best decision I ever made."

Beth graduated from college in December 1992 and received a call from the St. Louis District for an interview, "I came in for an interview and it's with the Hydrology and Hydraulic Engineering Branch (H&H). What I didn't know was



*Beth at her SES confirmation ceremony.*

that the deputy for H&H, Billy Arthur, was walking down the hall with Dennis Seibel, my boss in Construction, and they were having a conversation about engineers, and the hardships about not being able to hire any because of a lot of hiring freezes at the time, and Dennis said 'Well, I just had one of my interns graduate you should give her a call.' And so, that's how I got called to come in for an interview." Beth recalls her interview in December 1992 pretty vividly. It was in the Robert A. Young building, but the St. Louis District had only been there about two years. She walked into a conference room and was introduced to Brad Strauser, Claude Strauser, Don Coleman, and Ted Postol all from the H&H Branch. Each of them described what it was their section did and then they asked what she was interested in. "Well, I have a civil engineering degree. But my emphasis has been

in environmental engineering,' and they all looked at Ted Postol" and she found herself in the Environmental Engineering section. Even though she was hired into the Environmental Engineering Section, she ultimately ended up doing a lot of work for other folks in the district: "I worked for Dave Busse and did water



*Beth cleaning equipment in her early career.*

quality work at the lakes. I did hazmat work for Operations [Division] and helped them sort out their hazmat at different facilities. I even did some work for Brad [Strauser], doing some cartography work."

Some of Beth's early experience as a GS-5 engineer in MVS was during the Great Flood of 1993. "I think just working that first summer here, doing that work and getting out and assisting with the flooding efforts. It definitely

made its mark." These efforts are some of her proudest. "We do a lot of great work but I think our ability as an organization to respond to and try to mitigate for events like flooding and other natural disasters is one of our strongest attributes."

Ted Postol's leadership and Dave Busse's wisdom had an impact on Beth early in her career. "Ted was probably the person that influenced me the most because he spent the time to help develop me as a young engineer. He took the care and time to help teach me those blocks of information that really helped me to take the next steps in my career. Dave Busse was a person that I could go to and ask questions and learn from." She also commented: "I'm not even sure at that point in time I really knew what a mentor was exactly."

She took the lessons she learned from her mentors and applied them to her own qualities as a mentor, which she loves to do. She admits that she does a lot of mentoring. "I love to mentor. It is a passion that I would love to do as a full time job. I tell people all the time: the greatest thing about this organization is how diverse it is. You can start out as a wage grade or a GS 01 and you can find your way to a GS 15 or higher, and along the path you can do so many different things, you know? You're really not limited by the organization. You're only limited by yourself. I think that is unique in this

organization and you don't find it in other places.”

It's ironic that Beth initially did not envision a long career at USACE. Her professional path was not determined until she left the St. Louis District to move with her husband to Seattle, “When I was in college and doing it as an intern, I didn't know what I wanted to do as a career. I grew up knowing the Corps, and it was something I thought about. The day after I came in for the interview, and I got that job, I said, ‘Okay, maybe this is the very place to be.’ It really solidified, after I left the District, because I had to make a choice to move out to Seattle with my husband in 1997. I asked myself ‘what am I going to do?’ and I found myself at the Corps again.” Only this time, it was with the Seattle District, where she would stay for the next 19 years. Her time at the St. Louis District, however, “set [me] up well for my next challenge.”

“When I went to Seattle, I went into Program Management. Over the years I had the opportunity to work in many different diverse jobs, from Planning to Regulatory to Civil Works Programs and then back to Operations. With each of these positions I increased my knowledge and responsibilities from program management to first line supervisor to Division



*Beth out on the river.*

Chief. I think I've also been able to help different organizations to grow, encouraging cross-functional integration across the diverse organization. I think that because of my experiences and being able to go into different organizations, I've been able to broaden those organization's perspectives.” Beth credits her “ability to work with people” as the major factor behind her success. This, combined with her love of mentoring and developing people, has served her well in all of her positions, but her favorite job was as the Chief of the Civil Works Programs Branch in Seattle.

While serving in this capacity, Beth had an opportunity to take an initial staff of seven and develop it into an office of about 30 people. “I like to build teams and lead teams...I really

enjoy watching people grow and develop, and be successful.” In addition to serving in jobs of ever-increasing responsibility, Beth has had the unique challenge of balancing two careers, “People have asked me for years how I do my Army Reserves and my civilian job? I think part of it is I’ve just always done it. I’ve had two jobs since I started. I think I’ve been able to juggle things most of my career pretty effectively between the two. I leverage what I learned from each of the jobs to help me be successful in the other one.”

When Beth [virtually] attended the Army War College for her Master’s degree in Strategic Studies, she still maintained her role at the Corps and the Army Reserves, “The one challenge I had a couple of years ago was when I was doing Army War College and trying to do two jobs. Mentoring helped keep me balanced because I was sitting down once a week for an hour with a mentee and talking to them about how they can grow and develop. I’d leave those conversations feeling really rejuvenated. In my own mentoring sessions, if I came in feeling stressed, I usually left with a lot of that weight off my shoulders and new tools to help me deal with the day’s challenges. You just always have to check in with yourself. There’s no secret pill for work-life balance. Acknowledge that you’re going to be out of balance sometimes, and you’re going to be in balance sometimes.” Beth focused on limiting the impacts of gender discrimination

by ensuring women had the support they needed, “If they were struggling, that’s where I stepped in with mentoring. I had conversations with people I’ve mentored about what they were experiencing and gave them some advice on how to handle things. Usually my biggest advice for people was that ‘you’re smart, you know what you’re doing, and be confident. It doesn’t matter who you are or what your background is or what your sex is. Be who you are. If you’re who you are, you will be successful.’”

Beth believes that the increase in women in the workforce overall is improving the culture at USACE, “What has definitely changed is the demographics. There are more women in our workforce than there were 20 or 30 years ago. That’s a huge step, and I think just changing the environment has been a huge positive. There are more women in senior positions. We have a lot more Deputies for Program Management and Senior Executives that are women. It’s across the board.”

She sees how holding a senior-level position has had an important impact, “When I became the Operations Chief at Seattle, I knew there had been some others before me. We had a Chief of Contracting that was female and others in positions like that, but I didn’t realize until I got in that position the impact to the staff within the organization of how significant it was to them that I was in that GS-15 position. I was a

role model at that point in time to other people. I look at the Seattle District now and three out of four of their GS-15s are female. I think we've changed a lot, but there's still more to be done. We need to get the right people in the right positions in this organization, no matter their background or sex, helping them to figure out their strengths and how they can excel. That is my focus and something we all need to be working on."

Beth's work has been recognized with awards several times in her career, but one accolade stands out to her. "The coolest one for me was when I got a Bronze De Fleury. This [the citation] was written from the aspect of both my careers and what I'd done for the regiment as an Engineer Officer and what [I had] done for the regiment on the Corps side. That means a lot to me. I also received a Superior Civilian Service medal when I left Seattle and it showed that I didn't realize how much I had impacted the District." And she's not done doing great things yet.



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# JANE COLLINS

*Program and Project Management Division, Program  
Management Branch, Chief (Retired)*

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Jane Collins began work for the Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District in 1965 as a GS-2 Clerk-Typist in what is known today as the Programs Branch. Jane spent her 41-year career almost entirely in the Programs Branch and worked her way up to become the GS-13 Programs Branch Chief. She was promoted through the ranks of the Programs Branch because she was extremely intelligent, hardworking, dependable and loyal to the Corps of Engineers. She was well respected by her subordinates, peers, and supervisors for her expertise, unwavering integrity, and diligence in providing accurate information. Her vast understanding of the federal budgeting process placed her in demand for national Corps assignments. Jane was a subject matter expert on a Corps-wide team that was assigned the responsibility for redesigning and implementing the PROSPECT Civil Works programming course. Her contributions were instrumental in aligning the programming process with the Project Management Business Process. Over the course of her career, she received numerous awards, which included the Army Engineer Association de Fleury Medal (Bronze), letters of appreciation, and commendations for her knowledge of the Civil Works program, exceptional performance,

dedication to the Corps mission, and loyalty to the organization. Jane exhibited extraordinary technical skill, leadership, and dedication which served the Corps of Engineers locally, regionally, and nationally exceptionally well.



*COL Setliff presents Jane with her Bronze DeFleury.*

\*Jane was inducted into the Gallery of Distinguished Civilians. The interview team was unable to reach her to invite her to participate in this project.





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**ASHLEY COX**

*Operations Division, Deputy Chief*

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Ashley Cox was an intern at Woolpert, a private industry engineering company in St. Louis, when she took a chance to expand her career opportunities by applying for a position with the St. Louis District. “I was working on their water team, and the big job was the Metro East Sanitary District project. It was not extremely interesting, at least what I was doing as an intern. I was reviewing some video and analyzing gauge data. Then, I was in my hydraulics class at school at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and June Jeffries came in and did a presentation on the Corps and said, ‘If anybody is interested in a job, just shoot me an email with your resume, and we’ll get it to the right place.’ I was like, ‘You know what? I probably shouldn’t just look at Woolpert as if

they’re my only option. I need to gain more experience.’ I gave my resume to her, and at the end of the day, she ended up passing it to somebody in Hydraulics, and I got a call offering me an interview.” Ashley did not have any expectations or preconceptions of what her career path would be when she started at the Corps in May 2008. She was hired in under a two year development program—Ashley went in as a GS-09 equivalent and completed the program as a GS-11. “I started at the Applied River Engineering Center (AREC). I didn’t really know where I would end up or what I would do. My main goal was to be successful, work hard, and be dedicated. Nothing specific like, ‘Oh, one day I want to be the Chief of Engineering and Construction.’ I wanted to



*Ashley, (in white, 2nd from right) demonstrating one of the micromodels at the Applied River Engineering Center.*

do my job and do it well. I wanted people to respect me and know they can come to me when they had a problem, and I could solve it.” This lack of expectation has not hindered her success in any way. When the position of the Chief of the Operations, Technical, and Policy Support Branch, a GS 13 supervisory position, was advertised in February 2015 and she applied, she did not expect to be offered the position. She remembers thinking, “I’ve been in the Leadership Development Program (LDP), I want to learn what interviews are like; this sounds interesting. I probably won’t get it. I’ll just throw my name in the hat.” When offered the position after her interview, she nearly dropped the phone.

Accepting the position meant moving her duty location from the Service Base to the District office. Some might see this as a negative, but Ashley recalls, “It opened up so much, so many more doors to meet people, understand the different support organizations, and how our District functions basically as a whole. And then I got to get my hands in on more of the lakes and the rivers, and meet the people out at the projects, which has been great. And see the different types of services that we provide out there. And not just reports and engineering, but actually recreation and flood risk management, things like that. So it was a really neat job.” Two years later, one of her mentors, Dennis Fenske, announced his retirement. And once again,

Ashley thought, “You know what? I haven’t been here very long. I’ve gotten my hands in a lot of things. I understand the district, but I don’t... I’m probably not going to get that job. I’ll just put my name in and get experience.” And again, she was selected for the position—this time as Deputy Chief of Operations Division. Once she accepted the position, she thought, “Well, this is pretty amazing. God’s had a hand in it. I’ve got the right people that I’m surrounding myself with to teach me, so I must be doing something right.” Ashley became the first female Deputy Chief of Operations Division in May 2017.

Ashley values mentoring received from people in different disciplines, which has aided her in becoming a more-well-rounded professional. “When I was at the Applied River Engineering Center, I watched and listened to people. I started talking to Dave Gordon and Don Duncan, and asking them about their thoughts on things and their ideas. They really taught me how hydraulics was structured and kind of the process and that physical modeling isn’t the only thing we do. Also, when I was in the Leadership Development Program in 2014, my mentor was Andy Schimpf from Rivers project. The goal is always to try to find somebody new, somebody different, somebody maybe not in your chain of command. So, I went out of Engineering and Construction, and I asked Andy because I had experience on a model that he had funded. I thought, ‘You know what, I like Rivers. I want

to learn from him,' and he really opened my eyes to the ways of the District, and how we function and work with the Mississippi River Valley Division and all of the business line stuff as far as navigation goes and funding. It was a really good experience to just listen to the historical knowledge and experience."

Ashley feels the advice she received from Dennis Fenske helped her become more effective in a leadership role. "At the very end of his career, he really helped me become a better supervisor by showing me how to look at things, to be fair yet firm, and how to study a situation to make the best decision overall. Because being in the position that I'm in now, there's a lot of personnel issues that we work through. It was completely new to me, and he's really taught me how to just analyze it and be fair." Ashley only felt she was treated differently because she was a woman in her first job as a river engineer when she was assigned tasks her male counterparts were rarely asked to complete. "When I first got hired on with the Corps, my supervisor didn't always show a lot of interest in people's development or growth, and he always seemed to assign me his administrative type duties."

In spite of often being tasked with administrative work in comparison to her male counterparts, Ashley felt that in the end, it helped her develop as a professional, and she used her knowledge of these tasks to take on a new challenge. "It

actually helped me grow because when I got my job in the Operations-Technical Policy and Support Branch as the chief, I knew how to do those administrative tasks already. I didn't necessarily appreciate being treated differently, but it wasn't a big deal and I was better because of it." She believes flexibility and prioritizing allow her to balance work with her home life. "I had to learn what was important and how to fit all that stuff in without overburdening or overwhelming myself. Now, my husband and I both understand what our priorities are, who needs time for this, who needs time for that. We used to do coed sports together two or three nights a week, and now that my kids are in sports, it's like, 'Nope, we have to give up our sports to take care of the kids and their activities.' We just flex to what comes up and try to make sure we both accomplish things that we feel are important or necessary for our success or keeping our family well positioned."

While Ashley has enjoyed every position she has had in the St. Louis District, she particularly likes her current position. She says in her current position, she "gets to work with the Regulatory [OD-F] folks and learn their mission and support what they're doing. And then I get to see the Emergency Management [OD-R] side, and how we flood fight and we support the different natural disasters. And then, of course, the lakes and rivers. They are such an amazing entity that we have as part of our District..."

So I just really enjoy the diversity and the folks that I get to work with every day.” Her proudest moments, however, are opportunities that allow her “to work with partners and figure out a solution that is amenable to all groups... ..And since being in Operations [Division], it’s super awesome to get to go out to the field sites when we sign Memorandums of Understanding or Agreements where we’re partnering with people for a bigger cause, better purpose, pooling our resources, and just getting notes back from those agencies or different people that are partnering with us saying, ‘It’s been so wonderful to partner with these folks...You’ve got a great set of people here.’ You’re proud of your people and what they’re able to accomplish, and how they’re working with others.”

Although she feels proud of what she has accomplished so far, there are opportunities she wishes she would have taken sooner in her career. “I wish I would have been more adventuresome at work. I did join the Illinois flood fight team early on, and got out of the office, but I stayed pretty holed up in my Applied River Engineering Center job, and I was there for seven years. I kind of kept my position or my career on hold for a while there because I was ‘comfortable.’ I wish earlier on, I would have learned some more things about the agency and met some new people.” She also credits her family upbringing and faith as part of the reason she has been so successful. “My

parents and my grandparents have been solid, law abiding citizens that have worked their whole lives. Some were able to stay home with their kids and then went to work after they were grown. But they’ve all been a great influence, and have really helped mold and shape me into who I am. Learning from what they did that I don’t want to do, or what they did that is great and I think I should do...My parents always taught me to try hard and never give up, and to be honest and truthful. My faith: I couldn’t do any of this without a firm group of people that believe in God, and that has really helped me. I have a source I can fall back on if I’m ever having any issues.” The advice Ashley has for women beginning their career at the Corps is the advice she would have given to herself at the start of her career. “Get out and learn more about the Corps at all levels early in your career. See the big picture so you understand what role you play in it. Learn about the different offices and entities and find a good mentor. Surround yourself with people that you can trust and that know their jobs, and you can learn from them. You can gain different perspectives. Always take that adventure and don’t get overwhelmed or discouraged because it’s something you’ve never done before. We need individuals who are happy and successful at their jobs who are willing to learn what the Corps (and the District) is about because, otherwise, you’re never going to understand the full impact that we can make as an agency.”



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# ROSEMARY CRAIG

*Resource Management Division, Chief (Retired)*

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Rosemary Craig came to USACE in search of new career opportunities. “I was employed by the State of Missouri, the Department of Mental Health. I went right after college; that was my first job. I was there for 13 years. In the middle of that, I got divorced. I needed more money. I needed to find another job because I topped out there. I was a clerk stenographer there. Only place to go was I’d have to get into another career field. At that time [for the Federal government], you had to take a test and apply, so I applied and got a job with the Corps with the Construction Division as the clerk stenographer.”

One of Rosemary’s fondest career memories comes from her first year on the job (1985). “They were working on Lock and Dam 26 and the neatest thing I got to do is I got to walk the bottom of the Mississippi River. So they had the cofferdams up and it was the actual river bottom. And I didn’t really understand it all because I was so new. The Chief of the [Construction] Division told her, ‘you have to go. You have to go out there.’ And I thought, ‘okay.’ Until I got there and then I realized it’s like, ‘wow! I’m going to walk on the bottom of the Mississippi River...the bed of the Mississippi River. How many people can say that?’ That was the probably one of the coolest things I ever had to do.” She further commented, “I really think [it] is so important when you have employees such as myself, being in an admin or

in an office setting, but yet you’re working with the projects. You have to go out there and you have to physically see that project, and then you understand how important your piece is.”

When Rosemary started at the Corps, she was looking for job security, but in her first year as a clerk stenographer, she realized the potential she could reach. With a push from her supervisor, Rosemary began to explore new opportunities for her career. “I was here six or seven months, and a job announcement came out for a budget analyst job. I was interested in the job, but I put it aside. Dan Flippen, my boss at the time, said to me, ‘You need to put in for this job.’ I told him I was not going to put in for that job. He insisted that I apply, telling me ‘No, I really think you should put in for it. This is the kind of job you need to be doing.’ And I said, ‘yeah, I hear you but I’m not going to put in for it.’ He said, ‘Oh yes you are.’ I was the travel clerk and I had travel vouchers and travel orders all on my desk in piles, and he grabbed up every one of those stacks and said, ‘You will get this back when you apply.’ At the time, you had to do what they called knowledge, skills, and ability [KSA], and your supervisor had to sign off on them. He said, ‘when you send me your knowledge, skills, and abilities, you will get these back.’ Oh, I was not happy. ‘But they are waiting for them.’ ‘I don’t care. You tell them to call me.’ So, I went home that night, and I applied because I thought I was just going to do

what I have to do to appease him and get my work done. I got that job. I just couldn't believe it. It was an upward mobility job. So, I went from a GS-04 Clerk Stenographer to, after three years, a Budget Analyst GS-09. When I retired in 2012, I was the Financial Manager for the District." And she was the first woman in that position for the St. Louis District.

"I became the chief of Budget Branch as a GS-11...then I got the Manpower [functional] area and they [Headquarters] reclassified my job and I was still the chief of the Budget Branch but a GS 12...I was able to do a temporary assignment for four months, temporary promotion to be the [Division] Chief until they recruited someone. [Headquarters] looked at everybody's position descriptions and new requirements with the implementation of CEFMS [Corps of Engineers Financial Management System], which was a change from our prior accounting system, and the job graded out to be a GS-13. With that creation of duties, I still was the Budget Officer, I still was chief of the [Budget] Branch, but then I was a GS-13...Two different times the then Resource Management Officer deployed to Iraq and I was the acting Resource Management Officer for both of those details [totalling four details in this position]. In 2006 it became vacant and I applied for it, and then I became the Financial Manager for the District until I retired in 2012. Throughout her career, she was able to make her Associates Degree in

Business Administration a solid foundation for "lots of professional training...when I was here, there was a Comptroller Career Accreditation program levels 1-4, and I became a 4, accredited 4...My bosses were very good about allowing me to attend any kind of fiscal law, or financial, or budgeting training that I thought would help me in my career. But thank God for on the job training because that helped fill in a lot of gaps that you don't learn in school."

Rosemary continued to encounter mentors who had a significant impact on her career. "When I was a just a budget analyst, the first Comptroller I worked for, Homer Duff, was the nicest person, but when he talked, he was very gruff. I thought he was unapproachable, but he would come in the office every day and talk to me. He would say, 'You know, if you do this and that, you'll have a career here.' He would ask me to do something that maybe was a little outside my level of knowledge, just to see if I could do it. So, I would do it. Then he would send me back a really nice note. 'This is good. Next time consider this' or 'Take it a step further.' He pushed me and taught me at the same time." There was also Ed Mitchell, the Finance and Accounting Officer, who was always willing to help her. "When I needed to have a better understanding of how the finance and accounting system worked in certain areas...I would just walk into his office and I would say, 'Ed, I need you to teach me something.' And



he'd say, 'sit down.' And I'd say, 'Can you give me an understanding of this?' He would walk me through it, and he was so patient, and just wanted to share his knowledge. I just appreciate all of those who were willing to share their knowledge with a young upstart, you know?"

Initially Rosemary was tentative about mentoring others. Prior to the establishment of the Leadership Development Program [LDP] in 2007, the District had a volunteer mentoring program where individuals could add their names to a list of available mentors. Rosemary remembers, "Well, I don't know if I could... what do I have to offer? Could I really offer advice to somebody...?" I guess my problem was almost I felt like I was blessed. Did I really do something to deserve how fortunate that I

was to be where I was?" Then she received a call from a colleague in Real Estate Division, Lawrence Williams, who told her, 'you have been name requested as a mentor for a young lady who is in the clerical field and wants some career advice, and I noticed you weren't on the mentor list.'" When she hesitated, he suggested she try it to see if she might like it. She did, and she did.

She also recalls, "when you are the Resource Management Officer, you're what you call the Career Program Manager, I was the Career Program Manager for the CP-11's, which is the accountants, the budget folks, auditors, and program analysts." She has also served as an LDP mentor for several individuals and has seen many of them rise in the District and other

agencies: "I remember when they were just still going to school, and they would ask me the same question three or four times, and now they're leading the pack. That is a proud moment." While Rosemary had a lot of support that helped her thrive at the Corps, she also experienced challenges as a woman in a male dominated workforce. "When I first came here in 1985, it was male dominated, especially



*COL O'Hara presenting Rosemary a length of service award.*

on the technical side. Women were still looked at like were doing this as a hobby because they assumed that we all had spouses, and it was our pin money. They didn't really think of us as having a career. I remember when the decision came down throughout the Corps that the function of manpower would be placed under the Budget Office. They said when you do that, your Budget Officer should go from a GS-11 to a GS-12. It's an accretion of duties and an additional function. That came from headquarters. The Chief of Management was a GS-12. The Finance and Accounting Officer was a 12, but I, as the Budget Officer and chief of my branch, was a GS-11. By doing this, we all three were GS-12's. The Chief of Management was upset. He would not accept the fact that headquarters did this. He said the only reason they did it was because I was a woman. He was so mad at me, at me personally. Like I did it. He would not speak to me. He retired in 1993, and he never acknowledged me. Both the Comptroller and the Finance and Accounting Officer tried talking to him. I don't know what his response was, but nothing changed. There was no disciplinary action. There's nothing I could do about it except deal with it and move on."

This difficult situation resulted in Rosemary being denied an opportunity at the District because she was a woman. "When the Comptroller retired, the three of us branch

chiefs were going to rotate this temporary promotion to Comptroller to allow all three of us an opportunity to sit in that job. They went by seniority. The Management Chief sat in for three months, and then, the Finance and Accounting Officer sat for three months. After that, I was supposed to sit for three months. About three weeks before the time was up, the Deputy Commander called me in the office. I'm thinking to myself, 'Oh, my time is coming up.' He told me that they were going to let the Finance and Accounting Officer be the acting Resource Manager Officer for a year, and I was not going to get an opportunity to sit the position. I asked if I had done something wrong to not be afforded the opportunity. He responded, 'We're not so sure that...You're a woman, and there's a lot of strong personalities, and we're not so sure.' Because the person that was giving me the issue of not wanting to talk to me, I would then become his supervisor for three months. I was disappointed because I would have enjoyed learning another aspect of the whole division. That day, I truly saw how they really felt about women." She admits she probably could have filed a complaint, but believes it wouldn't have changed anything.

Despite her experiences, Rosemary believes that the work culture at the Corps has improved, and women would not have the same experience she did. "Fast forward five, or six, or seven years after that incident, and that incident would have



*Rosemary (in center) with COL O'Hara and the RM staff.*

immediately been stopped. It wouldn't have been allowed to go on. Women are recognized as a valuable piece of the workforce. We bring another dimension. We are just as smart, and we are just as good. We're engineers or we're accountants...The only thing I can say is when I first got here, all the lake managers were male. When I retired 27 years later, I know we had two, we may have had three female lake managers... If you're willing to spread your wings a little bit, you'll do very well, and if you get in here and you find this isn't your cup of tea, the Corps gives you enough training that you can go anywhere and succeed." Rosemary

advises women entering the Corps "to take on any kind of an assignment. Don't be a doormat, but spread your wings. Get out of your comfort zone; you may like it. Don't just say, 'This is my job. I'm not going to do anything else.' You don't have to volunteer for everything that comes along, but be open to it."

While this book was in production, the District voted to include Rosemary Craig into the Gallery of Distinguished Civilians. Due to the current COVID-19 crisis, the actual induction ceremony has been delayed indefinitely.



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# ANDREA DAY

*Program and Project Management Division, Program  
Management Branch, Chief*

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Andrea Day's career might best be described as serendipitous with hard work thrown in for good measure. Because her mother worked for MVS for 38 years, she literally grew up in the St. Louis District, often visiting her mother and running the halls. In 1998, at the age of 19, she made it official. Throughout high school she had a job making applique t-shirts, standing at a hot press all day and attending craft fairs to sell those wares. This was not a job to which she was well suited, so when her mother mentioned an opportunity to work for the St. Louis District as a summer hire in the Geotechnical Branch, she jumped at it. She was to work in the branch as an administrative assistant. Unfortunately, this did not work out because the person she was backfilling for decided not to leave. Instead she was sent to the soils laboratory down at the service base. "I'm pretty sure I cried the first night they told me I had to do that. Mainly because I didn't know where I was going and how to get into the facility. I look back now and go, 'what was wrong with me? It was fine.'" She only worked there two weeks, but long enough to learn "it's soil; it's not dirt until it hits the floor."

After that, she went to work for the Hydrologic and Hydraulics Branch in Water Control. She did not have a desk, so she sat at the central table in the War Room. She had no privacy and three colleagues worked with her on either side of the central table in cubes. She was admittedly

something of a "smart Alec" and one of her colleagues was not appreciative of her humor. So much so that he went to the supervisor for an intervention. The intervention came in the form of the supervisor asking Andrea if she were "giving this individual hell." She, of course, replied, "yes, sir," not realizing he wanted her to stop. He continued to ask this question daily and her response never wavered. It wasn't until her mother asked her if she was picking on this individual and told her to stop it, that she realized what was going on. "I don't know why it stands out in my mind so much, but it's just one of those stories where I'm like, 'oh my god.' Because I was a kid. So much of a kid, I didn't realize what I was doing. Now I hope that I do a better job of not being quite like that." Self-awareness is one of her watchwords now.

Dave Busse did his best to convince her to study engineering, but she knew it was not for her. "I don't like science enough. I'm fine with math; I just don't like science enough. I was like, 'okay, do you realize I could barely get through geology class?' I took astronomy because I didn't want to take chemistry. I knew engineering wasn't for me, but I had started here doing a summer job." She was pursuing her Business Management degree and had always felt a calling for business. After that first summer, she moved back to St. Louis and transferred to St. Louis University. Once again, she found herself at the district, "I stayed with business management and just kept

my fingers crossed that something would work out. It ended up working out. I did program analyst work in the front office of Engineering [and Construction Division] for the first 8 years of my career.” She found that she enjoyed the work and liked the people she worked with. She just never really thought of it as long-term.

She next put in for a detail at Mississippi Valley Division in Resource Management Division. She was not selected for that detail. Instead she was offered a detail in New Orleans working for the Hurricane Protection Office (HPO) because of her P2 experience. She went down for a 120-day detail but ended up returning to St. Louis thirty days early to work on the operating budget. She returned to HPO later and was then offered a position there. The HPO office was a temporary office working to get the hurricane protection system in New Orleans and environs operational after Hurricane Katrina. Everyone knew the end date of the project was September 2011, so although the position was a move, it was temporary.

The time with HPO afforded Andrea an opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. She worked with 99 other individuals in a fast-paced environment where she needed to be able to work with a well-oiled team. During her time in HPO there were many people that came and went. Two years after being there the boss of the Program Support



*Andrea (right) with colleagues in New Orleans.*

Branch was leaving. Andrea was then put in the job by a management directed reassignment. This put her into a GS-13 supervisory position at the age of 30. She led team-building activities and really learned a lot, particularly from her mentor there, John Grieshaber. He was the one who helped her become more self-aware: “Okay, you put a bar higher than the bar I gave you. That’s who you are, but that’s not everybody. You gave them a bar. They attained the bar; they’re doing good. Stop thinking that they are not.” He also showed her sometimes she had to pick her battles, and sometimes getting loud was worth it! Because one of Andrea’s strengths is her relationship building skills, she found herself in

the unenviable position of mediating between colonels. In post-Katrina New Orleans, there were three commanding colonels—the New Orleans District Commander, the Commander for the HPO, and the Commander for Task Force Guardian. Fortunately, she rarely had to deal with the Task Force Guardian Commander, but she found the other two colonels often at odds. Since the two colonels refused to meet, she found herself running between the two.

One notable experience came as the HPO work was approaching its end. The HPO Colonel (her colonel) wanted to take all 100 HPO employees on helicopter tours to see the results of all their hard efforts. The cost of this was prohibitive so eventually a deal was brokered where stakeholders and some employees could take helicopter tours, just not all of them. She augmented this plan with a site visit for all HPO employees to a local pump station where everyone got to see the massive turbines of the pumps recently installed. “Everyone was like, I can’t believe it’s going to be filled up with water soon. Look how tall it is and look how little we are!” The tour gave them all a sense of accomplishment, something that Andrea thinks is important. “Because you do work on this stuff and if you don’t ever get the appreciation, sometimes you don’t feel like you’re a part of it.” Amidst all this activity, Andrea also managed to get her master’s degree from the University of New Orleans in Business.

Knowing that her job would be ending soon, Andrea realized she was faced with a choice: she could return to St. Louis District at a lower grade, or she could find another job that would enable her to build her career. Once again, a detail was her ticket to further her career. This detail was in Mississippi Valley Division in Vicksburg, Mississippi. A lot of people told her she would not like Vicksburg because it was “like going back in time 50 or 60 years.” She was wary but undeterred. She felt like Vicksburg would be a better fit for her than Washington, D.C., which was where many of the job opportunities were originating. She applied for a detail but was then asked if she wanted a permanent job as the regional P2 coordinator. This position had been advertised incorrectly so it didn’t work out. Eventually they re-advertised the position and she applied again. In the meantime, she had accepted another detail in Vicksburg. She received a call from Joni Nichols about the permanent job. “I know Glenda picked you up for the detail. So, you’re still going to do the detail with Glenda. Then when you’re done with that, you’re going to come work for me permanently, if you want the job.”

Andrea worked with Joni from September 2011 until October 2019. She started as the P2 Program Manager and then was selected for the strategic planner and champion for the Emerging Leaders program in 2017. She also had an opportunity to be in the Emerging

Leaders program and attend the Government Affairs Institute class three times. She found



*One of two P2 awards Andrea has received.*

this class particularly helpful because it dealt with applying knowledge in a real-life setting. Different speakers were at each class—representatives from the House, senators, and staffers—so it was new each time. She also remembers taking the CES course—all four weeks of it. It was during this time that she discovered some major insights into work and about herself. During an exercise on the Army Decision Model she worked with an individual who did not appear to be very self-aware. The team took the Meyers-Briggs personality test and she had a flash of insight about this individual. “I realized she wanted to be a very data driven person, but really she was an emotional person and she reacted more upon her emotion of the situation than the data was showing. I’m just the opposite. So, I’m like, ‘that explains a lot.’

I know we do LDP (Leadership Development Program) here and I know they do the Myers-Briggs. I just wish as smaller teams that you could truly understand what that meant for each of your coworkers, because it would probably cut down on a lot of conflicts that we have. I wasn’t nearly as aggravated by her in the future because I knew it’s just how she was, so I tried different angles of communication.”

Andrea speaks highly of her mentors and those that have inspired her over the years. She tells of how Dave Busse “brought me along in a way, taught me on-the-job stuff a lot with just different tasks. I always said he was really good at giving me part of the story. And so at first I would try to work through the whole thing and then later I realized I should do part of it and go back and ask if this is really what he wanted based upon the way we communicated. That was learning communication too. Unless I fully understand what somebody wants from me, I do part of it, do a sanity check—‘okay, here’s where I’m at. Is this where we’re going? Is this what you want in the end? Oh okay. All right, let’s go.’ I think I picked that up from working with him on different stuff.” John Grieshaber at HPO also mentored her a great deal. While an engineer himself, he recognized some of the challenges she faced as a non-engineer and helped her through them. She speaks of how both Joan Stemler and Joni Nichols were inspirations to her. Joan, because



she was doing it—making it as a non-engineer in an engineering organization. Joni showed her how to empower her subordinates and was self-reflective about it. “Okay, tell me when I have to peel my fingers off it. Because I’m going to give it to you, but I’m probably not going to want to let it go.” Joni would always say, “she grew up in the Army, worked as a private consultant for years, she was not an engineer, she was a female in an army of men and she had to battle constantly. She told me lots of stories. So, I looked at it as I didn’t have it nearly that bad...it’s been helpful to see what other women have overcome so that I didn’t have to. Because that’s how I see my old boss, Joni, is that she had to go through it way worse than I did.” She also speaks highly of Bonnie Toennies, Sharon McGee, and Naomi Myles and says the three of them taught her a lot.

Andrea has also mentored others and she enjoys it tremendously, her skills at relationship building once again at the forefront. As the champion for the Emerging Leaders program, she felt it was her job to set her mentees up for success. One of the ways she did this was by assisting them with resume and interviewing skills. “Sometimes people don’t get that advice and I see resumes and I’m like ‘good gosh, somebody should have helped them.’” She also sees the value in reverse mentoring, especially with technology. She once teased a leader, asking, “Sir, would you like me to get somebody to come in and teach you IT? And

he’s like, ‘can we do that?’ ‘Of course! We can do whatever we want.’” She acknowledges the benefit of both formal and informal mentoring. “Say you and I have a conversation and you say something that resonates with me. You know what I mean? It just happened so organically sometimes you don’t realize that you should say that was mentoring. It’s just more like sharing some advice or sharing some insights.”

When asked if she had ever felt as if she was being treated differently as a woman, she only recalled one situation with a peer. She gave him a work product and his reply was “I’m going to check with Terry to get his perspective since he has a man’s perspective. So I’m going to check with Terry.’ So I looked at him and said ‘okay, that’s fine, but Terry knows nothing about this and Joni did not give him instructions, but feel free to talk to him.’” She feels she has been treated differently more because of her age. When she became a GS-13 at such a young age, one woman at HR and her military supervisor refused to do the paperwork to make it happen. It was in the old system and Andrea had to fight to get the paperwork done. Her boss at HPO suggested the woman might be reluctant because she did not get her GS-13 until she was 55 years old. Eventually another HR specialist had to assist because the first woman simply would not budge. She also feels it was good for her to get out of the St. Louis District for a time since so many people knew her as a “kid,”

both before working here (from the association with her mother) and after she started working here. “I guess maybe that was a good part of leaving and coming back just because people have changed.”

Another difference she feels keenly is being a non-engineer in an engineering organization. Earlier in her career, she looked into going into project management but was told she could not because she wasn't an engineer. “I had a conversation with an engineer in New Orleans who told me ‘there's no way a non-engineer could be a project manager because how would you know if the engineering was right?’ I replied ‘because you are supposed to have a PDT and you're supposed to have someone who's an expert in that. So if I don't trust that person, that's a whole different problem.’” She's had the discussion with individuals up and down the Mississippi Valley Division—it always ends with the same circular reasoning. “I guess I felt it in ways where I knew my career was limited because I knew our culture wasn't going to change, but I still fully believed that I could be just as successful as a project manager because I still believe one of the biggest things is relationships and communication.” When asked if there was any documentation that stated a project manager had to be an engineer, she replied, “I can show you an unsigned memo on some funky letterhead that is from 1989 and the district is still following it. So, I'm

hoping the tides will turn because we have had change in HR (Human Resources). Rock Island has expanded those who can apply [for these positions], but still from the scientific series... so sometimes there's just an antiquated rule that gets you more so than the true nature of the organization. The culture wants to change, but the rules are stopping them.” She wants to be part of the cultural change in recognizing that non-engineers also contribute value to the work of the Corps. Recently OPM has expanded the definitions of the 0340 Program management series. She sees hope for younger non-engineers who can now have another career path.

The best advice Andrea ever received concerning work-life balance came from General Kaiser: “Work-life balance can't always be a daily thing, but in the long run you should see the peaks and valleys. If right now we're in a peak and you're here a lot, real soon I need you to not be.” Andrea explained that was pretty much how her career went. “When it was busier, I was devoted to work and I made it work and I paid attention to my phone when I had to. But when it wasn't, I shut it off.” And some days it worked better than others. In her free time, she enjoys crafts, crocheting, her dogs, and she is an avid bowler.

Andrea would definitely recommend the Corps as a place to work to a young woman just starting her career, but she would also advise that person “you have to be willing to move. You have to be

willing to bend. You can't be real rigid in what you think is going to happen either." To this individual, she would advise, "You should work hard and work on building relationships with people, because it does help you. You need to

things. So between trying to build relationships and do good work, also volunteering sometimes, because that does stand out. It stands out in people's minds."



*A thank you from LTG Semonite to the Business Management Division (BMD) Team in 2018.*

have a good work ethic to where you're coming to work and you're doing your job. And people talk about going above and beyond, and there's some truth in that. Another thing is it's good to volunteer for things. You don't have to volunteer for everything. But every once in a while, I'll say 'hey, I wouldn't mind taking on that project,' when an extra project shows because we know that will happen. Get all kinds of fun extra



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# JAYNIE DOERR

*Operations Division, Regulatory Branch,  
Missouri Section, Chief*

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Jaynie Doerr's life and career have revolved around a passion for teaching as well as preserving the environment - a balancing act with many rewards. While working as a GS-3



*Jaynie in her ranger uniform.*

Seasonal Park Ranger at the St. Louis District, Rivers Project Office she attended graduate school and worked as an adjunct teacher at two local community colleges, ultimately earning her Master of Science degree in Biology in 2002. At the Rivers Project Office, she split her time as a park ranger working with both the environmental and interpretation sections. Even after her graduation, she was faced with a dilemma to stick with teaching or continue working for the Corps. She has a passion for teaching, she says, but she saw a number of teachers she knew, including her mother, whose “work never stopped.” Having seen “that passion for teaching burn out” with them, and “seeing that there could be some [other] possibilities” in the Corps, she debated what path to choose. “I thought maybe in retirement, I could go back

to teaching. And when I gave programs as a park ranger, I was able to continue ‘teaching’ in many ways. It’s all about education and dealing with the public too.”

She graduated in 2002 and, “they (HR) forwarded my information to the District that a recent graduate was looking for a job in the Corps, and Danny McClendon called me and said, ‘we have an opening in Regulatory starting at GS7.’ So, I chose to stay with the Corps. I had an offer over in Environmental [Branch] too,” she says. “I asked around a lot and googled, ‘What’s Regulatory?’ I heard so many people say, ‘Regulatory is such a fun bunch.’” And what exactly is Regulatory? Jaynie says, “I regulate section 404 of the Clean Water Act. I spend most of my time on private land, and I’ll talk to anyone from a ma and pa who want to stabilize their creek bank to a developer who wants to build a commercial development or a subdivision, to a municipality that wants to put in a utility line. Anytime that work impacts our creeks, wetlands, rivers, lakes, and ponds, you may need a permit under the Clean Water Act. That’s where I get involved.”

When she started in Regulatory, she says, “[training] was, ‘Here’s a book of the laws and regulations. Read up on this and start heading to the field with the senior staff.’ I made flashcards of the different permits so I could at least sound intelligent when the phone

rang.” She learned the ropes by shadowing people. “Ward Lenz mentored me in the very beginning. Anytime someone was going in the field, I went with them,” she says. “As my level of knowledge developed, I started answering the phones and fielding calls, answering simple questions, and eventually evaluating permits. This is how you develop professional judgment to do your job [in the Regulatory Branch]. You have to take seriously that this is someone’s property, somebody’s pocketbook that you’re working with, but you also have to protect our aquatic resource. In those first few years, I was developing that balance. Best professional judgment is what you go with, because our water resources are not the same across the nation. It doesn’t look the same in Illinois as it does in Missouri or certainly out West. The law is the same, but the topographies, geographic environment, and the biology of our aquatic systems can all be different.”

One of Jaynie’s biggest professional challenges has been talking to landowners who object to government “interfering” on their land. “Going on somebody’s private property and saying, ‘If you want to do this work, you may need a permit from the government’ doesn’t sit well with private landowners. Also, having a young woman tell them what they can and can’t do on their own land because of federal law can be quite the challenge. Overcoming that challenge is helping them understand that

what they do on their property may affect other landowners downstream and the reward comes when they ‘get it’ and you can work together to ensure they have the appropriate permits and comply with those permits while also protecting our wetlands.” An additional way Jaynie has learned to educate others is through continuing her teaching passion. “I teach the Regulatory 101 course as part of the Corps PROSPECT program and giving them pointers on how to better connect and communicate with land owners is one part of those lessons. I have had a number of people write back on evaluations, ‘I never gave it a thought that how you dress when you meet folks and knowing your audience would make a difference.’ You might want to wear your Carhartts and jeans versus nice dress pants or a skirt.”

Now, Jaynie is the Section Chief over Missouri. “The years have gone by in such a flash.” She misses going out in the field, she says, “but I’m pointing people in the right direction and helping them find the tools they need to develop their skills for this job. It’s the educator in me. I can’t help it.” She still has the ability to go out in the field, but most of her time is dedicated to assisting her section members and making sure the education of new team members takes precedence to make them the most effective they can be. In other words, she’s still balancing. In stark contrast to her field experiences where older men have not wished to listen to

her, she describes a landowner workshop she coordinated in a rural Missouri county where a road was “about to fall into a creek.” The County didn’t have a lot of money, but the leader of the highway department had a very open mind about how to do things better and spend money more effectively. Jaynie remembered, from the Stream Stabilization Prospect course in Vicksburg, that the Corps had a teacher named Dave Derrick, who could be brought in to help with a project that had public impact for free, as long as they would host a workshop. “We invited all the landowners in the area, mostly farmers who were set in their ways and didn’t always believe or want to hear what I said. But they came anyway, and in one day, we stabilized

a 200-foot section of creek bank using rock, hand-cut willows, and minimal equipment for less than \$3,000. It’s not just about stabilizing the creek, it’s doing it using some rock and bio-stabilization measures, it’s showing how the permit process worked and how you can work with materials at hand. We turned around a lot of the county because people were impressed with what we did. I had a new method to show future landowners. I visit that site every season. The trees have come up, and you don’t even see the rock. The road is stable and the County is happy. We’ve done three of those workshops so far in our District. I believe this is a program that a lot of people don’t take advantage of to assist with some difficulties. It’s called WRAP



*Jaynie, (seated at right) with St. Louis District deployees for Task Force Guardian.*

– Wetlands Regulatory Assistance Program.” Hurricane Katrina, of course, also stood out for her. “When I went down in September, that was my first deployment. I worked directly for Colonel Setliff. He took me under his wing, and I wrote the daily situation reports. When we went past homes on tours of the parishes, I asked, ‘What are those numbers written on there?’ It was the number of dead. That’s when I realized what I was doing. I came back with a different perspective on the Corps. That our



*A door in post-Katrina New Orleans, showing notes from searchers.*

mission in disasters was much bigger than I ever imagined and more than just processing permits in Regulatory.”

Jaynie appreciates the flexibility she has, both in the Corps and in Regulatory Branch. Even when she was first starting her career, she was able to take leave without pay to study sustainable development in Africa in 2000 as part of her graduate program in Biology. Jaynie was in Kenya, “where the City of Nairobi backs right up to the national park. Where there’s development, you start putting up fences to keep the giraffe, lions, zebra, and the elephants [out].” One of the questions she was studying was how to balance this increasing population and growing city with the animals that were here before people? At the same time, this is what brings in the money, because people come here for tourism.

I spent the summer at the School for Field Studies in remote Kenya, slept in a tent, and the entire time showered with the giraffes right there and sometimes the lions would spend the night in the camp. It was amazing.” Jaynie doesn’t have children, but she does have “two horses, two mini donkeys and several dogs and cats. I have to make sure that I don’t come in to work smelling like a barn.” When work gets stressful, “my horses are my therapy. And I’ve got that dog that happily greets me no matter what, and a husband who’s very supportive and





*Jaynie, in Kenya, with the lions.*

who works for the Corps, so he understands.” All of these factors help Jaynie maintain that healthy balance. Many people have mentored and inspired Jaynie along the way. “Danny McClendon, the chief who hired me, was very good about promoting self-development. If details for temporary jobs in other offices came through that he thought you could benefit from, he made sure you saw them.” She also worked with Dennis Fenske during Katrina. “He was a senior engineer working with a phenomenal group of folks in New Orleans with the hurricane recovery efforts. I was a little intimidated by these experienced men but he made me feel welcomed and part of the team. He would routinely ask, ‘What can I help you with?’ He was really good at explaining things and introducing me to folks. He made sure I had

the resources I needed to write my reports and never threw me into a situation without backup.” Jaynie also mentions Deanne Strauser as someone she admired. “I didn’t have a lot of interaction with her because I’m dealing mainly with the public and not internal Corps employees, but whenever I was around her, I saw a woman in a high position who has a lot

of grace. Here’s somebody who could go from talking about the Corps’ mission and projects, who had her fingers in every part of a branch, but then can also talk to you about how just last weekend she was out riding her mules down the hill.” Jaynie’s coworkers, she adds, “are very amazing cheerleaders. Everybody wants to see each other succeed, grow, and learn.” Her mother also provided terrific support and influence as well. “My mother always said, ‘Go out and do it. Don’t let anything stand in your way.’ When I applied to be Section Chief, I asked her, ‘Am I ready for this?’ And she said, ‘Well, all they can do is say no. What’s the worst that can happen?’” The best advice she’s received is that “you don’t have to know everything to be a leader. When I took this position as a

supervisor, there was a little bit of hesitation and lack of confidence at first. How can I tell folks what to do when I don't know everything?" But then she realized "you need to know how to find the tools and resources to make sure your team is successful. If you can help your team be successful, then you're a leader. That helped me sleep a little better at night."

She's always trying to mentor others along the way, particularly in Regulatory. "There have been lots of folks come into Regulatory as their first or second job with the Corps or maybe their first job in the District Office and I try to help them out giving them guidance, ideas and support like I was given by the people that mentored me." The Regulatory program is her passion and she says, it is "great to see people succeed and become passionate themselves and help them as they become leaders and take on leadership roles. To see folks come through that you lead along the way, and to see that spark, that passion makes you feel good. Those are the rewards of helping others and helping our program grow." Jaynie thinks that the Corps is a wonderful place for a young woman to start a career. "There are so many opportunities, like 60-day or 30-day details in another branch, that might lead you to find a niche and develop a skill set that you never knew you had, especially when managers allow you to explore those opportunities because you're bringing back a set of skills to the office. What job in

the private sector allows you to move around and completely change gears, then come back at the same pay, same position? There are so many opportunities for advancement. You can develop a lot of knowledge and build a great resume. The main thing is to explore opportunities, know that details are only short term, and that you can explore details outside the District as well. Don't let those pass by; don't be afraid to explore other things."

Jaynie has been recognized often for her contributions. "I've gotten awards for working with Task Force Guardian (Hurricane Katrina), flood fight teams, and environmental product delivery team awards, I've also received small awards like kudos awards and star appreciations from my co-workers." Still, she says, "I know it sounds clichéd, but my biggest reward is at the end of the day feeling satisfied that I've done the best I can, or somebody thanked me for helping them and figuring something out. That's what I appreciate the most." Still balancing the roles of protector of the environment and educator.



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# NATALIE DREW

*Engineering and Construction Division, District  
Knowledge Manager*

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By her own admission, Natalie Drew has had one of the more bizarre paths leading to her eventual 27-year career at USACE. “When I graduated from high school I had a full scholarship through AFROTC [Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps]. They sent me to, what was then, University of Missouri at Rolla (UMR), and said, ‘We want you to pursue nuclear engineering’...I did abysmally. I stayed in nuclear engineering for a semester and I have a lovely certificate that says I started the reactor up at UM-Rolla.

honorably discharged from the Air Force Reserves, Natalie switched her major to engineering management with a civil engineering preference for a year. “At that point it dawned on me that even if I did manage to get my engineering degree, no one in their right mind was going to hire me because my GPA was so low.” Natalie switched her major to history after learning about an open work study job at the university archives through her partner—now wife—who also worked there. The professor, who ended up becoming her academic advisor, hired her for the job, “and that’s how I became an archivist.”



*Natalie's certificate for starting the nuclear reactor at UM-Rolla.*

After earning her Bachelor's in History, Natalie attended graduate school at the University of Missouri at St. Louis and worked at the University Archives as a graduate assistant. After graduation, she was hired as the University Archivist for the UM-St. Louis campus.

While there, a friend

I switched to civil engineering and that lasted about a year and basically what it comes down to is, I'm really stupid when it comes to math and science.”

After losing her ROTC scholarship because of old sports injuries and receiving a medical but

showed her an advertisement for a position with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “I knew nothing about them and it was for this position as an Archival Researcher. It sounded like a really interesting job and it was basically for the Defense Environmental Restoration Project for Formerly Utilized Defense Sites (DERP-

FUDS). I got a call back from this man named Dr. Sonny Trimble, and he and I talked on the phone for a really long time and the more we talked, the more interested I was in the job. At the end of the conversation, he asked me to come in for an interview.” At the end of a two hour interview, Drew was hooked on the idea of a job at the Corps. “I really liked him and I really liked the idea of the job, of traveling across the country to different archival repositories at different levels—federal, state, and local—and trying to find potentially where some of these chemical munitions had ended up and if there was still any danger in any of these sites.”

Hired on as a GS-11 because she had a Master’s Degree, Natalie became part of a team of 12 historians and archivists hired specifically for this project in the Planning Division of the District, working for Sonny Trimble. Finally to round out the team, Project Management Division, working for Mike Dace, provided the PMs [project managers] for the project. “We were separated into teams of three—one PM and two archivists that would go out and conduct research within a specific geographic region.”

When describing her memories of this first position, Natalie describes herself as an inadvertent troublemaker. “I have a very strong sense of right and wrong and I don’t back down easily. I’ve gotten a little bit more tactful over

the years, thank God. That’s probably the only thing that saved me, but almost immediately I got into disagreements with the PM on whose team I was assigned. Rarely have I met such a misogynist. “There were only two women who were hired in that first big hiring action, Shelia DeVeydt and I, and we were assigned to the team with him as our PM. He wanted to do everything military—by the book. We didn’t have a problem with the archival research but when we actually got into the field this guy was like, ‘You’re going to crawl down in that pipe and see if there’s mustard gas still there,’ and I was like, ‘No, we’re not. I’ll walk the site but I’m not crawling into a pipe that’s potentially been closed for 40 years to see if there’s mustard gas still down there and neither is she.’ I actually threatened a suit against him...They eventually paired Shelia and I with another PM—Bob Wich—who was a great team leader.”

The following year, St. Louis District underwent a reorganization in the 1994/1995 timeframe and the Planning Division was dissolved. As a result of this, the DERP-FUDS project experiment had been relegated to the singular management of Mike Dace and Project Management. Sonny Trimble refocused on his primary position as Chief of the Curation and Archives Analysis Section in the Planning Division. When Planning ceased to exist, many of the functions that were traditionally part of Planning went under Project Management. The

exceptions to this was the two non-traditional offices of Mike Dace and Sonny Trimble, the Environmental and Munitions and the Curation and Archives Analysis Branches, respectively. When a position for an archivist opened in Sonny's office, Natalie took it.

"When Sonny asked me to come up to the curation office it was to work with associated records and that's basically tied into archaeology. From very early on, he and I were talking and I told him 'If we do our job right, we won't have a job because the amount of archaeological collections that need to be rehabilitated are finite. If we are successful in teaching people how to do it right the first time, there won't be any more that need to be rehabilitated. But you know what? Everybody's got records and they're all a hot mess.'" She worked in this office for the next 25 years. In 1993, her position was audited and it was determined to be at the GS-12 level. Natalie loves her job and feels that it is "the coolest job on the planet." Approximately two years ago, she became the District's Knowledge Manager, established directly under the Engineering Division Deputy Chief, and has a mandate "to make and improve things in the District for District employees... If I see a problem that I think Knowledge Management can assist with, I go for it. If somebody sees something and thinks that it's something, then Dave Busse or Dave Gordon will say, 'Natalie, I think you need to look into that.' If I get a

phone call from somebody who needs help with Knowledge Management, I try to sell the program and the services I can offer. I am the only Knowledge Manager in the Corps of Engineers that I know of that actually can offer to work for another district." Natalie has worked for Albuquerque, Memphis, New Orleans, New England, Portland, and St. Paul districts. "We're known within our own Mississippi Valley Division as the district that has our act together when it comes to Knowledge Management."

Natalie has held two positions at the Corps—GS-11 Archivist and GS-12 Archivist/Team Leader, the most recent being Archivist/Team Leader in Knowledge Management. This has been her favorite position. "It's by far the most challenging. I started as an archivist. I was a certified archivist for 15 years. Then I got my certification through the National Archives for federal records management. I did that for about 15 years and still use those tools today. To me, this was a very natural flow... I see things very holistically. Archives is about organization and creating access and preserving things. Records [management] is about creating access and determining what to preserve. Knowledge management is about creating the best access and connecting people and information. It all comes full circle around to that. Each one of those has a logistics component. If you look at some of the projects that I've done, those are skill sets that I draw upon as necessary. I

have led teams and managed the move of entire museums, working with contractors and with museum staff. For the Iraq Mass Graves Investigation Team I led the efforts to set up the forensic analysis facility, and coordinated with the many professionals there the logistics and the flow of materials for the analysis conducted there. I was the first processing archivist on the Kennewick Man archives. I basically processed that out of a suitcase. I helped with the Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts for three months in 2006. Those are just the major ones. I've had more than my share of 15 minutes of fame and I don't really care much for fame. I'm the 'pay no attention to that woman behind the curtain' person."



*Natalie receiving recognition award for her work on the Mass Graves Project from LTG Strock.*

A number of individuals have impacted Natalie's career—some positive, some negative, and some both, depending upon the time. She has

always used these relationships to learn from—even if it is what NOT to do. "Another person who really had a strong influence on me was Rosemary Craig. When I was in the Leadership Development Program (LDP) in 2009, we had to pick a mentor and I knew nothing about Resource Management.

I decided I was going to break out and ask somebody who was in a realm I knew nothing about because I wanted to learn. I didn't know Rosemary at all and I went in and introduced myself. I explained to her that I was in LDP and said, 'Would you serve as my mentor?' and she said, 'Sure.' She was really an awesome mentor and she and I still have a really good relationship."

Later in LDP when we took the StrengthsFinder assessment, I discovered that my signature strength was "learner." No surprise there. Natalie also mentions Susan Wilson. "When you think of mentors you usually think of somebody who's older than you are but really age has nothing to do with it. It's more about finding someone who's more experienced in something than you are, someone who has knowledge that you don't have and Susan Wilson definitely falls into that category. She is a phenomenal woman." Natalie

also mentions her colleague, Nancy Brighton (once at the New York District, but now at Headquarters), whom she worked with on the African Burial Ground project as someone else she admires.

Ironically, even with all her varied experience, Natalie didn't feel qualified to mentor others for a long time. "I don't think I really know that much." One of Natalie's current mentees, the interviewer for this project, Ryann Willis, begged to differ. Natalie now has several young mentees who started with her in the

Curation Branch and have now moved into other positions in the district—Real Estate Division, Environmental and Munitions Branch, the Geospatial Engineering Branch, the Regulatory Branch, and a few that have taken positions outside USACE—and she continues to mentor them. When asked about her proudest moments with the Corps, Natalie points to the African Burial Ground project. In 1991, in downtown Manhattan more than 400 burials from a historic African American cemetery were discovered during a Federal building construction project. The Corps entered the picture after the archaeological recovery was complete and the human remains

and associated artifacts had been relocated to many different universities and repositories for study. "In 2002 they basically hired our office to coalesce all the materials because they had been scattered to the four winds...The whole idea



*Re-interment ceremony at the New York African Burial Ground in 2003.*

was that we were going to reassemble all of this at Howard University." After a very complex and time consuming process, everything was assembled and readied for the re-interment ceremony. Natalie even had to pick out the horse drawn hay wagons used in the ceremony's processional. "If someone had told me that I was going to end up planning a funeral for 423 individuals, I would have told them they were nuts. I had several people during the ceremony come up to me and thank me for making things right." She received a Commander's Award for her outstanding work on the African Burial Ground project, and another for her work in Iraq on the Mass Graves Investigation Team.



Natalie credits “sheer pigheadedness” as one of the character traits that has contributed to her success at the Corps. “I am one of the most determined people you’ll ever meet. I don’t give



*Coffins, loaded on horse-drawn wagons, proceeded from the pier up Broadway Avenue to the burial site.*

up lightly. I used to be really bad when I was younger about beating my head against a brick wall. Now I think I’ve at least learned how to go around. It’s funny because one of the things I’ve learned about the people in this organization is we are skilled at workarounds; we have to be because there’s so many things that thwart us. One of the things that I have learned about myself is that I’m a problem solver...and I much prefer working in what’s called leaderless teams. I don’t mind facilitating, but I don’t want to be the leader. I would much rather get the ideas and the creativity around me simply because

I’m not that smart. I have no problems stealing shamelessly. I’m not interested in stealing anybody’s credit because I think we are much more powerful, much more creative and much more innovative as a group.”

Other than her run-in with that first project manager, Natalie does not feel she has been discriminated against because of her gender. She chuckled and said, “Because I fit the stereotype of a lesbian, I think many people notice that about me before they even consider my

gender. Even if I weren’t gay, the stigma would still be there. I think many folks are so busy adjusting to that and trying to deal with it... Because people just don’t know what to do with me. That’s pretty much, I just want to leave it at that, but I don’t think it’s different as a woman. I think I get more of the different handling because people are like,... oh.” She does feel like it has gotten easier to be a gay woman in the workforce over the span of her career. She has been out for her entire career, but now she knows of others who are out as well; a definite change from when she first started. As a woman

in Engineering, she feels women have equitable treatment. “I know that a lot of women have risen pretty high and I think that Dave Busse really goes out of his way to make sure that women have equal opportunity.” Natalie would recommend the Corps as a place for a young woman to begin her career. “Probably the best advice I’d give them is that change is coming. Cultural change is so hard and there are so many vestiges of misogyny and bias but that’s throughout our society... In 27 years, I have seen some cultural change in the Corps but it’s so slow... There’s a hell of a lot more women here than when I started and I do see leaders making a difference. Dave Busse has busted his butt to make sure that fully a third of Engineering Division is female. Twenty-five years ago you wouldn’t have seen that effort.”

“I’m big into relationship building. I took the StrengthsFinder in LDP and one of my signature strengths is relator which means I build relationships and I go back to the same people over and over. It’s funny because Sonny once told me, he said, ‘You have all this authority’; and I laughed at him. I said, ‘Sonny, I don’t have any authority.’ ‘What are you talking about?’ ‘I have influence. Not the same thing.’ But influence can be very effective if you know how to wield it. It’s that relator working for me.”



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# KATHY ENGELMANN

*Programs and Project Management Division,  
Program Management Branch, Chief (Retired)*

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Kathy Engelmann started at the St. Louis District in December 1976 when she was just 18 years old. “I took an aptitude test to get hired on with the government because I was trying to get a secretarial position at the time. An opening came up at the St. Louis District after I’d applied. It was a [GS-3] clerk/stenographer position in Operations Division in Emergency Management.”



*Kathy receiving an award early in her career.*

In the beginning, Kathy did not think her job at the Corps would develop into a career. “I lived in a rural area, so I thought I’d be working three or four years, get married, have kids, and quit working. That was back when women were starting to work outside the home more and more. Well, I did get married when I was 20, but I didn’t quit working. That didn’t happen. My husband was a carpenter, and he would be laid off sometimes, so it became more career oriented for me after that.” Kathy embraced change

and took opportunities that transformed her career. She was only in her first position for six weeks and then transferred to the Engineering Division, still as a clerk/stenographer, and worked for the Deputy Chief, Art Johnson. From there, she went to the Planning Branch, which was still in Engineering Division at the time as the secretary. When a reorganization made the Planning Branch a separate division,

she stayed in Planning, but switched over to budgeting. “Herm Tilton was the Budget Analyst, and they hired me to assist him, so that’s how I got started in budgeting. From Budget Analyst, I became a Program Analyst. I was a Budget Analyst in planning, and I got into an upward mobility position. I went from a GS-5 to a GS-9. After that, I got picked up by the Programs

Branch in Project Management Division. I started out as a GS-3 clerk/stenographer and I ended my career as a GS-13, the Chief of the Programs Branch.”

Kathy recalls one humbling experience with Jack Rasmussen [Chief of the Planning Branch] early in her career. It cemented for her the idea that the Corps truly treated its employees like family and was a good place to develop a career. “I remember his patience and his tolerance. He

liked to dictate and I took shorthand. One day, I was trying to get the recording. He was really kind of in a hurry that day, which was unusual for him, so he had it on the Dictaphone, and I was transcribing. I don't know if I hit the wrong button or something, but I ended up recording over his dictation with somebody talking about a Cardinals' baseball game. I had to tell him what I'd done or didn't do, and when I approached him in his office and told him what happened, he just said, 'Okay, thank you.' That was it. He was just that kind of a person, and it stuck in my mind forever." Kathy had several mentors who influenced her sense of professionalism, including Jane Collins, Dave Leake, and Jim Zerega. "We always had so many deadlines all the time, but Jane Collins was always more worried about getting it right and taking longer if you had to. She made sure what we did was right and accurate. Dave Leake and Jim Zerega were the ultimate professionals. They



*Kathy at her desk in the Programs Branch.*

wanted to do the right thing, were serious about their jobs, and treated people with respect." A conversation with District Archaeologist Terry Norris influenced Kathy's decision to go back to school while working full-time. "One time, I remember talking to Terry Norris about going back to school, and he made the comment, 'Well you can either continue and have a degree or be 40 and not have a degree.' I was 32 or 33 then. I decided to take a few night courses in order to see if I wanted to keep doing that. It was at a fairly good time. My boys were in school, and I was still able to get to all their activities. I committed to working full-time and going to school part-time, and eventually, I got my Bachelor's in Business Administration."

Kathy notes that early in her career, the work culture of the Corps could be challenging for women as they advanced, and she felt that men were considered for leadership positions more than women. At times, she found it difficult to be taken seriously as a woman. In spite of experiences early in her career, Kathy believes that the workplace culture at USACE improved for women. "For the most part, in the District they really strived to watch for those kinds of... I don't know if injustice is the right word. behaviors. I think they got better about that. Definitely, I think it came to be as things in the rest of the world became more sensitive to those things, I certainly think the Corps did. It's one of those things that's going to take time and...I

think that's something too that got better as time went on. I think for the most part, it was probably geared more for men earlier on in my career." Finding balance between her work and personal life was a challenge for Kathy, but she

came at the end of her career—the Bronze de Fleury and two years after her retirement, she was inducted into the Gallery of Distinguished Civilians. "I had a good career here, so those were wonderful." Kathy recommends the Corps



*Kathy (3rd from left) when she was inducted into the Gallery of Distinguished Civilian Employees.*

to young women beginning their career. "There is a chance for growth. When I started, I didn't have my college degree, and they worked with me and knew that I had potential to achieve something like that. That's what inspired me to go to school." She advises newcomers "to come here and learn what you can about the entire organization, not necessarily just where you get your position but to learn about the entire organization in order to see where there is a better fit for you than where you are initially placed or accepted. The Corps is a varied organization with a lot of different disciplines. I would never have imagined the growth from the time I started my career."

was committed to making time for her family. She recalls one evening that illustrated the need to step back from work. "It was hard, and it got harder, especially later in my career in Programs. I remember one Friday night around 10:00 or 10:30. Paula Bell and I were trying to meet some deadline, and the power goes off. I'm in my office and I could hear Paula say, 'Kathy?' Fortunately, the generators kicked in, and we were able to use the elevators, but I thought, 'Oh, typical of a Programs crunch, and we're caught in this.'" Kathy was recognized several times throughout her career, but the most meaningful two awards

to young women beginning their career. "There is a chance for growth. When I started, I didn't have my college degree, and they worked with me and knew that I had potential to achieve something like that. That's what inspired me to go to school." She advises newcomers "to come here and learn what you can



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**TANDIKA GATES**

*EEO Officer*

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Tandika (Tan) Gates started at the St. Louis District in 1995. “I was attending State Community College in East St. Louis. I remember people going around the campus saying, ‘Hey, they’re hiring.’ I knew nothing about the Corps.” When she interviewed, Tandika did not envision a long career at the Corps, but her first opportunity led her to discovering her passion, “Honestly, I just wanted a job. I knew nothing about Equal Employment Opportunity, but I was hungry. I remember the EEO Officer Ms. Jean Stephens handing me the regulations and telling me to read them. I knew the position was only for the summer but I fell in love with EEO.”

Working with Jean Stephens had a significant impact on Tan’s career, “She gave me a chance, and I will never forget that. I was 22, a young mother, and married. I had a three-year-old daughter at the time, and she took a chance on me, despite me going to school and trying to hold a full-time job. After the interview, I called her probably every other day for about two weeks. After she hired me, “Mama Jean” told me that she wanted to see how many times I would call her about the position. Jean told me that she knew when I left the interview, she was going to hire me. I told her, “I promise you I will make you proud.”

After her student appointment ended in September 1995, she split her time between

EEO and Information Management (while pursuing her undergraduate degree in Management Information Systems). At one point, she even became a contractor employee, bouncing between the two offices. Finally, in 2002, pursuing another degree (Masters in Public Administration) a full-time EEO Student position was approved for the EEO Office. After receiving her degree she was converted to a permanent employee as an EEO Specialist. From that point, the sky was the limit. “I was always willing to learn, taking on more responsibility, and challenging myself to be great and then greater.

This approach afforded me the opportunity to work at the USACE, HQ and Army levels as an EEO Student and EEO Specialist. I advised Generals, Commanders, Senior Leaders, Managers, and Supervisors across USACE and the Department of the Army. As Jean Stephens, and other EEO Officers after her, continued to challenge me to grow, I developed relationships across the Army and other federal agencies. I was frequently called on at all levels and when I was selected for the EEO Officer’s GS-12 position, they kept telling me “you belong at Headquarters /Army level.” Tan’s passion for her work inspired her to reach higher - “resolving complaints not just across USACE but the Department of the Army.” Her passion, hard work, and commitment to EEO eventually led her to become the first GS-13



EEO Officer in the St. Louis District. After Jean Stephens retired, there were other women who mentored Tan and provided insight that shaped her professional path. “I remember when I was in the inaugural Leadership Development Program for the St. Louis District and everyone was told to select a mentor. I selected Brenda Wynne-George because I loved her honesty, her tenacity, her attitude, and her drive. Not only has Brenda been a mentor to me but over the years she’s become a close friend. I’ve learned a lot from her, not only professionally but also personally.”

Tan’s mentor inspired her throughout her career, and she took the opportunity to honor her and other St. Louis District women in leadership positions in an effort to encourage women in USACE to believe that their career goals were obtainable. “I remember a couple of years ago, my office came up with the idea to honor the

women in the District, specifically women in leadership, to highlight the accomplishments of women. It was a great encouragement for women and showed that you can start out in an administrative position but you don’t have to stay there. I remember going to these different women, and they were so humble. They would

say, No, you don’t have to honor me. You don’t have to recognize me. Finally, I persuaded some of them. It was an honor to see those women [including Kathy Tober, Brenda Wynne-George, and Susan Wilson] in leadership positions and to be able to work among them.”

Tan doesn’t feel she has experienced discrimination based on her gender or race. “Honestly, I’ve never been treated differently, but I can’t say that’s how other Black/African American women feel. I remember when the first female and the first minority female started on the Dredge Potter. I talked to them about



*Tan at her desk in EEO.*

the challenges they had while living on a boat with predominately men. I believe the women and minorities on our boats and at the field sites deal with a lot, and they accept more for different reasons.” Although Tandika does not feel she has experienced discrimination, she sometimes feels the pressure of being a woman

of color in a predominantly white and male workplace, “Women as a whole, we still have challenges and often times have to continue to prove ourselves, but there’s something extra when you’re a woman and a minority. Not just in the workplace but in society.”

Tan witnessed a moment that gave her hope and reminded her of the District’s progress. “I remember some years ago sitting at the Command and Staff Meeting. As I looked around, this was the first time we had a minority Commander, a minority female as the Chief of Contracting and a minority female as the Chief of Resource Management. I remember saying this is history and I am a part of it. For the first time I saw many women in leadership sitting at the table, not just minority women but women overall.”

Tan’s family has been a driving force behind her career ambitions, “I’ve always felt that my parents wanted me to be more successful than them. I had my first child right out of high school when I was 18 years old, and I got married before I graduated high school. According to statistics the odds were against me and based on society I wasn’t supposed to make it. I wanted to show my oldest daughter, despite of the choices that I made, I could do it. My children have witnessed me receive my Associate’s, Bachelor’s, and Master’s degrees. I did it for them and for my grandmother who only had a high school

education. However, she demanded that her children and grandchildren graduate from high school and obtain a degree.” While Tandika recommends the Corps for a new generation of women, she believes the culture at USACE needs to change to accommodate millennials and the generations beyond. “If we want to attract and retain the new generations, we’re going to have to be open to change and doing things differently. We found this out through our Clyde C. Miller Program where we have high school intern students come in and work as a part of their graduation requirement. You have to keep their minds going and if you don’t, you’re going to lose them.”

Reflecting on her career, Tan feels that even though she had other ambitions in the beginning, she landed exactly where she was supposed to be, “I initially wanted to be a nurse, but EEO became my passion. I was in the right place at the right time, although I knew nothing about EEO and nothing about the Corps. I will never forget those who were here before me, trained me, mentored and developed me. Some of them witnessed the civil rights movement. So, they took heart to EEO; it was their passion. It became my passion too. I want to make sure that EEO continues to serves its purpose. EEO is not about treating people equally but treating them fairly. If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn’t change my career because this is where I am supposed to be, and I love it.”



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# JENNIFER GREER

*HQ-USACE, Future Directions Branch, Chief  
(Retired)*

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In 1988, Jennifer Greer began her career with USACE working in Real Estate, but that was only the beginning of her amazing career, which eventually wound through both the Pentagon and Congress. “I worked very hard,” she says. “I was good at my job. But I am very aware that I was in the right place at the right time.” She was also the right person for the job. “I have an uncanny ability to read or understand a congressional situation, and instinct kicks in, and I know how to address the really tough congressional issue at hand—how we deal with it, what I recommend.”

A St. Louis area native, Jennifer had returned home after completing her master’s degree in Business Administration. She had started working for Leaf, Incorporated, a candy company that produced Switzer’s licorice. When contacted by the District for an interview, she initially declined because she was already employed. Then she received a second call asking her please to come in for an interview, no strings attached. She agreed. “I remember specifically that financially, it was a \$7 a year difference in salary.” She began her Corps career in Real Estate as an intern and chose the appraisal branch as her home after a year of rotation through the branches.

In 1994, Jennifer transferred to the Planning Division as an Economist. “The coolest thing I did there was working on environmental

projects. To receive money, funding, and support for these projects, you had to quantify something. Economically, it’s very easy to say, ‘What is the flood control project worth?’ Benefits can be measured, quantified. But you never really could do such an analysis for an environmental study. I helped develop a process where you didn’t monetarily value what we called the “Habitat Units,” but you could say your goal is to save as many ducks, or save as many wetlands, or save whatever the asset. You would look for the plan that might maximize what your benefits would be, however you quantify those. It was really exciting to be working on that totally new idea.”

In 1997, the District’s Executive Assistant retired, and Jennifer took the post as a detail. “The way that the St. Louis District sets it up,” Jennifer says, “the Executive Assistant works directly for the District Engineer and handles all of the congressional interaction for the District. This was the first time I got into what I did for the next 20 years, dealing directly with Congress.” When the job was announced, Jennifer applied for it, and became St. Louis District’s first female Executive Assistant.

In November 2000, Jennifer took a six-month detail working at the Pentagon for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA (CW), the Honorable Dr. Joseph Westfal. “I worked for him until mid-January, and then the

Gore/Bush election was called [i.e., the winner determined and announced]. If there's a change in Administration, regardless if there's a change in party, every political appointee resigns. They kept the ASA (CW) as the Acting Secretary of the Army. In March 2001, leadership at Corps Headquarters approached me and said, "Would you stay a little bit longer?" At that point, she did a year's detail working for the Energy and Water Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, which funds the Civil Works program. "It was really interesting. The Appropriations Bill passed in November, and I stayed through Christmas. I worked directly for the Ranking Member at that point and helped to put the Appropriations Bill together, helped get it passed on the floor. To get that big-picture analysis and understanding was really eye-opening. You really are seeing how it's all done, if you're able to do something like that, especially in the world of Congressional Liaison. For the rest of my career it helped me, because I understood what motivated them, what they were looking for. If you understand that, it's a lot easier to figure out how you're going to answer questions, how you're going to get them the information they need, and why they need that information."

When that detail was finished, Jennifer says, "I had gone back to headquarters, and I was a Special Assistant assisting the Administration which was considering introducing a Water

Resources Development Act, that would authorize projects, studies, or programs within the Civil Works program of the Corps." Then, "relatively early in the Bush Administration," she says, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works resigned. "All of a sudden, the Corps didn't have an Assistant Secretary. The hierarchy in the Army Directorate is the Secretary of the Army, the Under Secretary of the Army, and then the Assistant Secretaries, and they report to the Under Secretary. The Under Secretary at the time, the Honorable Les Brownlee, agreed to serve in this position in addition to being Under Secretary, instead of appointing another individual to act in the position temporarily."

"At that point, I will never forget, it was a Friday night. I was at my desk, and I was asked to come into the Civil Works conference room. There were a lot of people in that room. I knew walking in that something was going down. I didn't know if I wanted to turn around and walk right out or what. They said that they were given the opportunity to put someone directly in Hon. Brownlee's office to assist him. I went for an interview the next day and started on Monday. For about 18 months, I worked directly for the Under Secretary as his Civil Works Personal Assistant. At that point, he had the demilitarization of the chemical stockpiles in the country for the Army, and we were at war. He had so many things going on, and, when he

agreed to take this on, he knew nothing about the Corps of Engineers, and certainly knew nothing about the Civil Works program.”

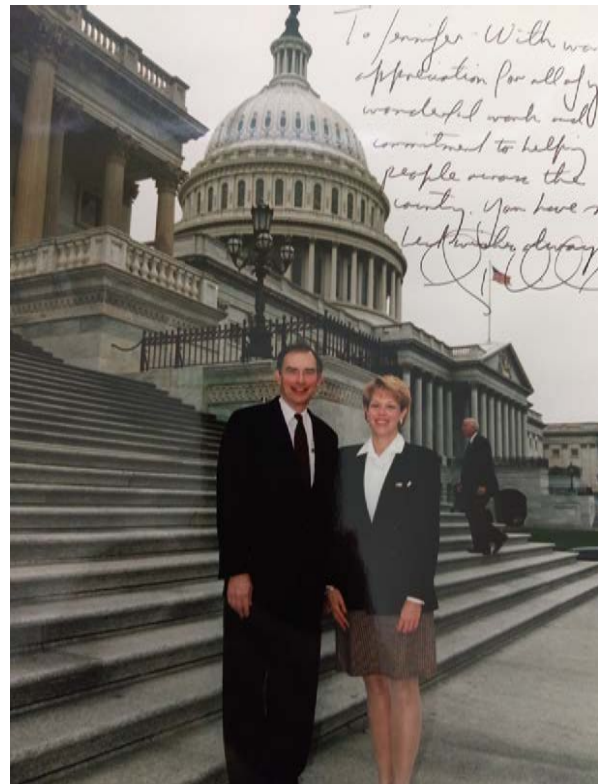
“He didn’t ever think he would really do this for 18 months, but he took it very seriously. He said, ‘I’m not going to be the figurehead signing memos. If I’m going to do this, I’m going to understand it.’ He ended up being a really strong Assistant Secretary for the Corps.”

In August 2003, a new ASA (CW) was confirmed, and Jennifer returned to the Corps, “working with the Director of Civil Works as a Special Assistant on appropriations and authorization issues. In 2005, they reorganized headquarters, including the whole Civil Works Directorate and Headquarters. There was a position for the Chief of what ended up being called the Future Directions Branch. So, I applied and did that from May 2005 through February 2019, when I retired.”

It was an entirely new role, and Jennifer got to shape it. She focused on building strong networks, strong relationships with the committees, and legislative initiatives. “I’m proud of the relationships that I developed with those staffers. Some will be friends forever, but the trusting relationships I developed really made a difference when things weren’t good.” In addition, she says, “I had supervisory duties. I supported all leadership at headquarters,

both civil and military, on any congressional engagements, congressional issues, budget issues, and appropriations issues. I had other Congressional Liaisons, the Strategic Planner for the Civil Works Directorate, and the Tribal Liaison.

“With Congressional Liaison and relationships within the Corps, I always saw that, where the rubber hits the road, the real relationships needed to be at the District level; the Division level would handle some of those more regional relationships. At headquarters, I really focused my time on the committees—the Authorization and Appropriation Committees; the staff that do not work for specific members of Congress



*Jen with REP Visclosky on Capitol Hill.*

but for the committees—and worked on our legislation. For the most part, I did what I thought needed to be done. I didn't come in each day and have a task that somebody had given me." The challenges Jennifer faced "were never based on gender or how I was treated, but really being willing to get out of my comfort zone and do things that I'd never done before. I had a very nontraditional career. I put myself into new situations, but it was very terrifying for me. I don't really love change. Even going to Washington for that first six months was terrifying. I made myself do it. You have to."

Jennifer says she was really only treated differently as a woman "when we went on real estate appraisals, and maybe it was a little more rural. I get out of the car, and I'm a woman, and I'm going to appraise your farmland. They basically looked at my coworker, usually Tim Nelson, and said, 'Okay, now what do we need to do?' We would laugh about it. In the District itself, I really wasn't treated differently. Where I worked, I was the only woman economist, the only woman Real-Estate Appraiser. The people that I worked with didn't treat me any differently. I'm not going to say it didn't happen to others. I just didn't see it."

When asked about work-life balance, Jennifer admits that "I don't think I balanced things well at all. Even when I was in the executive position in St. Louis, I can't remember more

than a handful of times that I wasn't locking the office up. I wasn't married. I didn't have kids. So, I just did."

The Blackberry, however, changed things significantly. "I was always on my Blackberry and always responding immediately. That practice grew into an expectation. The gentleman that followed in my position has young children, and I told him, 'Don't use me as an example.' I got a lot better in the last couple of years of my career. I saw I was retiring. I saw things a little bit differently. I honestly can say I got really tired. I got burned out near the end, because it was constant. I'm not sure that I would recommend somebody do the position I was in for as long as I did—almost 14 years. That's a long time in a position that's foot-to-the-pedal all the time."

She feels most proud of having led confirmation processes. "I was able to get three Chiefs of Engineers prepared and confirmed, and two Assistant Secretaries. It's a lot of sensitive work. People used to confirming Department of the Army appointees understand everything about Army programs and nothing about the Civil Works program. They don't perceive that it's going to be so hard and contentious. Sometimes it took years of negotiations, with 'I want this, and in the Corps of Engineers, you have to agree to see to this before I take a hold off.' Everybody wants something. They see this as a way they can potentially get something from the Army."

Jennifer credits Joe Przada in MVS Real Estate Appraisal Branch as one of her early mentors. “I watched how they worked and how they handled people,” she says. “My number one mentor was Fred Caver. He’s a Corps legend now. His mentoring and support over the years is hands-down the most that I’ve ever received. I had someone that I could always talk to about anything.” She also names Lieutenant General Tom Bostick, the Chief of Engineers, whose confirmation process took a year. “There was nothing that he could have done differently, but because of politics, I got to know him very well.” Before she left, Bostick “completely surprised me in front of Corps headquarters with the Bronze Order of the De Fleury.” Finally, “Major General Ed Jackson, the Deputy Commanding General, Civil and Emergency Operations, the head of Civil Works, had the greatest influence on me after Fred retired.”



*Jen and Julie Ziino.*

Within the District, she herself mentored Tish Tyler in Public Affairs; Chuck Camillo, who she hired into the District; and Julie Ziino, who she says “was going to do my position temporarily and ended up staying. In the end, we mentored each other for years.”

The best advice Jennifer got, she says, was about using her power with care. “I was the personal representative for the Under Secretary of the Army, so the Corps of Engineers had a direct door now to the Assistant Secretary. Fred Caver pulled me aside and said, ‘We will do anything to support you and to support Mr. Brownlee as he takes this on. You have unprecedented power to say the Chief of Engineers needs to be over here in an hour, or these people need to be over here and they need to have this presentation ready. You can basically make anybody in the Corps do anything you need. Use that power very, very carefully and thoughtfully.’ That has never left me.” For her part, Jennifer would advise young women beginning at USACE to “be open to new opportunities.” On the other hand, she says, “Don’t wait for them to fall in your lap. Take the initiative and see what’s out there.”





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# KATHERINE GREER

*Personnel Office, Recruitment and Placement Branch,  
Chief (Retired)*

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During her tenure as Chief of the Recruitment and Placement Branch of the Personnel Office, Katherine established an excellent working relationship with operating officials and employees.

Katherine has been inducted into the Gallery of Distinguished Civilians. The interview team was unable to reach her to invite her to participate in this project.



*Katherine and her branch colleagues.*

At the same time, an excellent regulatory compliance rate was maintained. Katherine's personal initiative, integrity, and technical expertise in managing the staffing program played a significant role in the efficient and effective operation of the St. Louis District. Throughout her Federal career, Katherine gained the respect and admiration of all who knew her.



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# STEPHANIE HALL

*Nashville District, Deputy of Programs and Project  
Management Division*

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When she was younger, Stephanie Hall's mother advised her to "go into a field that's dominated by men because it pays better, you will be able to support your family, and you will have more opportunity." Stephanie took that advice and got her first degree in economics. "I worked in my 20s doing some financial consulting and hated it. I went back to school at 28 to become a civil engineer." When Stephanie was working nights at the U.S. Geological Survey in Rolla, Missouri, one of her professors approached her with an opportunity to begin working at USACE. "He asked me would I rather work on and off a semester and then come back to school instead of doing this work at school all day and then working at night with USGS. I said, absolutely. He made some phone calls to the St. Louis District, and I started work that December (1994) in Water Control as a co-op."

After she finished her co-op, Stephanie accepted a full time position in the Engineering Division, which was the beginning of a career that has taken her around the world. "I worked there up until 1999, then I took a job in New Orleans in the Construction division doing modifications and claims over \$100,000. I went from being in the office doing mods and claims to working in the field doing Project Engineer work and building huge concrete canals to de-water the city of New Orleans and pump stations. From there, I pursued a Project Engineer position

over an office in Vicksburg District and went to work in Vicksburg, still in construction building mainline Mississippi River levees. Then, I went to work in Stuttgart, Germany for the Directorate of Public Works. I started in Engineering. While I was there, I was promoted to the Engineering Division Chief at DPW (Department of Public Works). I deployed to Afghanistan for a year where I was back in E&C (Engineering & Construction), and I was the deputy for E&C in Kabul. Then I competed for a position in Korea. I was managing a branch in Korea. It was very similar to what we were doing in New Orleans. There's a bilateral agreement between the Korean government and the United States government about who manages the demilitarized zone." She then led the Kansas City District's construction of the local National Geospatial Agency's new building here in St. Louis. Stephanie is now the Chief of a unique office, the NWD Military Integration Division.

Stephanie attributes the growth of her career to tenacity, her mentors, and being in the right place at the right time. "I think there's always opportunity about being in the right place at the right time. Had I not gone to Korea and reset my military construction program credentials, I probably would not have gotten the job at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. Had I competed for a job as the GS-14 in New Orleans District doing civil works, even though I had done Katrina, they would have

looked at my resume and said, maybe there's somebody who's been doing MILCON a little more recently. Part of my success was having an idea of where I want to go and making sure as I moved along, I continued to make those career steps that enabled me to take those opportunities when they came available. Also, Dave Busse and Joan Stemler just really opened my eyes of what was possible in engineering. I didn't know the great things that federal service Army Corps of Engineers provided to the Army and to the nation until I worked for them, and that was the beginning of what would be the opportunity that I would choose to take."

Pride in supporting an important mission has been a significant motivator in Stephanie's career at USACE. "I chose Civil because at the end of the day if we do our jobs well, we will improve the lives of people or communities that we touch. For me, that type of service has always been important. When I stepped in the door and started working for the USACE, I discovered that's what we do. That's what we do at every level, whether it's individuals or communities or the army and DoD. We improve the lives of soldiers, the lives of people, and communities. I began here to fulfill my technical needs and desires, but I can also provide service, and I don't think there's an organization that I know of that provides the opportunity to do both well." While Stephanie felt fulfilled in her career, working at St. Louis and other districts

challenged her both as a woman and single parent. "For a long time, I was a single parent. I had to do things like have sick daycare. I had to make sure that if something happened, I had a safety net that allowed me to participate at the level I needed to be seen participating at work, and managing that work-life balance was very challenging sometimes. I had to do some creative things in order to allow myself to stay relevant at work in a path that I wanted for my future."

In the beginning of her career, Stephanie also noted how few women were in her department and lamented the absence of other female peers. "When I graduated Rolla in 1996, the graduating ratio was one woman to every four men. Being a woman at Rolla prepared me for being in a predominantly male space, but sometimes it was still difficult to be the only female in a room and a very large part of the beginning of my career was governed by that. The project office I led in Greenville - there were no other women. The project office that I worked at in New Orleans District, there was another woman but she was in a different section. I didn't have a lot of peers."

Stephanie has seen a cultural shift at USACE that has created a better workplace for women, but believes more conversation about diversity and inclusion needs to be had. "Things that were readily socially acceptable when I came on

board in the 90s are no longer allowed. I think we have been having good dialogue, but we need to have more of it. We all come with some bias, but we have evolved as a culture to be able to talk about that in a more meaningful way. Change is slow, but the USACE is pursuing positive change. I may get frustrated at the rate that they're going, but if I don't like how fast it's going, then maybe I need to get a little more engaged to facilitate the speed at which it's moving." Now, Stephanie sees more women in the room and encountered a supportive peer group at a recent event. "I went to a retirement celebration and sat at a table and noticed a bunch of other women sat down next to me. I was brand new, and I didn't know any of them. I was thrilled to see this whole table of women. The reason all these women, maybe not all of them, but some of them found me and sat at my table was I am the first GS-15 female in Kansas City District. There are a lot more women in higher-graded positions now."

In reflecting on her career, Stephanie feels that learning how to be a more effective, kinder communicator would have been beneficial when she first began at USACE. "If you didn't know me in my 20s, I was succinct, direct, and did not mince words. You could say I may have had very little tact and that would have been a good assessment. It took me a while to realize sometimes you need to shut your mouth. As I look back, I probably would have held maybe

a little bit of that back. The last 10 years of my career being a supervisor and having hard conversations made me realize it should be top priority to be kind. Be kind and you can give hard feedback in a kind way. But still honest. I have worked hard to be more positive and supportive. I can't say I always get there because I know I don't, but there have been conversations I've had in my past with supervisors and subordinates that if I had it to do over, I probably would've changed some of my language and some of my mannerisms."

She recommends the Corps of Engineers as a place to work for a young woman just starting her career. She advises young women just starting their career at St. Louis District to "find your talent, find your passion. Don't expect it has to be the first place you get put. Don't be afraid to do rotations. Embrace the opportunity of learning that what you thought you wanted might not be. Nobody wants to be in a career for as long as we're going to be in these careers, in a place that doesn't fit our ability to contribute to the organization and to the mission. Find your right seat on the bus and engage your organization to help you find it. They want you in it, you want to be in it. Just because you thought it at 21 doesn't mean at 24 you have to stick with it. Life is full of change, embrace it and pursue contributing your best talents to the mission that you've chosen to serve."



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# ROCHELLE HANCE

*Engineering and Construction Division, Environmental  
and Munitions Branch, Chief*

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Rochelle Hance, who would become St. Louis District's first female branch chief in Engineering and Construction Division in 2012, began her government career in 1986 as a clerk-typist with the Social Security Administration. The following summer, she was a clerk-typist at the Aviation Systems Command (AVSCOM). After two weeks with AVSCOM, Tom Leicht offered her an internship at the St. Louis District (MVS). "He convinced me that coming to the Corps, doing engineering work—what I was studying for—would be much better for me." She started off working in the Structural Design Section of the Design Branch. Ironically, what she learned while there only confirmed what she had suspected for a few years while pursuing her education in engineering—she really didn't enjoy the work! When she was halfway through college, Rochelle began doubting her choice of major. She decided to finish what she started and "see where it takes me." When she graduated in December 1988, however, she knew that she probably did not want to be an engineer the rest of her career. Still she stuck with it, to see if she would like it better over time.

She started permanently in January 1989, working on pump stations and flood walls with Tammy Atchley and Jeff Stamper. A couple years later, she was planning on leaving the Corps. "I couldn't see myself just designing stuff," she recalls, "and honestly I wasn't that good at it." So she began taking night classes towards her MBA

at St. Louis University, which she completed in 1996. Some of her early experiences in the Design Branch did nothing to alleviate her unhappiness with her career choice. In addition, she had a couple of negative experiences with the then Design Branch Chief—at one point he told her that she "didn't dress professionally, [although] I wore suits and skirts." Then when the Casino Queen came to St. Louis in 1992, part of the flood wall was cut out to build a tunnel connecting the parking lot to the boat. She remembers working on the design and being in the field with construction contractors. "One day they were placing the concrete, and they were throwing trash in with the concrete where the reinforcement was. I took that back to Jeff Stamper. We decided that it would be best if we had the contractor tear it all out and redo it. I worked up a memorandum with Jeff and Art Johnson, the Chief of Engineering and Construction Division, and then I had to go out there and tell the contractor." Rochelle, who was very young, short and petite, was the one who had to deliver this news to the contractor in person. This led to a heated exchange between her and the contractor. Because there was a significant difference in their height, at one point the contractor went down on one knee so he could be eye to eye with her and persuade her that redoing the work was unnecessary. During this exchange, she said that she vividly remembers "our construction guy, instead of standing next to me and supporting me, stood



back and just watched.” Nevertheless, Rochelle held firm and the contractor had to redo the job.



*Rochelle and her family.*

In September 1993, she moved to a newly formed office within Project Management Branch, which was moved during a reorganization into Engineering and construction Division and renamed the Ordnance and Technical Services Branch in 1996. This branch, now known as the Environmental and Munitions Branch within the Engineering and Construction Division, is where she remains to this day. The district established the office in 1992 to compile Archive Search Reports to aid in the identification and cleanup of military munitions (including chemical warfare materials), and Hazardous, Toxic and Radioactive Waste (HTRW) from what are commonly referred to as Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS). The branch’s work was

(and remains) part of a larger program known as the Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP). There is an inventory of more than 10,000 FUDS nationwide, and this Branch has prepared assessments and has completed various products for several thousand properties for every USACE District that has a FUDS mission. When the office was first established, it consisted of only four engineers and eight historical researchers but by the summer of 1993, the office was quickly expanding and Rochelle and several others were brought in by the chief, Mike Dace. Moving to a new branch and working under Mike gave Rochelle a fresh start and the opportunity to excel at work she enjoyed. She recalls how during one of her first meetings with Mike, he pulled out her personnel folder and showed her the “termination form her previous supervisor had signed.” She said that Mike held up the form and told her, “Just wanted you to see this,” and then he ripped it up and shredded it, telling her, “This doesn’t belong in here.” She would go on to work with Mike for the next 20 years and credits him as one of her strongest influences and most important mentors.

Her work in what would become the Environmental and Munitions Branch would be very different from what she had been doing in the Design Branch. Rochelle quickly excelled at this new challenge, which allowed her to work with a diverse group of historians, archivists,

safety and munitions specialists, project managers and engineers. Most importantly, Rochelle had finally found her niche. She said that one of the most rewarding perks of her work was that it allowed her to travel “all over the United States, from the most northeastern point in Maine to Oahu, Hawaii. I’ve been to southern California, a lot of Texas, a lot of New Mexico....I’ve been to Puerto Rico, all along the southeast and the northeast.” In 2003, when range inventories were required for all services, she was promoted to a GS-13 Technical Lead, and, eventually, in February 2012, she became the Branch Chief.

On her first temporary duty trip with the Ordnance program, she traveled to Targhee National Forest in Idaho with colleagues Pat O’Donnell and Tom Freeman. As they were walking the site, they were met by US Forest Service employees who were traveling in a pickup and had a dog with them. When asked why they had a dog, their response was “to scare away bears, so we can run away.” Her colleagues then dubbed her “bear bait,” knowing if they encountered a bear, they could easily outrun her.

Rochelle’s first big project for the Ordnance Branch was assisting the New England District in a six-month detail in 1995 near Boston, working with the district and their contractors on the munitions cleanup of Fort

Devens, after identifying numerous historic ranges throughout the Fort that needed to be investigated prior to closing the base as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure [BRAC] program. During the research and site visit for the report, they found, among other things, trenches and chemical warfare munitions from World War I, mortars or projectiles and grenades buried in playgrounds. Carter Hunt, the commander at Fort Devens, “was not happy at all, and Mike still talks about hearing my knees knock together as I was talking to him. He was furious—I mean he was red in the face—he was just aggravated that I was showing him where his contamination was. I was the messenger.” Rochelle recalls several incidents where she bore the brunt of someone’s (usually men’s) wrath, but she did not concern herself with these individuals or their behavior. She recognized that in many of these situations, she was nothing but a convenient target for people’s frustrations. In such interactions, if she didn’t respect the other person, “I really didn’t care,” she says. “It just rolled off my shoulders and I moved on.” She recalls one former commander questioning her ability to do a job because she was a woman, and basically answering him by doing the job very effectively. In Rochelle’s opinion, these behaviors are not just about gender: “I was a lot younger then. I think they were looking at me as some young kid. An older generation sees a young female versus a young male differently.”

Her next big project, the range inventory, probably had the greatest impact on Rochelle's career. The first phase was in 2000. They had six weeks to enter data for more than 1,000 Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) and everyone thought they would fail. The St. Louis District led the effort and enlisted assistance from Rock Island District, and did not fail. A few years later, the St. Louis District was tasked with conducting a more in-depth range inventory (second phase), which was required by all branches of the Military (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and National Guard).



*COL Corbin recognizing Rochelle for her work.*

When they started, “I had the guidelines of all the data that was required and needed to be reported; and I worked with the contractors who developed a database for it. We also looked at 1940s and 1950s technical manuals: how they

laid out the ranges, what types of munitions would have been used on those ranges, and the chemical components of those munitions. We put a system together that the team used. Later, the Army Environmental Command had me come out and present that information to their contractors who were doing the same analysis for the Active Army Installations. The Marine Corps, who was ahead of the curve, came to us in the late 1990s to do their range inventory.”

Several years after the team completed the 2nd phase of the range inventory and these ranges were further investigated to determine if hazards were present, USACE HQ returned to the St. Louis District to better define and group similarly contaminated areas together into more manageable projects. “At that time, I got to know a lot more people Corps-wide, headquarters really well, and some of those people are now at DASA (Department of the Army Staff Agencies). That probably impacted me the most. They got to know me, and they got to know the office. Relationships were strengthened, and if they weren't there before, we built them.”

She is proud of earning people's trust: “when you know that somebody is asking for your help because they trust you to know what to do. When I worked at the New England District for six months, I felt proud that they trusted me enough to bring me up there and pay me

six months TDY. They made me a plaque.” In 2010, the Southwest Division FUDS program manager “suggested that I come on a detail to Southwest Division” when someone was deployed. “That’s a proud moment, because he trusted me enough to bring me down there and threw all the stuff at me that I had never done before.” She is also proud of the “relationships built along the way.”

Among her mentors, she names Jeff Stamper, who “helped me a lot in those early days in Structures. He was very level headed. And Mike Dace and Tom Freeman would take me on trips and to meetings with different, new customers. They trusted me enough and believed in me enough that they wanted me to learn more, and they included me in a lot of different things.”

Mike Dace was a particularly powerful influence on Rochelle. “He took me under his wing. He made sure I learned what I needed to. He mentored me. He was always there to back me and support me and share whatever he could with me so that I could succeed. That was how he worked with probably just about everybody. He was always a protector of his people. He gave me a lot of responsibility to figure things out.”

As for herself, “Every day you work with someone on a project, that’s essentially mentoring. But it’s never been an official mentorship.” Tammie Bush, however, who conducted this interview,

says she considers Rochelle to be both a mentor and a champion.

The best work advice she got, from Mike Dace, was “Don’t turn down work. Just figure out how to do it. Do your best. Follow through, because you never know where something may lead.’ I think challenges are put in front of you for different reasons. Whether they are to help you or something to help somebody else, so just embrace it and learn from it.” Her own advice to young women starting careers at MVS is not to be shy. “If you don’t know something, ask questions. People would rather see you engaged than sitting back and struggling. Volunteer for stuff, get out, get to know people, do your job to the best of your ability, but find what you want to do. If you don’t focus on you and being happy, then everything else is miserable.”

Rochelle attributes her success to “loving what I do. People succeed when they love what they do and are appreciated. They need to be taught and trained and guided. It’s a lot easier when you’ve got somebody backing you, supporting you, and believing in you,” she says. “I feel very lucky, because a lot of other people helped me get to where I am.”



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**MELISSA (LYNN)  
HOERNER**

*Real Estate Division, Chief*

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Lynn Hoerner originally studied Exercise Physiology and interned at a cardiac rehabilitation center. “Once my first patient died, I decided this was not for me. My goal was to make people better, not to watch them die.” She then worked at a women’s health club and “had crazy hours: weekends, holidays, all kinds of stuff.” When she decided to attend Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville in 1997 to earn an MBA, she sought out “a nine-to-five job, so I could go to grad school at night and do homework on the weekends. I went to a job fair at the university and the Corps was there. Larry McCarthy talked me into coming to the Corps of Engineers. I picked this job because there was lots of vacation and flexible hours that fit my life at the time. I started as a Realty Specialist [GS 5/7/9].” At the time, she knew “not one thing” about real estate. “I thought, ‘This is going to be a temporary thing until I get my master’s degree done, and then I’m going to get a real job.’ I really didn’t picture it as a career.”

The benefits of a government career, however, began to persuade her otherwise. “There’s really no place else you can go and get the kind of health benefits, vacation time, and things like that newly out of school. That sucked me in. I had interesting work, and I had something that fit my life, and then I started having kids. It was one of those things where, once you’re in, there’s really nowhere else you’re going to find that.” Lynn worked “for two years as a student,

and when I got hired on permanent, it was [GS-] 7, 9, 11. There was lots of room to grow. I did the Emerging Leaders (EL) Program, and I gradually kept moving up.” At this time, St. Louis District did not even have a Leadership Development Program (LDP) so it was not a prerequisite for the Mississippi Valley Division’s (MVD) Emerging Leaders Program. While in EL, she met Anne Kosel, who would end up as St. Louis District’s Real Estate Chief and one of the champion’s for the District’s LDP program established in 2007.

In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, Lynn recalls, “I did a detail in New Orleans as a Public Affairs Specialist. We did what we called the three-hour tour—we took media to the damage sites and breach sites. It took about three hours to drive them to every place and explain what had happened and the history of flood protection there. I did that for four or five months, then came back and stayed in Real Estate for quite a while.” After a detail in Office of Counsel as a Paralegal Specialist, Lynn decided to leave Real Estate. For two years, she served as a Facility Operations Specialist in Operations. “I worked on contract actions for the lake projects and rivers—facility types of things: wastewater treatment plant replacement and contract actions. I was the go-between for the lakes and Real Estate, because I knew a little bit about real estate,” she says. “Then I messed around and got me a job as the Chief of Real Estate [as a GS-13].

It's only taken 22 years." Her favorite position is "anything real estate," she says. "I just like the work. There's no place else that you can do this kind of work. Corps of Engineers real estate is extremely unique, because we have civil works missions and military missions. We have unique authorities; we have unique business lines that make the work something not all agencies do. Where the Bureau of Land Management might be large land managers, it's not typically in areas with commercial businesses, where we lease commercial properties. We do so many different things, and we work with nonfederal sponsors for flood-damage reduction projects."

The biggest challenge she's faced in the Corps, she says, is "the endless bureaucracy. We have the hardest time getting out of our own way sometimes. What's amazing to me is how in emergency situations, we have our act together. It's the rest of the time that is not always so impressive. I think that comes from people being scared to be in trouble, scared that they might do the wrong thing, scared that they're not crossing a T and dotting an I. Emergency situations, it's carte blanche, let's get it done. Otherwise, I think people are afraid to make a mistake."

Lynn noticed some marked differences at the District's Lake Projects—"Well I feel like they trip over themselves less because [they] are the face of the Corps to the public. And so when you

have the public coming to you on a daily basis, you do things that make good common sense. If you're not face to face with the guy that lives down the road from you, you may make your decision in a vacuum and not have to answer for it. The project offices are not like that."

Her post-Hurricane Katrina recovery work impacted her career deeply. "After Katrina, the Corps took on, with Louisiana Coastal Authority, some ecosystem restoration projects, and I had the opportunity to work on two very large ecosystem restoration projects. Those were the largest projects I had ever worked on until that time. St Louis District took care of the planning of those projects. We actually presented one of them to the Civil Works Review Board. Because of those projects, I met a lot of people in the New Orleans District, and I got to understand the uniqueness of their District. It has projects that no other place in the country has, and Real Estate, especially in New Orleans, is very interesting, because Louisiana real estate law is its own thing. It's not based on English common law like the rest of the country. It's based on Napoleonic French code. I gained a lot of knowledge and insight from those projects." She felt particularly humbled to work for the Corps after Katrina. "We had an office set up specifically to get the hurricane flood damage reduction system back in place before the following hurricane season. The fact that we were able to get the system back to its pre-

Katrina levels in less than a year was amazing. The one thing that I will never forget,” she says, is when “we were doing a public meeting in Plaquemines Parish after Katrina. Plaquemines Parish was leveled, and the purpose of meeting was to inform folks how we were going to rebuild the levees, how we were going to acquire that property, and what that meant for them. These are people who have lived there their whole lives and couldn’t recognize where their house used to be, because there were no trees, there were no mailboxes, nothing. It was miles and miles of main road and driveways. Just driveways. There were no landmarks left. There were no structures left. There was nothing. And this mom came in with her kindergartener with her Dora the Explorer backpack and that is the only thing her daughter had.”



*Post Katrina New Orleans.*

Anne Kosel was a mentor to Lynn. “She was in the Emerging Leaders program with me before 2000, and she ended up being the Chief of Real

Estate in the St. Louis District. She is very even tempered, logical, and matter-of-fact, and she’s a very good advice giver.” She has also had other mentors “more informally,” she says. “Any very smart, knowledgeable people that I have the opportunity to spend time with, I try to soak it in.” In turn, there are “several folks that I’ve been happy to give my advice to. Whether they take it or whether they think it’s the right thing to do is something different.” The best advice she ever received came from her brother-in-law: “‘This too shall pass.’ It is true. Everything’s a phase, and it’s that way with kids, it’s that way with work, it’s that way with the economy. It’s that way with everything. And fashion comes back. As long as we don’t get parachute pants back, we’ll be good.” She would advise a young woman just starting her career with the Corps to “keep your eyes and your ears open and never miss a good opportunity to shut up—really—because you’re going to learn more if you have your mouth shut.”

She attributes her success to “some luck, hard work, and an ability to compromise. I just don’t feel like you’re going to get anywhere if you try the-my-way-or-the-highway attitude. Communication, empathy, and trying to see other people’s point of view” are also important to Lynn. As for awards and accolades, Lynn says she has a few commander awards and “numerous coins. One of my most cherished [awards] is my Honorary Barge Pilot’s License.”





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# CYNTHIA JACKSON

*Project Operations Manager, Wappapello Lake  
(Retired)*

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Cynthia Jackson retired in January 2019, after almost 38 years with the Corps. She had grown up “a bit of a tomboy” in a small town, the youngest of five and the only daughter. From being on the high-school basketball team and the women’s team at Henderson State University, she learned early that “it was always about the team.” About her own performance, she says, “I was pretty good, but I normally assisted. I’d make the pass, and let everybody else make points.” Above all else, she’s a straight shooter. “What you see is what you get. I try to keep it fun. I try to give the information like it is.”

Both of Cynthia’s parents left school after the eighth grade. They told her, “There’s nothing wrong with being this, but if you want to do better, you need to go to college.” Her mother told her in the summers if you don’t have a job I’m going to find you a job.” Inevitably, those jobs were difficult or even dangerous: “mowing cemeteries, planting pine trees, working at the sawmill stacking lumber and at the chipping saw. Not everybody had all their limbs or fingers.” But her older brothers—one a USACE park ranger and others in the Forest Service and National Park Service (NPS)—let her know that “federal jobs are good. You got a retirement, you got benefits, and it’s a good job.”

Cynthia started with the Corps in 1981, working summers in Arkansas at Lake Ouachita. In

1984, when the NPS hired staff for the World’s Fair, she worked in New Orleans, where she experienced the city and urban living but also some interagency tension. Her NPS coworkers “bad-mouthed everything the Corps did,” she says, including draining swamps in Louisiana, but she told them that “natural resources folks in the Corps are doing the same things you’re doing” and tried to be a bridge builder. Her strength, she found, “was positivity and harmony, inclusion, and trying to keep people making things better.”

One of her first jobs was as a contractor on the garbage crew at DeGray Lake, where she says, “one of the rangers looked down upon us as just the cleaning people. I thought, ‘someday I’m going to have that job,’ and I did.” In January 1985, she was employed seasonally at the Navigation Field Office in Monroe, Louisiana, but later that year, she returned to Lake Greason as a GS-5 Seasonal Park Ranger. Her goal was “just to have a career. It was a lot harder to get in permanently than it is now.”

Her early career was in the Vicksburg and Nashville districts, but a promotion landed her at Wappapello in June 2000, where she spent nearly 20 years. Even so, her favorite position has been a GS-5 Seasonal Park Ranger. “You meet more people. You’re outdoors. You were always around happy campers—baking, frying—and people having fun.” As “the only girl in a family

of men,” Cynthia learned quickly that “if you beat them, they don’t ask you to play anymore, so you didn’t show them everything you can do. Knowing in my mind that I could beat them was all I needed.” So when she married in 1984, her husband’s career in the Corps took priority. In the end, however, Cynthia’s career grew much faster than her husband’s. After following her for several moves, he joined the Air Force, and the couple divorced. It was a turning point in Cynthia’s career. She was now able to focus on herself and put her heart and soul into her work. Moreover, taking on all of the household responsibilities by herself revealed her leadership abilities and prompted her to “work hard to get to someplace, to get a promotion, and to be somebody.”

She attributes her success to “challenge, change, and commitment.” Regionalization, floods, and simple personnel issues were her biggest challenges. She wishes that regionalization had worked out. “It would have worked if it had been implemented differently,” she says. She was also frustrated that her skills and knowledge needed to be official to be recognized for grades and promotions. “I had a lot of the outdoors training already, but it wasn’t documented.”

Big floods had a great impact on her career. “In 2002, we had a flood that opened our eyes. We made it clear that it was going to happen again and we need to be ready.” She and Gary Stilts,

the Operations Manager who hired her, began asking, “Why did we let ourselves do this? Why did managers let this happen?” and trying to improve flood preparation.

Cynthia remembers exactly where she was when the water went over the berm during the flood of 2011—“sitting on an ice chest at the spillway at 10:00 pm, with Doug Nichols. It was pouring down rain, and it was cold. I was wondering what we were going to wake up to the next morning, what was going to happen downstream. I thought we had covered everything we could, but I just knew we’d wake up to somebody being dead the next morning. But we didn’t. Not everything was perfect, but nobody got killed. That’s one of my sayings: There ain’t nobody dead yet. We can fix it.”

As the operations manager, she felt her responsibility keenly. “Not only are you responsible for the structure and your people, but you also feel like you’re responsible, emotionally anyway, downstream, upstream. Most people think once the water goes down the flood’s over. Well, then the cleanup starts, and it’s an ongoing thing.” They had learned a lot preparing for the 2011 flood and “a whole lot more after it was over,” so in 2017, they were better prepared: “We got the road back in less than 30 days.” Cynthia’s upbringing and early life shaped how she navigated the Corps as a woman: that is, partly by accepting the male

culture, working within it, and insisting on treating people as individuals, without regard to gender. Some women in the Corps, she felt, “weren’t good examples of women in the workplace,” and following behind them was difficult. “They were filing grievances every time something changed, or somebody looked wrong, or some man had a bad habit and blew snot out his nose. Growing up with brothers, I was prepared for some of that. You got to just take some of it.” Her own approach was “to say something to him and embarrass him,” she says. “You have to treat everyone as you know them. Then gain the respect you need, and respect what you can on their end of it too. It’s give and take.”

She wonders, though, what the division of labor says about gender. “In Nashville, women always got the fee cashier jobs because we were organized. Some of that was just because you had those skills, but we’d notice it was all the women at the fee cashiers meeting. Is that a put-down? No, it’s part of our job, but it does give a wrong impression.” Still, she thinks women in MVS have the same advancement and promotion opportunities as men, and she feels that, over the course of her career,

being a woman in the workplace got easier. The public, however, “sometimes doesn’t like it when the man in charge is a woman.”

When asked about her mentors, Cynthia says, “There just weren’t many women in the service at the time to pattern yourself after, so I didn’t really look at it as a man and woman thing.” Instead, she thought in terms of responsibility and being the best employee. As she began mentoring others, she passed down this approach, telling her mentees that “if you want to be respected, you have to respect,” and that sometimes, you have to speak up. “I had a lot of managers,” she says, “and some of the mentoring is the advice they give you. I also learned a lot about how not to do things.” She also speaks of co-workers, and veterans in particular, as mentors, especially because she began at the Corps during the Vietnam era. “Their service



*Cindy with COL Hall and Julie Ziino at Wappapello.*

was a little different than mine,” she says, but they taught her about taking pride in her own service. “There were other people who believed in me, especially in the district office,” she says. The best advice she ever received was to “Think where you want to be in five years, and how you’re going to get there. Then in two years you may have to reevaluate, and think five more years.”

Much of the mentoring she did was baked into her assignments, such as the Becoming an Outdoor Woman Program and being the lead—and only female—boating instructor in Nashville, which she feels made women less self-conscious. “I’ve always tried to teach them that not everybody’s perfect, but you’re going to be able to do what we need. There’s some things you’re going to need help with, but there’s some things men need help with too.” Additionally, Ginger Bjornson in contracting and Liz Norrenbern in water control both chose Cynthia as their mentor in the Leadership Development Program (LDP), and she supervised Rosie Lemons and Becky Hayes at Wappapello in the Leadership Development Program, although “they each had mentors that were different.”

She would recommend a career at the Corps to a young woman with “the right attitude, and wants to pursue a career and work. You can’t just come in here to have a job. You have to have a career.” She would advise her to “enjoy your

career, work hard, and have fun” and “go to a retirement seminar when you first start with the federal government. Then you need to go at mid-career, and see if you’re in line.”

Cynthia received the Bronze De Fleury medal when she retired, “probably the one award I’ll hang up,” but her team makes her the proudest, especially when responding to disasters and persisting until the job is done while under pressure from the public. For her team, she counts two safety awards for the district flood team, a Natural Resources Project of the Year (2008) award, and three Natural Resources Management Employees of the Year Awards from headquarters: Andrew Jefferson’s Hiram Chittenden’s Interpretive Excellence Award (2008); James Gracey’s Natural Resources Management Employee of the Year (2009); and Kathy Dickson’s Hiram Chittenden’s Interpretive Excellence Award (2012). “I guess those team awards would be my proudest moments. I had good people around me.”



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# JUNE JEFFRIES

*Programs and Project Management Division, Program  
Management Branch, Chief (Retired)*

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June Jeffries began her career in mechanical engineering in 1986 working at Ford Motor Company. While she worked for Ford, June earned a Masters in Manufacturing Engineering. After graduating, she and her husband “decided we’d like to move back closer to home in Northeast Missouri.” Once in St. Louis, she says, “I worked for Moog Automotive, an after-market parts company, for seven years and at Emerson Electric for about a year and a half. At that point I decided I wanted to do something different, so I enrolled in the University of Missouri-St. Louis and got a Master’s in Ecology. My personal interests at that time included birding and I grew up on a farm, so I was looking to do something along those lines. But my husband said, ‘Well, maybe not throw out the engineering,’ so I enrolled in a master’s program in Civil/Environmental Engineering at SIU-Edwardsville. When I finished that program, I interviewed with David Busse and Joan Stemler, and I ended up being hired into the Hydraulics Branch of the St. Louis District. I was in the Department of Army Intern Program, and I worked in Water Control and the other sections in Hydraulics. And that’s how I came to work for the Corps of Engineers. I’ve got 14 years in with the Corps. It’s the best job I ever had—a great place to work,

really good benefits. I have worked in private industry, so I really value some of the things we have here that you don’t have anywhere else.”

When June started with the Corps, she says, “I just wanted to start over. I was looking for a job that was challenging, that had some kind of connection to the environment. Just about everything we do at the Corps touches the environment.” Eventually, she says, “Someone—a male—encouraged me to apply for the Leadership Development Program, and I did. That led to a detail in Project Management, and I worked on a couple of levee projects and got some really good experience. It was real P.M. [project manager] work. I mean, it wasn’t assisting someone else, it was doing the job. I had two active construction projects and a study. When the opportunity came open for a



*June aboard the Motor Vessel Mississippi.*

project manager job for the Regulating Works Program, I applied for that and was selected, and I really enjoyed that a lot. But after a while I felt, I'm at a certain point in my career, and maybe I should get some supervisory experience. That led to where I am now. There's definitely things I miss about the Regulating Works job that I had, and I got to go out in the field a lot more. I've been in Programs for six years. It'll be seven years in November [2019], longer than I've been anywhere in my career."

Like many women, June encountered sexism at work, starting with her first job. "Ford hadn't hired any new engineers for quite a while. This was in 1986, so they had a big generation gap, because after the oil shocks in the 1970s, they didn't hire very many new people, and the economy wasn't real good in the early 1980s. In 1986, they were starting to hire more people. So there was an older male generation and a lot of younger people, and they were hiring women engineers as well. There was an older engineer that would come around and say, 'Oh, let me warm up my hands, rub my hands, let me give you a back rub.' This went on for a while. And as a new hire, you just want to go along and get along, but it made me uncomfortable. Another engineer happened to be in the office, and he said, 'Hey, cut that out. That doesn't belong here.' That was pretty cool in 1986. Hopefully, there are other men in the workplace that will stand up and speak out when they see inappropriate

things going on. Looking back now, that person was really a hero. I didn't think too much of it at the time, but that behavior stopped and I really appreciated it.

I've had other instances where I've tried to speak up in a workplace, here at the Corps—a supervisor hugging a young female employee in the workplace—and the response to me was, 'Well, I don't know if that's a pattern of behavior or not. I'm not going to say anything.' Finally I said, 'If you don't say anything about this, I'm going to find somebody who will.' And they did say something to this individual. It was disappointing to me that that was the response that I got. I think these people meant well, but that's not how I received it, and I don't think that's how it was. When men see things that don't look right, it's very powerful when they say, 'Hey, that's not right, cut it out.'" And when June was on detail in Project Management, she says, "two different Section Chiefs in Engineering—men—yelled at me in the workplace. They raised their voices. And I didn't like that."

As to whether women in the District get the same opportunities men do, June says she hopes so, "but I've heard from other women who believe there was in the past, maybe still is, an old boys club. I've heard stories about a lot of crazy stuff. You shake your head and wonder, 'Did that really happen?' And I think it did.



Hopefully people evolve and culture evolves and it will get better.” Out in the field, she’s says, “I don’t remember seeing many female lock operators. We could do a better job of making sure we have diversity, valuing diversity, and hiring more people of color in engineering, professional, and other jobs.”

Control. Leonard Hopkins had the regulating works job before me, and he spent a lot of time training me. When I was in water control, Mary Miles trained me how to do a lot of forecasting. It’s invaluable when other people are giving and share of themselves. I learned so much from all of them.” She herself has “had the privilege of



*June (at far left) facilitating a meeting.*

The keys to June’s success, she says, are “persistence, trying to be a good listener, and not giving up.” She has also learned a lot from many people. “Jim Zerega, a former Project Manager here, trained me when I came over on my detail and gave me a really good foundation. I was able to learn from Dave Busse when I was in Hydraulics and Joan Stemler in Water

serving as LDP mentor for several people” and was “fortunate enough to graduate from the Emerging Leaders Program.”

The best advice June ever received was about public speaking. “I wasn’t comfortable speaking in front of people, and the LDP facilitator, Tori

Littlefield, said, ‘I can always tell a Toastmaster when I walk into a room. So, I joined Toastmasters in 2008. That helped me get more comfortable speaking in front of people, so that it wasn’t so miserable. I was with the club in Creve Coeur and gave many, many speeches and finally desensitized myself to it. I ended up coaching a club at Boeing and got the highest award you can get from Toastmasters, the Distinguished Toastmaster Award.’ Toastmasters International is a non-profit public speaking and leadership organization with many clubs available in the St. Louis region. You can visit as many clubs as you like, then join one that works for you.

She herself would recommend the Corps of Engineers as a workplace to young women starting their careers, and she would advise them to “just believe in yourself. Don’t beat yourself up. Have plenty of confidence in yourself, and have a thick skin.”

When she first started with the Corps, June hoped she would spend the rest of her career here. “I don’t think there’s any place else around where you can take retirement at age 56 and keep your health benefits. I wouldn’t be retiring if it wasn’t for that. It’s a big step and it’s kind of scary, but I think it will be okay. I’ve studied it to death, like I do most everything. I think it’ll work out.” The Corps, she says, is “pretty supportive when you have family members that need your time and

attention. They find a way to make that work. My dad had pretty ill health before he passed away, so since about 2010, I spent a lot of time with him and my mom. I really appreciate that.” More than the benefits, though, she thinks “it’s pretty fantastic that we’re involved with things that touch a lot of people’s lives. You know, 300 miles of the Mississippi River and all the reservoirs and the levees and the environmental stewardship—it’s really good to be able to work on something that is for the public good and the common good, not just making a buck for a stockholder. It’s a noble purpose.”



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# RACHEL LOPEZ

*Engineering and Construction Division, Levee Safety  
Program Manager*

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Rachel Lopez began working at USACE in dam safety when she was still an undergraduate student. “One of my professors had a close relationship with the supervisor here. The supervisor asked, ‘Do you have any students you’d recommend?’ I was recommended for this student position, got my foot in the door, and never left.” After graduation, she accepted a position with the Corps Dam and Levee Safety Section in 2008 as a GS-07. Initially Rachel did not know what to expect from a career with the Corps, “I was offered a job without really having any idea what the Corps did or having any idea what the purpose of dams and levees were. At that time, I thought what I wanted to

do with my career was to design and build stuff. As I evolved as a professional, I began to align my interests and my skill sets with a position.”

As a student, Rachel’s first job was collecting instrumentation data at each of the lock and dam projects so engineers could assess the performance of the structures and ensure they were safe. This experience really opened her eyes to one of the major missions of the Corps. She stated, “I would recommend that type of work to any student who thinks they’d want to build a career in civil works in the Corps... just the experience of getting out and looking at all the projects and getting understanding of

how they operate. It was a really good launching pad I think for my continued career in flood risk management type of work.”

It was Travis Tutka, her supervisor in the Dam and Levee Safety Section, who initially encouraged Rachel to take a position with the levee safety group. Rachel’s early career coincided with the St. Louis District efforts to develop a levee safety program. He told her “this will be interesting. You will get in on the ground floor of building policy and defining how the program’s going to kind of evolve over time.” Despite



*Rachel conducting a survey.*

some misgivings, Rachel took the position. “At no point in my early career did I think I wanted to be a Levee Safety Program Manager, and I remember thinking that [developing policy] sounds incredibly boring, but that experience helped define my career.” And Travis was right. “I was helping kick off a lot of the initiatives that we now do on a routine basis. So, for

levee projects, St. Paul levee projects. I did some design for some environmental management projects in MVS.”

Rachel sees all the roles she’s served at the Corps as interconnected opportunities that allowed her to hone her expertise and become an organizational asset as the Levee Safety



*Rachel (at left) with a team on-site.*

example, we were building what a periodic inspection on a levee would look like, what kind of content should go into that and what should we be looking at; and how we communicate the new initiatives to our levee sponsors; building some of the procedures we’ve now used for our screening risk assessments. Then [I] eventually started getting more involved in design projects, started using my education as a geotechnical engineer—I worked on some New Orleans

Program Manager. “When I went over to Afghanistan and worked with a construction group, it was incredibly enlightening. I got a really good understanding and appreciation for what the construction group does and how to manage vertical construction projects, as opposed to flood risk management, which is a lot of what we do. The experience I gained in that position allowed me to then succeed in another temporary position when I got

back to St Louis, which was the Architecture & Engineering Coordinator. During that job, I got a ton of exposure to things that would eventually benefit me as the Levee Safety Program Manager. Everything has kind of built the foundation for what I do today, and it has given me a perspective that I think allows me to be more successful in the job that I have today.”

Mentors have had an important impact on Rachel’s career, “Going up to headquarters, I saw how motivated some of those people are and how much they love what they do. Tammy Conforti is one of them. Getting to watch her in action was really inspiring because she’s one of the smartest people I’ve ever met. She’s really good at putting levee safety into the context of the broader USACE civil works mission and making connections with other programs and agencies. Having that exposure really helped shape, I think, what I wanted to bring back to the District.

“Deanne Strauser and Susan Wilson are both really impressive people. Being able to talk to them about their career paths helped me define what I wanted my career path to be, getting some perspective from them and the things they’ve overcome has been really inspiring. Dave Busse, the Engineering and Construction [Division] Chief, has also been really important as a leader and a mentor. My counterparts at other Districts and I share stories about

how things are going at our districts and the challenges with building successful levee safety programs, and it’s very clear that a supportive E&C Chief makes all the difference in how successful the program is and how fulfilling the career choice is.” Some struggle with a lack of support from their leadership. That is not a problem for Rachel and it definitely makes her job easier.

Rachel also attributes inspiration for her career to a leadership conference in Washington D.C. Tasked to develop a solution to improve the Corps’ ability to recruit, retain, and develop the workforce, she worked with a team who were in similar positions in their career. “We worked on this project for a while and then the night before it was due, none of us were satisfied with it. And we just tore it apart, threw it away and started over with the concept of, if we want to recruit people, if we want to develop people, retain people, we need to show them why what we do as an agency is so important.

At the time it was something that was really inspiring, and I feel like we all took some inspiration home with us. We did present it to the senior leaders, and I don’t know how impactful it was, but the group that I was with, and that project that we worked on, inspired me and motivated me to continue to try to infuse that culture into everything that I do.” Although surrounded by supportive mentors,

Rachel has faced several challenges as a woman in a male-dominated field, “There have definitely been times where I feel like that expertise was undervalued. I’ve given direction on a question, and I’ve known it to be good direction, supported by the facts. A few months later, I’d find the question then went to a man who gave the same answer and that’s when the answer was accepted. That has happened multiple times. I don’t think that’s done consciously. I think it’s a kind of a subconscious bias that some people have, where I have not been seen as the expert.”

Rachel’s expertise has also been overlooked when communicating with external stakeholders, “Many are farmers, men who are surrounded by men, didn’t have the same respect for what I say as they have for what my male peers said. They had an opinion of me based on my gender and based on what they expect me to know. Sometimes, I just had to accept that if I wanted them to understand the information I was giving them, I needed to bring a man with me. I had to put away my pride to get the job done.”

She also recalls having to tolerate behavior that today would probably be interpreted as a hostile work environment. She describes the behavior of one individual in particular who was known for making inappropriate comments about and to women. In social settings, this behavior sometimes went as far as inappropriate touching. “Reflecting on it, one of the things that was really

bothersome about it was not only was this man behaving this way, but people were sometimes acting indifferent to it. I had peers who were laughing at it, encouraging it, and joining in on it. There was an odd culture that tolerated this behavior, while also acknowledging that it was wrong. Inappropriate remarks were often followed with the disclaimer that, ‘Oh, I better go take my POSH training!’” POSH was the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Training that preceded our current SHARP [Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention] training. “The jokes completely undermined the intention of the training and showed how dismissive people were of the problem it was meant to address.” Thankfully, this behavior is not accepted or ignored any more.

Despite her relatively short career and early experiences with the Corps, Rachel feels that there is observable improvement in the workplace culture for women, “I know that this was the norm generations before me and this was accepted behavior. I saw the tail end of that culture, and things have gotten better since I’ve started. The culture has shifted a bit where people take the sexual harassment training a bit more seriously, refrain from making inappropriate jokes about the training, and understand that it’s just about respect for your coworkers and the morale of the organization. I know that the individual I previously mentioned had a big impact on morale not only because he

was behaving that way, but because nobody was doing anything about it.”

Rachel feels there are good intentions to provide the same opportunities for women, but there are shortfalls that come from a lingering culture that favored men in leadership positions, “There are a lot of people in leadership trying to help with the advancement of women professionals, and there’s a lot of talent in this District that could allow for that. There is subconscious bias of what a leader should be, and the system focuses on the traditional qualities of a leader that have been defined by men. It is not necessarily because the process was sexist, but maybe because the talents that women can bring to an organization aren’t always understood. If you’re looking on paper, if you’re just looking at the technical qualifications and not all of the other attributes that a woman can bring to her organization, and you’re not willing to take a risk to say maybe this person can still bring an element to the District and to this organization that is un-quantifiable, you may be overlooking some great talent and leadership potential. We still have some progress to make to bring more women into formal leadership positions, particularly in Engineering and Construction. There is kind of that intangible quality that women can bring, that minorities can bring.”

Rachel values the meaningful mission of USACE that allows her to help people on a daily

basis and believes that, despite the challenges, it is great place for women to begin their careers. She advises young women starting a career at the Corps to “own your expertise, be proud of what you’ve accomplished, and do not get discouraged by the hurdles that are inevitable as a woman in a male-dominated workforce. Use those around you. Almost all the women that I’ve interacted with in this organization are women who are passionate about what they do and want to see other women succeed. And because of that, you have a huge support system in this agency that you should take advantage of.”





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# KATHRYN McCAIN

*Planning Division, Environmental Planning Section,  
Chief*

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Kathryn (Kat) McCain's path to MVS, ran through Dubuque, Iowa, while working for the Missouri Department of Conservation. She was at a conference and happened to sit at the same dinner table with Brian Johnson. They chitchatted about work, and he eventually asked if she was ever interested in working for the Corps. "At the time, when I worked for the state, I had no clue the Corps actually had an ecosystem restoration mission area. As we chatted, I was like, 'The Corps does that? What? Really?' Then, that led to further conversations with the Corps and I was more or less recruited. I didn't even know the job existed." She started working at the Corps in 2010. She had no particular long-term goal when she started; however, she does now. "I was happy to get into the federal family with a GS level. I was directly hired through the Federal Career Intern Program and I started as an intern working in the field I have passion in which was awesome. Ecosystem Restoration is my passion. Now I do have a long-term goal of working at the national level for the ER (Ecosystem Restoration) mission area. Yes, St. Louis is my home, and now I'm asking myself what can I do from here to influence what the ER business line is doing at the national level?"

Kat came in as a GS-9 intern and then promoted to a GS-11 Ecologist a year later. From there she began working her way up. "When I was a GS-11 I raised my hand to do the detail as

the GS-13 Section Chief for Environmental Planning. I wanted the experience to know if I wanted to be a supervisor, so I offered to do the detail as an 11. When I submitted my application to my regional boss in Rock Island, he did not realize that I was only an 11. I was offered the detail and ultimately earned a GS 12. When the permanent Section Chief was announced, I applied and was selected. I've been the supervisor for Environmental Planning for over 6 years now". Kat moved up to Section Chief as a GS-13 within four years of coming to the Corps.

One favorite memory Kat has of her early career with the Corps still serves as an inspiration to her today. "I have a PhD in Restoration Ecology, with a focus in tall grass prairie. My background is terrestrial. I worked for the state as an ecosystem floodplain ecologist. However, my technical background in aquatic ecology is not in-depth. So, for me, I was full of self-doubt as being considered a subject matter expert in large river ecology because I went to school for 10 years with a focus on the terrestrial and wetland ecology. I felt I was not the expert. On conference calls, I was usually very quiet, never really stated my opinion or asked critical questions. [To Brian], I would be like, 'Well, they're doing that wrong, or that didn't make sense.' Brian would say, 'You need to step up. You are the expert. You have a PhD. Act like it. Own it.' Fake it until you make it sort of thing.

One time on a conference call I told myself, I'm going to voice my opinion. I felt awkward and uncomfortable, but I asserted myself into the conversation. As I did, Brian walked into my cube with big piece of paper with "You Go Girl" written on it and taped it to my computer screen. To this day, I have that in my cube as a reminder. Yes, I am the subject matter expert in the room and if I don't like the direction of something, or where it's going, I need to step up and voice my opinion."

Kat has benefitted from both internships and on the job leadership training in her career at the Corps. She started as an intern and was promoted to a permanent employee. Kat also

participated in the St. Louis District Leadership Development Program (LDP), as well as the Emerging Leaders (EL) Program through the Mississippi Valley Division (MVD). She completed LDP in 2012 and EL in 2015. Finally, Kat is currently in the Planning Associates Program "which is what they call elite planning training for the planning organization within the Corps. Across the Corps they accept about eight people each year. It is a two-year program and I'll complete the program at the end of this year (2020). The program is cool because it provides you with that national perspective, you get trained in all mission areas of the Corps; it challenges you to critically think and find innovative solutions to a problem through



*Kat (3rd from left) on an Emerging Leaders trip to the nation's capital.*

your Capstone project, and provides you a lot of networking and relationship building opportunities. Each travel opportunity is for about 2 weeks. I've been to headquarters and Sacramento, and will be going to Portland and Rock Island for the remaining coursework. The sessions at headquarters have been an excellent opportunity that have provided job shadowing, mentoring, and relationship building. At the end of the day, it comes down to people. Having relationships and trust with people will lead to a shared understanding and ultimately better quality products.”

When it comes to connecting to people and building relationships, Kat feels she has been mentored and has mentored others. In addition to Brian Johnson who mentored Kat early in her career, another influential person has been Aaron Snyder, the Planning Division Chief at St. Paul District, who is now at Headquarters. Both men emphasized the importance that people are watching. Think of everything as an interview opportunity. Verbal and non-verbal cues matter. Present yourself as the expert both with technical knowledge and your professionalism. Aaron

has counselled Kat that it's okay to be yourself, challenge yourself to think and do things differently, and stand out/leave your mark. And when you have the opportunity to be in front of senior leaders take it.

Kat has also enjoyed her time as a mentor to others. “I love our District's LDP because it provides an opportunity for mentoring. Each year the class picks individual mentors from the district. And for several years, I've been selected as a mentor. It's being able to share my experiences, have mutual learning, and help another person grow. I really enjoy mentoring, and I think LDP is a great District program. I also try to do a lot of informal mentoring, which doesn't involve a “contract,” but more of an open-door policy and “let's go to lunch” type of mentoring.” Kat attributes her success to one trait. “Discipline. It's definitely needed. To get



*Kat with her son out on a hiking expedition.*

to where you want to be, you have to do it. No one's going to do it for you. No one's going to hand you a silver plate and say, 'Yes, you got the job you wanted.' How I got to where I am today is I put the hard work in. I did it and I wasn't afraid to say yes to things. If you play it safe and wait for when the 'time is right,' then it's never going to happen. It's never going to be the 'right time.' So if you want something, say yes, and go for it. You can figure out the details later!"

One challenge Kat has faced is work-life balance. "There's no such thing as balance. It's a trade-off. Prioritizing what's most important and realizing that you're not going to have both. So for me, work has always been a passion and then I had my daughter and it was really hard to communicate with certain people here at the District that, no I'm not working on the weekends anymore. I'm not going to do that because I want my family. I guess I learned that lesson very hard because I was working 10 days after giving birth to my daughter. Now I advocate for my staff. Number one priority is family first. Career second. Work is work, it'll be here when you're back. If work is time-sensitive, but there is a family emergency, then the team will deliver. You are not alone and work will get done and it's okay to lean on others. I've heard numerous times from senior leaders that the only way to move up in the Corps is to move. This is hard to hear sometimes. This is my

struggle with home-work life. My career path means I will need to move. But my family with 2 young kids in school, is not moving right now. Family first. My personal choice is to stay in my current position rather than pursue going to the next level. This is a trade-off, not a balance. But it's my choice."

While Kat doesn't think she was treated differently as a woman in the Corps, it was different coming up through Natural Resources in college. "Women are not very well represented in the Natural Resources program through college. Most of the students are white males. So coming up you're always having to show that you can do something – both academically and physically. You had to be the best because otherwise people think, 'oh, you just can't do it.' Coming to the Corps, I haven't experienced too much of this, but I have heard the "you can't do it" phrase. For me, those are fighting words." Kat feels in the Corps, women in the workplace has improved. "When I started with the Corps, there were only 3 women in our Division. Now, the Environmental Planning, Environmental Compliance, and Plan Formulation Section Chiefs are female and about half of our technical team is female. I like our balanced workforce because I think women do bring a different perspective into the workplace based on our technical abilities, life experiences, and personalities. I like where we're at. But there is room for improvement in the Corps. We still

have the “Wall of White Males, and that’s where we [women] need to have someone break through that.”

One project Kat feels particularly proud of, and for which she was awarded the Civilian Service Award in 2019, was the Habitat Needs Assessment-II for the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program. It involved answering a number of questions about the health and resiliency of the river, including: what does the river need now? What are the existing conditions of the river? And what will the river need in the future? “Initially, I was on the committee and I had no real leadership role. We have a very diverse partnership with five federal agencies, five states and three Corps districts. It’s sometimes a challenge with this diverse audience to get everyone to look in the same direction. We were fuddling around for a year trying to figure out how we’re going to do this and then eventually, the Program Manager in Rock Island said, ‘We’ve been told that the partnership wants you to lead it.’ I’m like, ‘What?’ ‘Well you’re a fixer’, and I’m like, ‘What?’ Even though I had been on the committee, the purpose and goal of this effort was unclear, but the schedule was set. It was going to be a heavy lift to deliver this project because the partnership didn’t really know what they wanted. So even though it was one of those things that I really didn’t want to take on because I had other things here at the District and I had a fear of failure – I’m like,

this is really important for the Program and will provide future direction for river restoration. So I was like, ‘okay,’ and I took it on. With the help of a woman from the Rock Island Fish and Wildlife Service and a man who worked for the US Geological Survey, they made progress. I always say, ‘Take off your agency hat when you come in the room to talk about what’s best for the river.’ For me, I think it [has] been my favorite project even though at first it was like, ‘ugh,’ but getting to the end where we presented the results and now the Program is actually using it as we select our next round of ecosystem restoration projects. It’s very satisfying to see work you led actually being used and being implemented and become the cornerstone for future restoration work. ”

Kat would recommend the Corps as an employment option for young women starting their careers. She says the best advice she ever received was, “be yourself, and don’t be afraid to be different. A lot of people make themselves uncomfortable to make other people comfortable. Sometimes if you want to do it for you, you have to be comfortable with your decisions even if it makes other people uncomfortable. Sometimes you have to do it for you. It’s not selfishness. If you want something, you may make other people uncomfortable, but at the end of the day, you’re the one who has to live with yourself.” As to the advice she would give a young person starting their career with

the Corps, she says, “get out there and meet people...the sooner you build the relationship side and build trust with people, they will help you in your career. You might be the best technical person in your individual office but if no one knows what you’re doing then you’re not going to go anywhere. People need to know what you are doing, but more importantly they need to know who you are. Build those relationships because it’s all about the people factor.”



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# JAMIE McVICKER

*Engineering and Construction Division, MVD Levee  
Safety Center, Technical Levee Manager*

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Before joining the Corps in 2009, Jamie McVicker interned with the Illinois Department of Transportation while pursuing a B.S. in Civil Engineering, then worked as an associate with Horner and Shifrin, Inc., a multi-disciplinary consulting firm in St. Louis, for 14 years. After that, she worked with HDR, another consulting firm in the St. Louis region for a short period of time before accepting a job with the Corps. The downturn in the economy had an effect on her career. Having recently completed an MBA, Jamie was searching for a position to utilize her skills in both engineering and business processes. “I met with Mark Alvey at a Society of American Military Engineers meeting and asked about any opportunities with the Corps. Mark replied, ‘you have really good timing. Maybe you would be interested in talking to Travis Tutka and I.’ They had me on the phone within a week and we set a start date three weeks later. This was at the time of the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. MVS was tasked by HQ (headquarters) to lead a Corps-wide program to conduct levee inspections of the entire Corps portfolio.”

When Travis Tutka took a position in Washington DC, Jamie says, “I interviewed for the District’s Levee Safety Program Manager (LSPM) job, and I worked in that capacity for two years. During that time, it was a mix between managing the Corps-wide Periodic

Inspection Program for levees and managing the District levee program, working with the levee sponsors in the MVS portfolio. Corps’ Headquarters staff said, ‘If you’re interested, we have an opportunity to help author an international levee handbook.’ Although I did not have extensive technical expertise in a specialized area of civil engineering (i.e., hydraulics and hydrology, geotechnical engineering), I said, ‘I’d love to contribute.’ That turned into three years working with a consortium of professionals from Germany, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, and the United States. It afforded me the chance to go to Europe and prior to that opportunity I had never been.”

“Through the Water Resources Development Act the Corps, jointly with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), were authorized to lead a national levee safety program. An initial national committee on levee safety was appointed, chaired by the Corps and FEMA, with several people from state agencies, tribes, and private industry. They developed a report to Congress in 2009 related to a national levee safety program. The work I had previously accomplished with Corps headquarters and locally allowed me the opportunity to pursue my interest in helping to lead that program. At that time I interviewed for a technical levee manager position with the Levee Safety Center. Unfortunately, until this past year, we didn’t

have appropriated funds. So we started doing preliminary pilots, coordinating with state agencies and other voluntary partners, and working with other federal agencies to make sure we were developing appropriate future national guidelines for the life-cycle of a levee.”

Jamie says, “the group I work with in the levee safety community of practice puts a lot of long hours in and we have some painstaking discussions, but we also enjoy the camaraderie, having a lot of fun along the way. We have had countless meetings at headquarters where it can be dark and quiet, and we will be laughing so hard in a conference room that people come by and glare, saying ‘Hey, keep it down. Let’s shut the door.’ Those relationships, the dedication of the team members and laughs keep me coming back every day. There are so many of those moments I can’t count them.”

Her current position has been her favorite, “because it’s so much bigger than a single person or what we’re doing on our Corps portfolio on levees. It opens the door to talking with local levee owner-operators, communities, states, and federally recognized tribes, along with other supporting organizations that give input on policy development. It really opens your eyes to different perspectives. It’s truly a collaborative effort. We want to ensure we’re learning and not being perceived as the Federal government, imposing our policies and practices. We have to

really be open to evolving and making sure that we understand their issues. It could be a career-long effort to get this national program up and running.”

She hadn’t originally thought she would spend the rest of her career in the Corps. “Starting out with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, I envisioned just getting some experience. I knew we had a big program, and I knew it was important for the district to succeed. We managed the program from St. Louis District, procuring eight national indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contracts with architectural and engineering firms across the country. We then worked with all 38 districts to help manage the work; distributed tools for field inspections; created scopes of work for individual task orders, and provided oversight to engineering firms conducting the inspections. I didn’t have any long-term aspiration about what I might do. I just put a lot of hours in, trying to learn who the people were, trying to understand the financials and how we were delegating work to the districts.” Now this is “absolutely” her career. “My background is civil engineering. I did not specialize in hydraulics and hydrology or geotechnical engineering, so I rely on people with that depth of experience. There’s phenomenal skillsets right at our fingertips. I love that about the Corps.” Jamie says “I’ve worked with so many inspirational people. I could list 80 mentors easily. Obviously, Mark Alvey, a

proponent for everyone he's worked with. He has your back no matter what, but he'll also call you out if you're in the wrong. Noah Vroman is a phenomenal director, a good-hearted person. He's very unassuming, but technically exceptional. Working with Troy Cosgrove, one of the best supervisors an employee could ask for, has been a remarkable experience. I had the opportunity to work directly with Dave Busse and have so much respect for his leadership position and demeanor. He gives you a long leash and lets you do what you need to do. I've been blessed with a history of many former and current bosses that gave me that long leash but also made it evidently clear that the door is wide open if there's anything that comes up, and you work together to resolve it."

People draw positive attributes they want for themselves "from the colleagues you work with on a day-to-day basis," Jamie believes. She names several other people from the St. Louis District who have been positive influences on her: Rochelle Hance, Rachel Lopez, Theresa Williams, Janet Ulivi and Robin Schoemehl and Kathy Kornberger.

The best advice she ever got was after a bad day at work. "A close friend and former Vice President of Sabreliner, said, 'I've had many bad days. Any time you're confronted with a dilemma or a setback, just think to yourself, am I even going to remember this five years from

now?' And 80 or 90 percent of the time, you're not going to remember that day, let alone the issue at hand."

As for mentoring others, Jamie says, "I wish I had had more day-to-day opportunities, but fairly excessive work travel has interfered. I love having conversations with new engineers and students revolving in and out. In the past, I did a lot work with the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Society of American Military Engineers, who have different initiatives with students. So much good has come my way, and so many great relationships with colleagues that it will soon be time to give back. Once I get settled and am not doing six-month details every two years, I want to get involved again in ASCE (American Society of Civil Engineers), SAME (Society of American Military Engineers) or Engineers without Borders, because they're doing so many different philanthropic things. They're working with students, doing community service, and accomplishing great things for our veterans."

Jamie credits her success to her parents' example: "My mother was a nurse, my dad was in banking, and they worked really hard, long hours. They would've had to move to find different jobs. It was a bit of drudgery, with three kids each with their own prospects. I saw their dedication. Even though there were hard days, my parents budgeted, and we went on family

vacations every year. We're a tight family, and I grew up seeing all of the hard work they put in to ensuring we knew how important the family dynamic was. It's ingrained that you put the time in, and if you don't understand it, you put more time in and ask people to help you out. I've tried to do a lot of that along the way."

Trying to balance the different parts of her life is a challenge for Jamie. "I don't know if I do" have balance, she says. "I don't know if anybody does. I'm very involved with exercise and nutrition. That's where I de-stress." She also says that at the Corps "the opportunities are limitless, and sometimes deciphering which path to go on and why" is a challenge in itself.

Jamie says she fit in more with "the guys" from a fairly early age and never felt she was treated differently as a woman. "I didn't have a solid network of girlfriends in high school, because I didn't like the drama. In college, I had a few girlfriends that were close enough, but I really didn't fit in to any group until I met this group of guys in engineering. We camped; we hiked; we drank (probably too much) beer; and we just had fun and studied hard. I felt like they had much closer aspirations to what I was wanting to pursue in life and we could have open conversations. And

I really fit in." Later, she says, "when I started engineering in private industry, I worked with a lot of contractors, and you build a thick skin. But for the most part, it was pretty respectful." When asked whether women have the same opportunities men do in the St Louis district, Jamie says, "The opportunities are there for everybody. It's pretty equitable. Under Dave Busse's leadership, I don't think it would be anything less. It's a culture thing, and it starts with the top leadership. That trickles down to the branch chiefs and hopefully the section chiefs and others."

Jamie has been recognized often in her career for her contributions. "The American Society of Civil Engineers recognized me with the Young Engineer of the Year award way back when," she says, and the Society of Women Engineers gave her an award of contribution. She received the



*Jamie with MG Wehr and LTG Semonite upon receiving the Civilian of the year Award.*

USACE's Flood Risk Management Recognition, the National Team Award for the Periodic Inspection Program in 2015, and the USACE Civilian of the Year Award in 2017, which she says "is even today really unbelievable. I didn't know the depth or the magnitude of it. They called me in St. Louis and said, 'We have a ceremony. We'd like you to give a few words.' And I thought, 'Okay. Not a big deal.' Then they called several times and said, 'You're coming right?' and I thought, 'Well, I guess this is a bigger deal than I thought. I probably need to be there.'"

She says she would recommend the Corps of Engineers to a young woman just beginning her career "hands down. What a great opportunity to gain experience, to see parts of the country, to experience the depth of knowledge and the resources that we have." And she would tell such women that "you have to dedicate the time. You have to put the commitment in. Don't expect to know everything; be open to asking questions and learning, and be open to opportunities when they come your way. Sometimes there's some balance and trade-offs to taking those opportunities; be mindful about weighing those pros and cons." For Jamie, "it's been one opportunity after the next, and that's probably one of the big points I would like to make: just raise your hand, because the opportunities are there. You just have to be willing to step forward and take them."

PHOTO



UNAVAILABLE

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# CYNTHIA MORALES

*USACE Logistics Activity, Transportation,  
Maintenance, and Facilities, Chief*

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Prior to beginning her career at USACE in 1988, Cynthia Morales worked at Marriott Chase Park Plaza. With a young child at home, Cynthia desired a job with more regimented hours that would allow her a better work-life balance. With a bachelor's in Transportation, Travel and Tourism, she was looking for a service job which led to her applying to USACE for a role as a travel clerk. When she began, Cynthia was not familiar with the function of USACE. Five years later, Cynthia worked one of the largest flooding disasters in U.S. history. "The 1993 flood was a full blown experience that threw me completely into what the Corps of Engineers did. There were some things that I still didn't know, and I got an education real fast, having to get helicopter support and all that kind of stuff."

Cynthia did not anticipate a 30-plus-year career when she began as a travel clerk. She attributes her longevity to her willingness to serve in multiple roles at USACE. "A lot of people ask, 'how do you stay there for 30 plus years?' My answer is that I've done a lot of different things within the Corps. I started off as a travel clerk. From there I went to maintenance. I'm told I was the first female maintenance officer in the Corps of Engineers." From Maintenance, she took a position with the Facilities side of the house. She worked in Facilities for a while, when the Logistics Management Office transitioned to the USACE Logistics Agency (ULA). She

was almost moved into the new Resource Integration Section, but the Transportation Section Chief objected, stating she had too much transportation experience and needed to stay in her section. Her position afforded her the opportunity to develop the processes she uses now as the Permanent Change Station (PCS) program manager. She and her team process all changes in duty stations for the Corps within the continental United States (CONUS). Her official title is the Chief of Transportation, Maintenance, and Facilities.

Cynthia credits continuing her education and acquiring institutional knowledge to her longevity in the Corps. She returned to school and earned her Master's in Management. "I forced myself to do that. It was not an easy thing to do with two little kids, but I did it. I'm sure that helped." She also played a role in developing a leadership program that would ensure the fundamentals that enriched her career would be available to other women beginning their careers.

"Years ago we set up the first leadership development program. I was part of that along with Jenny Mueller, Dennis Fenske, and Lawrence Williams. We were the first ones to work to set up a leadership development program. We went down to Louisville to see because they had a similar program, and they were holding a conference. We came back,

and we were charged with trying to set up a leadership development program along with a mentoring program. I've seen how it's kind of evolved since then."

Cynthia's mentors were also essential to her professional development and provided invaluable insight, knowledge, and opportunity. "The women that were my mentors probably were the most inspirational. I saw what they went through, what they, you know, what they had to do to get where they got, you know, where they had been. One was Judy Griffith. She was the first supervisor that would actually take the time to sit down and actually go over things with me and teach me what I didn't know. I also worked with Jim Girth. He was actually over me for quite a few years, and I actually took his spot when I got the managerial position. There's not too many people who would've put me in a position as a maintenance officer, especially at that time. He took a chance. I did tons of self-educating to be able to do it. I had Eileen Grant, she was the one that actually said no, she needs to be in transportation. She pulled me over, and she said, this is what I want you to do. This is going to be your program."

Cynthia felt her experience working with women sheltered her from some of the challenges other women may have faced under male leadership. "When I first started working, I worked for a woman. The person who replaced her was a

woman. When the ULA was set up, I actually worked for a woman. So I think I got brought along differently than some people. I think that helped, but I also think women are harder on women. They expect more out of them. In that respect it wasn't, I can't say easier, but there was always an understanding." Although Cynthia's experiences with sexism were buffered by working with women in leadership positions, she still felt underestimated by her male counterparts. "When we went out on these inspections, we were supposed to walk across the locks and dams. I think they initially thought that I wouldn't want to do it or couldn't do it. I enjoyed it a lot, but I think that took them all by surprise."

Being underestimated isn't the only challenge Cynthia has faced during her career. At times, she has also found it hard to balance her job with her family life. "Well, for the most part, the Corps was a nine to five type job, but when things happened, like disasters, it was a little different. When the ULA was set up I generally spent two weeks to a month down in Millington, Tennessee. We worked a lot of hours, and I can remember my youngest son telling me, 'Mom, all you do is work. You've got to stop.'" In spite of the challenges she has faced during her career, Cynthia believes that there is support available for women with small kids and that it is possible to find the balance in order to leave work at the office.



Cynthia has always taken pride in the work she does. In contrast to wavering public opinion, her conviction in the value of the service the Corps performs remains steadfast. “When I was working in maintenance, there were a lot of times we did field site visits. Once, we were heading down to Wappapello, and they said you have got to take one of the government vehicles that aren’t marked because they had incidents of people shooting at them. At that point, the residents of Wappapello were not happy with the Corps of Engineers down there, but I never felt that way. I don’t ever shun away from telling people where I work for or who I work for. I know what we do on a daily basis.”

Cynthia feels that time has created more opportunity for women in the Corps. “Throughout my 30-plus years, I’ve known quite a few women in fairly high levels. I think it’s gotten better. Thirty years ago, I don’t know if there were that many women going to be engineers. I think that’s the sign of the times. I think it’s come around.” She advises women entering the USACE to “be your own advocate. If you see something you want to do, if you want to try something, then do it. You have to knock on that door, and you have to ask the right questions.”



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# ANDREA MURDOCK McDANIEL

*Southwest Division, Operations and Regulatory  
Division, Chief*

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Andrea Murdock-McDaniel's first job was with USACE in 1988. "I had the opportunity to go to a job fair, which is where I was interviewed for the Corps of Engineers. I was hired really before I graduated from Texas State University with a degree in Wildlife Management." She remembers that when she attended that job fair, they guaranteed you one interview. "It just so happened to be John Marzec." She was actually on the phone with the Peace Corps when John called her to offer her a position. She said she made the decision to accept while on the phone with both organizations. "I ended up deciding that I had debt. I needed to work. So that's what I did. I actually graduated on a Saturday, moved to St. Louis on a Sunday, and started my job on a Monday. I had never been to St. Louis before, or Missouri either for that matter."



*Andrea as a young park ranger at Carlyle Lake.*

Andrea started as the District Park Ranger in the Natural Resource Management Branch in the St. Louis District Office. "I actually had to sign the mobility agreement that I would go to the first available GS-9 position at one of the lakes, wherever that might be. And so my first job, after I was in the District for about a year or so, was at Carlyle Lake. I actually loved all the places that I worked in St. Louis District. It's hard to say one was better than the other. But that was the first. I enjoyed it a lot because I was in charge of a Natural Resource Management section, so I got to be out in the field quite a bit." As a District Park Ranger, she did interpretation programs for East St. Louis with Woodsy the Owl, conducted water safety programs and helped out at all of the lakes for special events. Later when she went to Carlyle, she was the Park Ranger in charge of Natural

Resource Management. "I got promoted to the first GS-11 position that they had there...in charge of visitor assistance, interpretation and the recreation program."

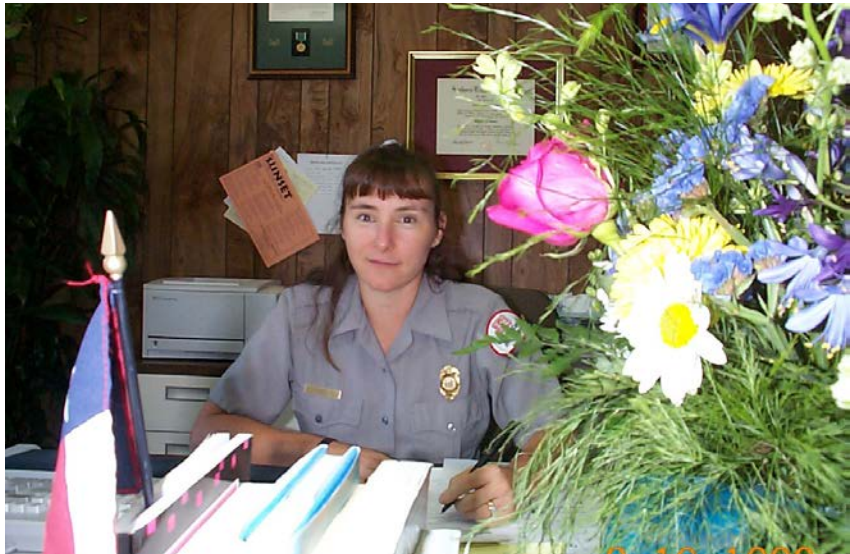
Andrea's next position was at Rend Lake as the Deputy Operations Project Manager (OPM). Following that, she spent a detail as OPM at

Wappapello Lake and then she was promoted to become the permanent OPM at Lake Shelbyville. She finds it hard to pick a favorite place or position. “Each of those projects brought a lot of fond memories, lots of good times. It provided an opportunity to learn about the various programs we manage, the importance of building stakeholder relationships and the importance of taking care of your people... You know, I moved up rather fast. I mean, I feel like I

did, anyway. It just happened to work out that way, and I’ve been thankful about that. But I caution people, ‘Don’t move too fast because there are some experiences you might want to savor.’ If I could go back and savor a little more time, it would probably be either my park ranger days as a GS-11 at Carlyle Lake because I had a lot of autonomy...or I would say my time at Rend Lake.”

Ironically, she notes that floods seem to follow her. While in the St. Louis District at the various operating projects, there were record breaking floods. When she moved to Little Rock District, they had their first flood in many years. And finally, when she moved to her current position in Southwest Division, they were in the middle

of the worst drought of their history. Once Andrea arrived, however, they had the worst record flood in their history.



*Andrea at her desk at Carlyle Lake.*

Although she started her job right out of college, from the very beginning, Andrea saw her new work with the Corps not as a job but as the start of a career. On her introductory tour she was introduced to Mr. Peterson, who was the current Chief of Operations Division. “He told me, ‘hey, you can be anything you want to be. There’s a lot of opportunity here. The Corps does a whole lot of things.’ Then he went through all these things that the Corps of Engineers did – and it was really exciting. After that meeting, I decided that the goal that I had set for myself was that I would be a Chief of Operations one day. It was a pretty lofty goal, but it was my goal from that point on. I sure tried to learn the things I needed to learn and be willing to take on responsibility.”

Some of those things she completed included: a Master's from Southern Illinois University in Water Resource Planning and Policy; enough engineering classes to almost earn a degree in Engineering-Hydrology; project management classes; and Wildlife Biologist certification. Andrea also took advantage of several details at Headquarters, to learn additional management skills. "When I was up at Headquarters, I think I received a much broader perspective of everything the Corps did across all of our project business lines and got a better understanding of the policies that guide us. I really loved it. I thought, 'you know what? I think I want to be the Chief of Operations for the whole Corps.' So that was my next goal."

When asked about people who impacted her career, Andrea feels that you can learn from those that have positive and negative impacts. "I would say that one individual who was the most influential to me was John Marzec. He was the Chief of the Natural Resource Management program whenever I was there and the one who hired me. Now, there are different opinions about John. Some people liked him and some people didn't. But I always admired him because he was really, really smart. He didn't always have the finesse with people, to put it nicely. So, I learned a lot from him about how not to be. But, it was also about how to be. It was a positive thing... I think another person who's been a huge mentor in my life is Bob Wilkins. He

taught me a whole lot about how to get things done, master planning...long range, being more strategic...I really, really admire him."

Dave Busse is another person Andrea considers a mentor. "We go back a long time, too. He could tell you stories of me calling him at 7:00 or 8:00 at night, and getting him to get on his computer because I had gotten a call from a Sheriff's office to ask me to, 'turn the dam down! And turn off the dam!' There was this big rain event and it had flooded downstream of Shelbyville. Now, it wasn't because of what we were releasing, but they had gotten like five inches of rain in a very short period of time. There was an anhydrous ammonia plant that was about to vent, and they were having to evacuate people because of the fumes from it. They couldn't get to them because the water was up over all the roads and everything. So I woke him up to say, 'Hey, I need to do something here.' And he went to his computer and realized the whole district was under a major flood... We had a couple times where I had to wake him up and say, 'Hey, we're in flood! The water's out of control, Busse.'" Andrea also credits Dick Connors, Deputy OPM at Carlyle Lake, Jim Hill in the St. Louis District office, and her first direct supervisor, Stan Ebersol, as people she learned from.

Over the years, Andrea has also served as a mentor to others, both formally, such as the leadership development program (LDP) and

informally. “That’s probably the most rewarding part of my job now, for sure, because really it’s about trying to pass on the knowledge that you have and try to grow that next generation of folks to follow your footsteps.” She has also given advice to many women working at the Corps. They ask her questions like “‘how did you move up?’ ‘Do I have a family and focus on my family?’ ‘Do I put my career first?’”

people she hired do well in their careers. “Jackie Taylor is one of those. There’s a lot of others sprinkled around the Corps.” When asked what attributes she has that have contributed to her own success, Andrea points to hard work, being forthright, a curiosity to learn, and her willingness to ask lots of questions. From her parents, she learned to “don’t place blame, but fix the problem.”



*Main dam at Carlyle Lake.*

Andrea feels proud of her work every day. “We did things that were important... We had a lot of floods and stuff that we always were having to respond to. Anytime you’re in those kinds of emergency responses, you take pride in being able to help people and to communicate what’s going on.” She is also proud to see some of the

One example of a challenge faced early in her career happened when she worked at Carlyle Lake. “I was young and female and I was put in charge of the Natural Resource Management part of the program, which is considered really as mainly dealing with men, right?” She regularly spoke to hunting groups and had a work crew

of older men, “heavy equipment maintenance kind of folks. And, you know...they were not necessarily pleased to have to work for me and take directions from this young girl.” She adapted to this by telling them, “you know more than I do. So train me. Teach me what I don’t know. I’m not going to tell you I know everything, but I’m going to expect you to help me and help us do better at whatever we were assigned.’ That basically made them feel like, ‘oh, she doesn’t think she’s somebody. She’s not threatening.’ And really I earned their respect because I would work hard. If I told them to do something, I’d go do it with them.”

Andrea does think she was treated differently sometimes as a woman. “At times I felt like they were trying to give me the easy stuff, so I would ask specifically for the hard stuff because I didn’t want to be put in a box of, ‘well, she can’t carry the load.’” While she hates to say it, she does feel like the “good old boy kind of thing” did exist and to some degree still does, but she thinks it has gotten better. “The best part about it, is that I think management is responding to it in a more appropriate way.” She does feel that women in the Corps are given the same opportunities for advancement and promotion as the men, particularly now. “I felt like I’ve had a fair shot at every job that I applied for and got or did not get.” One specific time when she thinks she positively impacted the lives of other women at the Corps involved her time

at Wappapello. “I did a temporary assignment there and there was some really bad stuff going on at that project to women, in particular...It would have been so tragic if I hadn’t been there because I actually was a person that the folks could approach and tell me what was going on. And I was able to do something about that in a permanent way to make sure it didn’t happen again. I guess I would say that my only regret in that whole incident is that a similar thing, but to a much lesser degree happened to me with this same individual and I just sort of put them in their place and they never bothered me again. But I had no idea that this person may be one of these serial sort of violators until I got there and realized the other things that were happening. So I would say that I’m proud that I responded, that I was able to help those women out and to end something that really should have ended many years before because this was not the first time that this individual had been brought up on some kind of charges.” On a broader scale, she takes a different kind of pride in being a good role model for women in the Corps. “I did work hard, and I did my time. I never asked anybody to give me anything that was special.”

Balancing a job and family life has been hard. “I don’t have any children. My husband does have two kids from a previous marriage. And I never wanted kids because I enjoyed my career and I didn’t really want to get anything sidetracked from that. And now, of course, as you get older,

you start thinking about life and realizing it is really shorter than you think it is and what do you really leave behind? I was blessed, again, to meet my husband and to be stepmom to his two kids – and it's like the best thing in the whole wide world. Balance is important and I encourage everybody to remember that. I'm not the best example of having kept a balanced life. That's why I've had three last names." She is working on balance. "I think knowing when to step out and just take it easy is something I've learned a bit more every year."

Her best advice to a young woman starting her career in the Corps is that "you can always change your mind. And you don't have to know every answer. You can always say, 'You know what? Let me get back with you.' Because I don't have to have every answer at the tip of my tongue if I don't know the answer. And I'd rather be accurate with what I'm saying than to say something wrong or mislead something. I mean, don't let your ego get in the way of making the right decisions. You will make a mistake or a bad decision, we all do. Just don't be afraid to acknowledge your mistake, learn from it and move on from it. "

Andrea would recommend that young women consider the Corps for a career. "Just because you're an engineer doesn't mean that you have to be an engineer in design branch. You can be an engineer in regulatory or a maintenance

engineer in operations. You could be a project manager... I feel like if you're bored with your job or if you're not happy with what you're doing, it's really up to you to make yourself happy, which means you need to go and try to grow and learn and do different things and find your place."

"I feel to this day that every job I've had in the Corps has been the best job I've ever had. I've really enjoyed it. I've been able to learn a lot of things, got to go a lot of places, had the opportunity to meet and work with some great people. And I think what we do means something to the American people. And we bring so much value that it's hard not to feel like you're actually doing something important. I think that is rewarding."





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# PATTI O'CONNOR

*Human Resources Division, Human Resources Specialist  
(Retired)*

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Patti O'Connor began her federal career as a GS-2 clerk typist “at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth” in 1976. Within a year, she was selected for “an upward mobility position in the Training Division at the Civilian Personnel Office (CPO), and decided I really wanted to do human resources work.” In 1980, she and her husband moved to St. Louis where she did administrative work at the Army Reserve Center until another upward mobility opportunity allowed her to return to the CPO. After a divorce, she took another developmental position at Fort Eustis, Virginia, where she married an Army Officer. What was supposed to be a one year term turned into a five year stint, including a promotion to the CPO at Ft. Monroe, Virginia. She came to the St. Louis District from Fort Monroe when her husband was reassigned to the Reserve Center. Originally from Desloge, Missouri (near Bonne Terre), the move brought her back closer to her home town. She had always intended to only work a few years and then stay home with her children, but life happened and she decided she “definitely wanted to stay in HR for the rest of my career.”

She says she “had toyed with the idea of going to Washington,” but after “a week-long shadowing with the head of the Corps HR, Susan Duncan,” she decided not to. She was also a supervisor for 10 months during her career, “and that was my least favorite. I was never comfortable

being a supervisor.” She came to the St. Louis District as a GS-11 Human Resources Specialist in 1994. She also worked for a time in Project Management. “Jerry Barnes was the Deputy Project Manager at the time. But,” she says, “I just wanted to be the best HR specialist I could be.”

Patti values how other people have contributed to her career, whether as inspirations or mentors. “I have always been impressed with everything Romanda Walker has had to overcome. She has such a wonderful attitude and positive outlook, and she’s an inspiring person. And I was always very inspired by Mel Baldus, because he could be matter-of-fact when he needed to be, but he also cared about people.” Outside of work, her mother was a great inspiration. “Although she lived most of her life within a five-mile radius and didn’t drive, when she became ill and knew she was dying, I can’t tell you how many cards and letters and phone calls she got from people who told her what a difference she made in their lives, just by being who she was. She took care of several kids who passed through our home from time to time, and I think she heard from almost all of them, so that was pretty inspirational. Kathy Tober also influenced her career. “Talk about a role model. Watching her work and watching how people reacted to her” made an impression on Patti. “And Kathy Hatfield had a way with people that could make them feel comfortable just walking in her office—didn’t

matter what level you were.” She also considers Jerry Barnes a mentor. “He really went the extra mile to try to find people he felt needed an extra nudge. We had a push for mentoring when Jerry was here.” She attributes her success to “the managers I worked for, having a positive attitude, and taking every day as it comes, and just trying to do the best you can.”

She doesn't think she was treated differently because she's a woman, “other than one example early in my career. At the time, I didn't have any children. I was 22, 23 when I interviewed for my first job in Human Resources. One interviewer asked me if there was any reason why I wouldn't be able to complete the training program, and the guy sitting next to him kicked him under the table. I said, ‘Well, I don't know why I would enter if I didn't think I could finish it.’ And he said, ‘like retirement or anything.’ What he meant was, ‘Do you think you're going to have babies?’ I think they thought I would file an EEO complaint if I didn't get the job, so they gave it to me. That was really, honestly, the only time I felt like I was treated any differently. But I'm in more of a woman-driven field, except the percentage of people at the very top are men.” Her challenges in balancing a family and a career early on, she felt, were typical: “I only had one child, so I wasn't trying to pick up multiple kids. And she wasn't into sports or anything like that, so I just did it. Everybody else was doing it, too, and her dad was always

really good about pulling his share of parenting. I think that's probably the most important thing: you can't do it by yourself.”

Later, however, those challenges were poignant and unique. “When I was at the Army Reserve Center, it was a period of complete chaos. It was so stressful, and I got the opportunity to go for what was supposed to be a year, to Fort Eustis for a new program called Proponency with the Transportation Corps. My daughter was about nine or ten, and I didn't want to uproot her for just a year, so her dad and I worked out that I'm going to go on this and leave her behind. I never spent more than about six weeks without her coming to me, me going there. We talked on the phone every day. But my assignment kept getting extended, and it ended up being almost five years. She would come for summers, and at the end of the summer, she always wanted to stay. But we would've had to go to court, and it would've been a whole thing. He and I were very different, the way we parented, so it was better for her to have extended times instead of every other weekend. I've always felt really guilty about that, but it was the thing that moved me up the ladder and enabled me to get where I wanted to be. Career-wise, it was something that I felt good about. And she and I have a wonderful relationship now. She still tells me that it was a good thing.” Patti feels it got easier being a woman in the workplace over time because expectations changed. “I



*Patti at her desk in HR with her employee excellence award.*

was going to work for a couple years and then be a stay-at-home mom. That was expected of me, coming from a small town. When I didn't, some people looked askance at it." At the USACE, she says, "I sat in on many different executive interviews, and they'd come down to, 'This person had all these different experiences, and they've had developmental assignments, and they've done this and that and the other thing.' The discussion finally came around to, 'If you start selecting women for that kind of opportunity, then they will also have those.'"

As her career went on, "there was definitely a difference in the way women were given opportunities. There were more women who felt like they were earning opportunities based on their contributions, not just on favoritism. And definitely women came in who showed drive and

leadership skills, who I think earned more opportunities." In addition to on-the-job training, Patti earned a Master's Degree in human resources, funded by the USACE. "I went to the Army Management Staff College, with Kathy Hatfield. That was an amazing experience. I was also selected for the Emerging Leaders Program, which was an invaluable experience. I went to the original program and then I did two years as a coordinator with the Board of

Directors," a part of the program designed to "give people the experience of sitting in with the highest-level leadership.

We sat in on all the Board of Director's meetings with the generals and all the SESers. The Emerging Leader program was probably my first real attempt to be introspective and try to look at myself from other people's perspectives. It got you out of your comfort zone and you saw how decisions get made. That program made a big difference in some of the women who attended, especially the women who were selected to go to the next level and become coordinators. Then you get a completely different perspective, because you're sitting back and watching other people go through the same thing you went through. Some women who felt like they had to

be harder and more assertive, more aggressive, to have the same opportunities as the men got feedback that I think helped them a lot.”

“Pretty much every day,” she says, “I felt proud to work here. The people who work here, with very rare exceptions, are just people who really



*Patti receiving a Commander's Award from COL O'Hara at her retirement.*

For herself, she says, “the best advice I ever got was that you interview for your next job every single day. The way you live your life and do your job is the most important aspect of looking toward the next level, the most important thing to your career. And be yourself. If you try to be something that you're not, it never works.” Patti has and would recommend the Corps as a place to work, “because I think the Corps of Engineers is a very professional environment.” She would advise someone starting their career at MVS to “just do your job, be yourself,” just as she was advised. “Find what you're good at and what makes you happy.”

want to do a good job and care about what they do, and I've always been really proud of being able to tell people that I work at the Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District.”



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# VIVIAN RATLIFF

*Logistics Management Division, Chief (Retired)*

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Vivian Ratliff attributes her success in the St. Louis District to her parents and her own personal drive to succeed. “My father retired from the Air Force,” she says, so watching his drive influenced her tremendously. He was also in a logistics position, “he took care of the commissary wherever he was stationed,” Vivian says, “So supply runs in my veins.”

Vivian began working with the federal government in the Farmers Home Administration (now Rural Development). “I came to MVS in December 1979 as a GS-2 Word Processor. “Well, when I first started with the Corps, it was different. When I was with Farmers Home, we had bells that went off to tell us when to go to lunch, when to come back from lunch, when to take a break, when to come back from break. And at the end of the day everybody was lined up like little kids at the door waiting for the bell to ring so we could go home. So, when I got to the Corps it was totally different. It was more laid back. It was more comfortable, should I say, and didn’t feel like I was under a lot of stress.” Back then, if you got into the federal government, it was a good thing, because they paid real well compared to private industry. So I got into the government as a career. I kind of fell into Logistics. I did on-the-job training and went to classes, and while I was working in Logistics, I got my Bachelor’s in Business Management through the University of Phoenix.”

From 1979 to 1984, Vivian was in the Administrative Services Office and did word processing, keyboarding, “and different things for engineering.” In 1984, she transferred to Facilities and Property Accounting Assistance Office. “That entailed working floor plans, dealing with building maintenance, and different things like that,” she says. Afterward, from 1990 to 1994, she was a General Supply Specialist dealing with surplus equipment and property, and from 1994 to 2001, a Supply Management Specialist, “the supervisor of the supply branch, which encompassed supply and property book.” Finally, from 2001 until she retired in 2013, she was the Supervisor [i.e., Chief] of Logistics [Management]. She never thought she’d spend 33 years with the Corps, and, although she applied for some positions outside of USACE, she realized that “the Corps was a good fit. We were like a big family, and working for the Corps was very comfortable and rewarding.” And there were no bells.

Vivian’s favorite position was as a General Supply Specialist. “When we were doing our move to here, it was five or six floors of stuff that had to be excessed. This was a lot of work, but it was rewarding. We had trucks coming in from all over the United States picking up our excess. We had a lot of fun doing it. We made it fun to do it.” In an interesting parallel, her daughter was key in the recent efforts with the seismic upgrade project within the Robert A. Young

(RAY) Federal Building. “I think I was pretty well content,” Vivian says. “I wish I had gotten my Bachelor’s earlier in life, but working in the government, getting a degree doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re going to up your pay. It’s not like McDonnell Douglas, where you get it and they take your pay up.”

She found a sense of pride in her work, especially when it came to hurricane recovery work and deploying for Emergency Management. “I was able to work on hurricane recovery efforts in Baton Rouge, and the people would stop you and say, ‘Thank you for coming down and helping us.’ It really meant something, because they were really grateful that we were there. I felt proud being a part of the Corps.”

Over the course of her career, Vivian received several excellent performance awards and reports that, “within the whole logistics office, we received Logistics Office of the Year a couple of times. We were awarded for the move when we moved to the [RAY] building. You know, it’s good to say I, I, I, but like they say – there’s no I in team. All of us worked together and we achieved several of the awards from even the national Logistics [organizations], from the Department of Labor.”

Vivian found it challenging when people tried to circumvent the regulations. “I let the Commander know one time, ‘Hey, this property

book is yours. So if something happens, they’re coming after you, they’re not coming after me. You signed the document for property.’ And that changed a whole lot of things,” she says. She faced additional challenges as a woman. “A lot of times, being a woman in management, you don’t get the respect. If they’re men and they’re married, they look at you kind of like you’re the partner, not the actual authoritarian in your position. And when they sit down and talk to you, is when they realize that you do know your job. So sometimes you have to be a little more forceful—with some women, too.” For Vivian, this did not improve with time, “but some things you just dealt with. You just stand your ground and you move on. And eventually, I guess you could say it got easier because you gained respect [as people realized you knew your job].”

Balancing her job and family “took a lot of prayer, and you had to realize you only had so many hours in a day, so you can only get so much done in one day. Some things I had to sacrifice. I might have left work tired, but if Mark and Jackie or hubby had something, an activity that evening, I had to just buck up and go do it with them. But then you still remember there’s only so many hours in a day and you can only accomplish so much in one day.” Still, in the Corps, “they cared about your outside life.” If your kids were sick, Vivian says, they didn’t pressure you to get to work. “They cared about



your family. People wanted to know about your family – what your family is doing.”

In this collegial atmosphere, Vivian says, “my supervisors were my mentors. Barbara Collier impacted my career because she was tough on us. But at her retirement dinner with her family, her sister told us that she was hard on us because she wanted us to learn, and she was retiring because she felt that we could handle the job. She said that we were specialists. We were not just regular employees, because all of our jobs had ‘specialist’ behind it. So she pushed us a lot, but it was all worth it. Larry White in the supply branch pushed us too,” she says. “He would sit us down and say, ‘Okay, you’re here to do a job. We’re not here to play.’ And he would step back and let us do our jobs. Judy Griffith was basically the same way. She expected us to do our work, but we could have fun doing it. As long as we knew, ‘This is the mission you need to accomplish. How you accomplish it is up to you, but I need it done.’” Barbara Collier and Linda Wichlin in particular were inspirations to Vivian.

The best advice Vivian ever received is that “people follow what you do, not what you say. And if you tell them to do one thing and you’re doing something totally different, your integrity is on the line. Your character and your integrity are the most important things.” Of her own mentees, she says “I encouraged some of them to

go back to school.” She also found her children inspiring. “I wanted to show my children that they could make it, regardless of what game or what goal, they could make it. And my children are very successful.” This includes her daughter Jackie, who, like her mother and grandfather before her, works in logistics.

As Vivian tells the story, “I was at a logistics conference, and people from the Logistics Proponency Office were recruiting,” which they had not done for years. “I came home and I gave my daughter Jackie the paperwork. Within a week they called her. They flew her to Washington, D.C. and did an interview. She went through the 18-month logistics intern program at Fort Lee, VA. Once they completed their training they had to pick three places for their wish list, and she put the Corps as one. Logistics Office from Washington, DC visited Fort Lee and interviewed Jackie.” She adds that “I offered the opportunity to others to take the same program, but Jackie being the go-getter that she is, jumped on it. And as we can see, she’s very successful.”

Vivian advised her daughter not to “think that you’re going to go in there necessarily as a G9, but get your foot in the door and then seek opportunities. If you feel good, even within the Corps, and you say, okay, I think I can do something different, all you can do is try. I told her, always keep your integrity and

your character. Be careful. It's called a job, not play." When asked if she would recommend the Corps to a young woman starting her career, she laughingly replied, "I guess I did." As for advising other women, "I'll tell anybody the Corps is an excellent agency to work for," she says, "if you can get into it."



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# MORGAN REESE

*St. Louis District Deputy Commander  
(US Army, MAJ, Retired)*

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Morgan Reese's love of learning is evident in her numerous educational accomplishments. She graduated from West Point with a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering, served in the Army, and retired as a Major. She earned a Master's degree in Engineering Management from the University of Missouri at Rolla (now Missouri University of Science and Technology) and an additional Engineering Master's degree in Civil Engineering with Water Resources Specialty from the University of Florida, and finally taught at West Point. Already a credentialed Professional Engineer before she arrived, she acquired her certification as a Project Management Professional while at MVS as a Major in the Army. She says, "The professional training—the posture towards professional growth that the Army takes in St. Louis District in particular—really took for me. I love learning. I love

growth." Since her retirement from the Army, she's worked as the Associate Director for Engineering for Boehringer Ingelheim's Athens, Georgia, campus.

Morgan first came to MVS to work with District Commander Colonel Anthony Mitchell. "He had served as a mentor and we deployed

together. I had a lot of respect for him, and those are the kind of bosses you want to work for, so I jumped at the opportunity. Plus, as a degreed and licensed engineer, I wanted to work with the Corps in the Army. It was a golden opportunity on a couple of different fronts."

"I feel like I was impacted by everybody that I interacted with at the Corps. Colonel Mitchell was amazing. He breathes life into people and encourages them to grow, learn and develop. He has high standards and he holds you to them, but he's never going to let you feel like



*Morgan conferring with COL Mitchell while Mike Peterson looks on.*

you're failing at something. He's always trying to build folks up. Beyond that, the folks I got to interact with through SAME [Society of American Military Engineers] with Janet Ulivi or the project and program management with Susan Wilson and Deanne Strauser and the time I spent with Heather Asunskis was hugely impactful on me." Another mentor was Colonel

Bernie Lindstrom, the Pittsburgh District Commander. Most of her mentors were “either bosses that I had or folks that I worked with very closely. I always sought out mentors because I always want to grow. There are a lot of peers who have stuck with me... like Colonel Tricia George, the commander of the recruiting battalion headquartered in St. Louis. We would work out together and we lived near each other. We would encourage each other. Those kinds of relationships continue to inspire you to grow and move on and keep moving...just being the Deputy [Commander] was such a fun job for me. It really pushed me on a lot of fronts. I had to keep a lot of plates spinning and it was just a lot of fun. The staff that we had was incredible there. It was so neat, not just to learn how to operate at a different level professionally, but also just to be able to engage with the amazing staff that we had was awesome, and it was my last job in the Army, so it was also absolutely the best job that I could have been in to work on that transition to being a civilian. That was definitely my favorite job there.”

“I think mentoring goes with the job. Part of being a leader is being a mentor and helping the folks on your team grow and learn...It’s

hard,” Morgan jokingly says, “when you have accumulated enough wisdom and experience that other people want to learn from you, but you don’t feel that old yet. In all seriousness,



*Morgan speaking to a school group on Engineering Day.*

STEM outreach and being able to excite kids, especially the young girls, about what I do, being able to show them how that can apply to fun things that you get to do and also get paid for [made an impact on both the kids and her]. I got to do some of that with Amanda Kruse’s STEM programs.” Mostly, she says, “It’s not huge, big programs that keep my excitement for STEM so high, because I feel like where I’m gifted, and where it’s most rewarding, is making a big difference with a small number of people—things like knowing that one of my best friend’s middle daughter loves working on STEM projects with me, and showing her what I’m doing, like swapping out a light switch, and letting her finish the installation and she can tell

the friend we're helping out, 'hey, I got to switch out our light switch!' Buying K'nex kits and putting them together with her—I know it's got to be making an impact, because you can see so much excitement and gratification in them. If you make those investments at whatever scale, it will make an impact."

Morgan says she was only treated differently because she's a woman "a couple of times in my career. In these cases, it was mostly due to a lack of communication, or oversight," and more times than not, she was a part of initiatives to be more inclusive of women.

"Some functions of being in male-dominated industries are going to happen as long as that ratio of men outnumbering the women remains," such as "guys going out for lunch and not thinking to invite the gal. That happened even more frequently as I got more senior in the Army, because there were just fewer women to hang out with socially. There's a lot of women lieutenants; there are far fewer women majors and colonels. That dynamic may always be there, but instead of just feeling lonely or letting my feelings get hurt, I try to turn it around and say, 'How can I help others who may be feeling like this? How can I extend an invitation to the guys? Or when can I use one of those lunchtime opportunities to sit down with my mentor and catch up?' We're human beings, stuff like that is going to happen unintentionally all the time.

Either we can get angry about it and feel sorry for ourselves or we can do something to change it and make a positive thing happen."

Morgan says that finding balance was difficult in her career. "A lot of times, I've started to lose that balance and had to just take a step back and refocus and learn some hard lessons along the way. I don't do it perfectly now, but I think I've learned a lot. When you're able to take a more holistic look and say, 'Given the course of this year, have I taken care of myself? Have I put what I needed to, and what I wanted to, into my people, into my job, into myself, into the things that I've wanted to commit time to?' And when you can say yes to that, then that's okay. That balance can shift a little over short periods to accommodate the fact that 'life happens,' as long as you can really make sure you don't lose sight of trying to get back to that balance. I learned the hard way that you have to take time to take care of yourself, because if you don't, you will burn out and then, everything else will start to fall apart too. If I'm not doing that, I absolutely notice the difference. I get frustrated and angry much quicker. I've only learned that in the last four or five years that most of life is a long-haul thing, not a 12 to 18-month period when you can throw everything you've got into it."

Morgan feels that it's gotten easier to be a professional woman over the course of her career. "In most professions, there has been a

movement to find talented people who don't look like everybody else and bring them into the team. It does get harder to continue to look around and not necessarily see a lot of diversity. When you have diversity in greater numbers, you have people thinking in different ways. When that gets encouraged, it gets easier to just be who you are."

At MVS, Morgan says "a lot of things made me proud. During my time as a Deputy Commander, we had two record-setting floods and the Emergency Management team rocked it. Most people didn't even know that we had record-setting floods because we did our job." Seeing Tan Gates get promoted, and Marty Werdebaugh and Linda Werdebaugh grow into themselves and get recognized also made her proud. "It's always a proud moment when you see the folks that you work with be recognized."

She attributes her own success to her faith. "My Christian faith gives me something to hold on to that gives me hope and encourages me. Knowing that my God-given strengths, gifts, and skills are the things that allow me to keep doing the right thing and doing the very best I'm capable of. It gives me the courage to persevere and hope, to carry on and keep going even when it's tough. You get a little anxious ahead of tough things, but tough things are always going to be there; it's having the ability to burst through those walls and just keep moving forward – that

comes from trusting that God is bigger than me and has everything under control, even if I mess up. Even when it's really hard being able to keep that positive attitude and keep moving forward, that's the thing that makes a difference."

"I think the best advice, if I could extrapolate little pieces from all the different nuggets, would be to keep perspective, don't let the little stuff get you down. Keep persevering, keep hope that God has the perfect plan. You've just got to keep moving forwards towards what He's got for you and spread hope and joy and love along the way. If you're doing that, then you're going to do good at everything else... just stick around with each other and help continue to breathe life and hope into each other and just keep us focused on the positives, you got this, we got this. How can we have the most fun doing it while we walk that road? If you're having a tough day, just have a reflective moment - 'Hey, do you remember that time back in Germany when this crazy thing happened? It turned out okay and now, we can laugh about it,' sort of thing. While you're walking through the really tough times, I'm walking with you, you're not alone. It's so inspirational to ... I don't have the inspired, star-struck folks that I really could point to because they do amazing things, don't get me wrong, but I just get so inspired by having the relationships with the people who are trying to do the same things with their life that I'm trying to do or, just be focused on, encouraging and

persevering and having hope.” Morgan would “absolutely recommend” the Corps as a place for young women to start their careers. “We employ a lot of different kinds of people in the Corps. Especially in Engineering, there’s not a lot of other places in the Engineering world where you can find this many young women working, and such an amazing concentration of women to look up to and seek mentoring from.” She would advise those young women to “keep growing, keep challenging yourself, and find a mentor. Other people have gone before you, and other people are going through it right now. You don’t have to do it alone. Go find a mentor and a friend to partner with. Encourage each other and help challenge each other to continue growing.”





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# MARGE ROBBINS

*Engineering and Construction Division, Civil  
Engineering Technician (Retired)*

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Marge Robbins started her career at the Granite City Army Depot in 1968, then worked for the Automated Logistics Management Systems Agency before staying home for a time with her young son. “I was happily married, and I thought everything was going to be wonderful. However, I ended up getting divorced and had to find something else to support us. My father was employed with the Corps of Engineers and the Corps was the first agency that called me. I jumped at the chance. That was in January 1974.”

Marge began as a GS-4 clerk-typist in the Program Management Office with Jane Collins, Bill Boston, and Pete Puricelli. “One day,” she says, “this vacancy announcement came across my desk, and I jokingly said, ‘Here’s a job for me, a construction inspector.’ Pete told my dad, ‘Marge is interested in that construction inspector job.’ The next time I talked to my dad, he said, ‘Are you serious? Are you going to do that?’” When Marge said she wasn’t, her father told her to consider it. “I was worried about the traveling, but he said, ‘You need to do it. It’s a door to open.’ Three women applied for the program.

One made it three months, and the other lasted two or three weeks. I completed the program. I spent two years in the program as a construction inspector trainee starting at the Lower Mississippi River office in Chester,

Illinois, doing flood recovery work, levee work and finishing the Kaskaskia lock and dam.”

In Construction, Marge says, “Tom Coomes once said, ‘You don’t know a lot. You’re only a trainee, but you need to look at the plans and specs every day, and you’re going to make sure you know and understand one thing about whatever part of the project. That way you can bluff if you have to. If you don’t know something, radio us and we’ll get the answer.’” She says, “I’m not saying I bluffed a lot, but I could tell the construction workers wondered, ‘Does she really know what she’s talking about? Maybe we can’t pull the wool over her eyes.’”

She also recalls dealing with concrete crews who “would always say, ‘Let’s get going. Let’s get going.’ One day they wanted to start the pour before the rebar was inspected. I said, ‘No. You can’t do that.’” When the foreman came back with, ‘Yeah, but Marge, time is money you know,’ Marge said, “Yeah, but if we get there before Raleigh Dial gets here to do the inspection, then I’m in trouble.’ He argued with me a little bit more. He was towering over me at about 6’4” and finally I said, ‘Anybody ever tell you that you’ve got the prettiest blue eyes?’ He said, ‘No. Nobody has told me that. We will wait for the inspection of the rebar.’ I used any kind of intimidation or bluff or tactic to exert my influence. That time it was fun.” When she started at the Corps, she says, “I considered it

just a job. Food on the table, maybe someday be able to retire. When I went into Construction, it completely changed not only the trajectory of my career but my attitude toward it. I thought, 'Maybe I could actually be something.' Not that clerical work is a negative thing, but it is restrictive [in terms of grade level]. Normally, the highest clerk was a GS-7." Although she didn't plan to be in Construction the entire time, she did plan on staying in the Corps until retirement. "Having been through a divorce, I was never going to be dependent on somebody else again. Even though I had another marriage and it was long-term and wonderful, I always made sure I could take care of myself."

Her construction inspector job unfortunately ended with a back injury. "I had a really bad car wreck. I was thrown from the car, and my son was thrown from the car. I was off for eight weeks, and when I came back, I was on lighter duty. A construction inspector needs to climb ladders," she says, so she took advantage of an opportunity in Hydraulics at the district office. "I worked in Water Data. We collected river gauge readings, ran statistical analyses, and published the data." After that, she went to the River Stabilization Branch, "out on the river doing hydrographic surveys and inspections. There were no women in that field either, except in the budgetary end. After six months, the River Stabilization Branch was abolished, and I was reassigned to the Office of the Chief of

Hydraulics and eventually reorganized into the Potamology Section." The word potamology is based upon the Greek potamos, meaning rivers. So potamology is the study of rivers.

Marge worked "about five years in Potamology with Claude Strauser. I would help him with his research and presentations. I went to places that a lot of women never went, because many professional engineering organizations were male-oriented. He did a speech at the Missouri Athletic Club and the Masonic Temple, which at that time didn't allow women, and they said, 'You have a woman coming with you?' And he responded with 'she's my tech. If she doesn't come with me, I don't do this.'"

Her "ultimate career job," Marge says, was "Chief of Channel Maintenance Section. It was a GS-12 technician job, and I thought, 'If I go into Operations, I'll be right where I need to be.' I got a promotion there. I spent three or four years in the Navigation Branch of Operations as Special Assistant to the Branch Chief, working very closely with the Channel Maintenance and Locks and Dams Sections as a liaison between the district and field offices. Then there was another reorganization! I was actually reassigned to the Channel Maintenance Section, but the chief's job had been changed from a technician to an engineer. If there was ever a time when I thought being a woman kept me from attaining a goal, that would have been

it. It made me angry. But I convinced myself that wasn't the case and the change was simply a way of preserving the grade!"

At that point, Marge says she "continued to work with the dredges and with the inspection boat Pathfinder as a liaison between the field and the district office. The floating plant was made up of wage-grade employees and supervisors, and their performance appraisals and awards had been based on who had gotten it the last time. I told the first mate and the chief engineer, 'You have seasonal employees. When the season is over, we reassign them to different places. If it comes to not keeping people over the winter, the ones who received exceptional ratings get an extra five points on their tenure. You're doing your good employees a disservice by not giving them an exceptional when they deserve it.' It took a couple of years, but they finally did it right." She takes particular pride in that accomplishment. She also says, "When the dredge would demobilize for the season, we sometimes sent some of the seasonal employees to some of the lakes, locks, and dams or kept some at the service base. I received a special act award for implementing new methods for these reassignments during a particularly short

dredging season. Having done the appraisals correctly, we were able to keep the higher performing employees. So it made a difference in the way some of them performed, too."

Not long after she accomplished this task, she was promoted to a GS11 Civil Engineering Technician in Construction. She has held lots of other positions as well. Because she's "a self-starter," she says, "I rose to the challenges of special projects that were not within my



*Marge shakes hands with Admiral Wiman at SAME Luncheon.*

assigned duties. So, I was the Acting Federal Women's Program Manager for a while. I was an EEO counselor. I was the secretary of SAME (the Society of American Military Engineers) and, I believe, the only non-engineer who held an office in that organization.

I helped with navigation conferences, and coordinated the Mississippi River Commission's

(MRC) low and high-water inspection trips for 15 years. In fact, I planned the first MRC inspection trip above St. Louis and was able to ride the MV (Motor Vessel) Mississippi all the way up to St. Paul. I worked in the Emergency Operations Center when we had flood issues. I was the Financial Management System help-desk coordinator in St. Louis, San Francisco, and Rock Island. I was tapped to do these

different things. A lot of those special projects were done by people of much higher grades, but I was doing these things at a GS-6, GS-7 level. I thought, ‘What am I doing here?’ I’m not trying to brag, but people had a lot of confidence in my abilities. They thought, ‘We need this to be done. Have Marge do it.’ I was very often the only woman in the room in the late 70s, early 80s. I have lots of pictures of meetings and seminars where I am the only woman in a picture of 25, 30, 40 people.” She credits her success to never saying, “That’s not my job.”

She doesn’t think she’s been treated differently because she’s a woman. “I think it’s because I never expected to be treated differently,” she says. “When I worked in construction, I didn’t say, ‘Oh, you mean I’ve got to go climb that? I



*At an OD safety meeting. As the only woman in the room, she’s easy to spot.*

have to go out there and it’s raining?’ My butt was out there in the rain. I never played the woman card. If you held a position that a lot of men held, I don’t think you were treated much differently.”

When work life balance became challenging, Marge says, “My parents were very supportive. When I had to go for training programs, if it was during the summer and Stephen was out of school, he would stay with his grandparents. I also had this wonderful babysitter. I’d say, ‘I’ve got to go for training,’ and she’d say, ‘Just make sure he’s got plenty of clean underwear,’ because she had four kids of her own. I had a lot of personal and professional support.” She also credits several mentors, including Pete Puricelli, Claude Strauser, Paul Kornberger, Emmett Hahn, Len Ross, Tom Coomes, and her father,

who told her, “There’s no challenge you can’t try. Never pass up an opportunity to prove yourself.”

Marge says she would recommend the Corps to a young woman just starting her career, “because of the opportunities and the end result. There’s such a sense of accomplishment with the Corps. She would advise such a woman to “do whatever is asked of you: no job is too big or too small. Take every opportunity to learn something. Do the best you can and the Corps will reward you.”

Over the course of her 35 year career, Marge received 15 Outstanding or Exceptional Performance Appraisals, two Suggestion Awards, 26 Special Act or on the Spot Awards, Commander’s Awards for Civilian Service in ’95 and ’99, and the LMVD Commanders Superior Civilian Service Award in 2004. She was also district-wide Employee of the Month. When she looks back and takes stock, she says, “I worked in program development. I worked in engineering. I worked in operations. I worked in construction. I worked in contract management. I don’t think I missed a whole lot. I had a wonderful career. Every single job I had was the best job anybody could hope for.”



*Major General Crear presented Marge a Superior Civilian Service Award at her retirement in 2004.*



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# SANDRA SPENCE

*Operations Project Manager, Clarence Cannon Dam/  
Mark Twain Lake*

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When she turned eighteen, Sandra Spence began working at the Pittsburgh District of USACE. “I started as a Co-Op student and quickly learned that the Corps of Engineers had so many different areas that I could become involved in. I wanted to be able to explore some of them, and I did this by talking to other Corps employees as well as doing research on the opportunities available to employees.”

Thirteen years later, Sandra sought a new opportunity at the St. Louis District. “A field position opened up at the appropriate grade, and I was looking for a more challenging work environment. The announcement for the position appeared to match my knowledge, skills and abilities, so I applied for the Assistant Operations Manager position at Clarence Cannon Dam and Mark Twain Lake and was accepted.”

A memory that Sandra values from early in her career was an event she coordinated. “I worked on a project at Crooked Creek Lake. We held a very big event there called Eco-Meets, which is an ecology natural resource meet for students. The local schools would come out and challenge each other on their knowledge of natural resources. I had over 150 kids running around, and I really enjoyed working with them while they were working hard to win their sectional tests. What drew me to the event was its value. The value was the appreciation formed by the

students for environmental stewardship once they discovered they could have a great time enjoying the outdoors. That value to me was very critical because they were our next generation of stewards.”

Sandra did not initially see her first role at USACE as the beginning of her career. “I went to Pennsylvania State University. I received a Bachelor of Science in Recreation and Parks Management with a minor in Exercise and Sports science. Back in the day, you never knew how the careers would go. It was always recommended to all the college students to have a minor that was in a discipline separate from their major as a second career to fall back on. Everyone starts out seeing their first position as just a job because no one knows enough yet to visualize if they can make a career from that first position. My first formal position was as a Co-Op student, and I was new and young. Usually the career positions are vastly different than an entry position. As I got to do more things and had increased responsibility and knowledge about the Corps, I knew the Corps was a place that I felt offered their employees unlimited potential to succeed, but the responsibility for that success lies with the willingness of the employee to stretch past their current comfort zone and embrace new ways of doing business or going on new assignments and so forth. With that in mind, the Corps became a career for me.”



One event had a significant impact on Sandra that defined the value of her role at USACE. “We had a historic high water event at Mark Twain Lake that happened during the late summer of 2008. There was a historic flood, which was something that neither the District nor Lake staff had experienced before. This event changed how we do project business concerning flood control efforts, and definitely for the better. It gave us the opportunity to make the Mark Twain Lake project safer for our customers, as well as include them in the process through public listening sessions following the event and to talk to them about their concerns. I felt the work accomplished what it set out to do and was a proud moment for St. Louis.”



*Sandra (at right) at the ground-breaking for the Mark Twain Lake Visitor Center in 2009.*

Sandra attributes the success she has experienced in her career to mentors who deepened her institutional knowledge and helped her develop as a professional and a parent. “The mentors I’ve had are the folks who wanted me to succeed and wanted to help me reach success for the good of the organization. Mike Dace was a great guy who knew a bunch of Corps history, which he liked to share with everyone at the field site. I remember him telling me some of his District Office stories over the

years he worked there, and these stories are useful in my current position. Pat Kline was also a wealth of knowledge on how to be a successful Park Ranger while still enjoying the job. His big area of interest was the protection of natural resources, and I was very inspired by his drive and ambition. They share their experiences as a teaching tool.

They made me think and be accountable, and this set the standard for me as an adult. I’ve carried that forward and find I do the same things with my kids now.”

Sandra believes that the key to maintaining a balance between your career and personal life is to accept that you cannot do it all. “I always tried to keep an even balance between work and home, and sometimes I was successful and

other times I wasn't. By no means have I ever met anyone who has had a perfect work to home balance, but each of these comes in waves when more attention is needed, and each recedes back to a normal pace again. The thing to keep in mind when you're overwhelmed at times is a balance can be attained with understanding. You need an understanding spouse or kids if you must miss an event, an understanding place of employment, and sometimes things have to shift on the calendar to be successful."

Sandra has seen how the variety of opportunities that drew her to the Corps has created an ideal workplace for young women at the beginning of their careers. "There are so many fields that a young lady can explore and get involved in and then make a career choice in an area of interest. She can be part of the District, the Field Sites, or the Lock and Dams. There's just so many things. If you look at engineering alone, you could specialize in structural, electrical or mechanical engineering. Nowadays, women can be in the electronics field."

Sandra advises young women beginning their careers at the USACE to "get involved and see what opportunities are out there and available. If you want to be in the field, be in the field. If you want to be in the District, go be there. Be a professional in the beginning because you will be expected to be one as you climb the career ladder. Be known for being open, honest, and

ethical in your responsibilities. Be engaged and accountable no matter what field you choose. Really the job takes care of itself, if you can follow those type of rules."



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# JOAN STEMLER

*Engineering and Construction Division, Water Control  
Operations Section, Chief/Leader of MVD  
Sub-Community of Practice for Water Control*

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The woman who would become the leader of the Mississippi Valley Division's sub-Community of Practice (CoP) for Water Control and the Chief of the Water Control Operation Section, started her career with the Corps as a clerk-typist at the service base in 1986. Joan Stemler came to the District looking for an opportunity that would allow her to support her family. "I was working part time, and I had just had a baby, and I was starting night school to go into accounting. I ran into an old friend of mine, and she had just gotten on with the Corps, and they were looking for folks, and she told me to take the civil service test. Back then, that's how you got on. So, I did take the test, and I got a call. I was still looking for part time because I just had my daughter, and then, I didn't know if I could balance night school, her, and work. I started at the service base. I got on there, and the rest is all history."

With her focus on her young daughter, Joan didn't initially consider the job a career. "It was a good experience when I first started, but I never really thought I'd end up where I am today." She did not spend much time at the service base before she transferred to the District offices (then at 210 N. Tucker Boulevard) to work as a full-time clerk-typist for the Geotechnical Branch in Engineering. From there, she ended up working in the Hydrology and Hydraulic Engineering Branch, which became her permanent home. "There was a lot of really cool things they were

doing, but the job I was doing really didn't keep me occupied. I kept asking for more work, and they started giving me more and more stuff to do...What happened, and how I got to where I am today, was through the upward mobility program [as an engineering technician]. And that required some night school classes and then on-the-job training. Then there were also H&H (Hydrology and Hydraulic Engineering) classes...I went to University of Arkansas for some classes and whatever was laid out is what I had to do to meet the job. And then as time went on, there was more and more demand of different avenues that I chose. So I would go out and learn and take the classes and then moved on up that way."

Today, Joan is still an engineering technician and a section chief. Historically, there have been issues with engineering technicians being promoted to higher grades. Typically full engineers (i.e., those with formal degrees) get those positions, not engineering technicians. There are rare exceptions and Joan is one of them. It took several years, much hard work, and the support of Engineering leadership at both the District and Division level to get it done, but it was eventually accomplished. Joan received due recognition for her knowledge and skills despite the fact that she possessed no formal degree. In particular, Joan credits Dave Busse for having a significant impact on her career. "His mindset is to give the work to whoever he knew could do

it. We didn't have to necessarily be an engineer. So, he piled it on pretty good. He taught me a lot through the years, and he's a smart guy so it was really good that he took me under his wing, helped me through."

Joan attributes her success to her upbringing. "I grew up on a farm with seven siblings. Sometimes we played hard, but we worked harder. We got up early in the morning. We didn't sleep in. We didn't back talk. We didn't do anything except what we were told. That is just how my personality is. Anybody that knows me is aware that I am a Type A personality."

There were times, however, that her Type A personality led to defining moments in her career. "I did a detail after Hurricane Katrina at headquarters." Joan and another gentleman from the Northwestern Division were the two individuals selected for it. The competition was fierce and Joan had to do a phone interview in addition to the written portion of the application, but she was selected. She tells the story of the second day of her detail. The male engineer who typically briefed the Chief of Engineers and his staff told Joan she was going to be doing that when she arrived at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). "It was very intimidating. When they would march in, everyone would stand and they'd stop and they would hold their arm up and they'd get their briefing packet under it and then they would continue to march in.

So as soon as I started the briefing, they turned around because it was usually Jack who gave the briefing. We turned around and the then Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Strock, said, 'who are you.' And I said, 'I'm Joan Stemler from the St. Louis District.' He said, 'come up here.' And I was like, 'Sir, I'm good right here.' He said, 'no, come on up here.' So I did."

After she finished the briefing, General Strock was preparing for an upcoming interview with CNN later that day by questioning a member of his Senior Executive Staff (SES), "what's going to happen with the Missouri River, the flow reduction for the winter and the navigation support?" And the SESer replied, "nothing, sir." A gentleman standing next to her, saw her shaking her head and told her to speak up. "And I'm like, 'no.' Anyway, they heard the grumbling and then General Strock said, 'come up here, St. Louis.' So I did. And he said, "what's going to happen?" And I said, 'sir, with current conditions, we're going to fall three to four feet from where we are right now.' And I was going on about where we were at, and where it looked like it was going to, and when we would see a full reduction of the flows. So he looked at the guy [the SESer] and said, 'you need to talk to her and get the notes.' So that's one of the problems I've always had. Don't ask me, if you don't want the answer. So I knew I was in trouble when that happened." Rather fortuitously, she had received an email from the

District Commander, COL (Kevin) Williams, asking her how her detail was going. Her response of “sir, if you only knew” prompted him to write back, “what did you do?”

Her contradicting the SESer did not go over well, “so HQ called [Mississippi Valley] Division and Division called Dave Busse, who was the Chief of H&H at the time. And so they came up with a fact sheet. And it was funny because the fact sheet they sent to me to look over to make sure everything was accurate is exactly what I had told them. The rest of the time I was up there, before they went on TV, General Strock or one of his employees would come over and say, ‘Joan, he wants you to look this over because this is going to be the backdrop of his interview.’” On one notable occasion, General Strock called Dave Busse with a question because he could not reach Joan. When Dave asked him why he didn’t call Joan, who was up at HQ at the time, General Strock’s reply was “I went to call her first, but she’s not at her desk. So you’re second.”

Even with a strong work ethic, Joan still felt being a woman impacted how she treated by her peers. “Being a female in a male-dominated world causes a lot of gossip.

There were a lot of people that I’ve never held a conversation with [that] had something negative to say. They questioned why I was there—not believing it was because I worked hard or knew my stuff. For them, it had to be for every other reason. When going to meetings, people have made comments like, ‘oh, you are eye candy.’ That has been challenging.” She admits that some of this treatment may well be because she is not an engineer: “because there is such a stigma. You don’t know anything because you’re not an engineer. Some of the engineers can’t do the job. Because you have to have more than just book smarts... I can either choose to let it bother me, or I can choose not to let it bother me.” This attitude was reinforced by her father when he advised her, “if they’re talking about you, they’re leaving someone else alone... you’re strong. You know what you do and that’s



*Joan receiving the Most Valuable Partner (MVP) award from the navigation industry.*

all that matters; put your head down and keep going.”

Despite these challenges, Joan has been recognized for her hard work and subject matter expertise several times—with Commanders’ awards, Environmental awards, coins, and other accolades within the Corps. One of the ones of which she is most proud, however, is unique. “The river industry created a Stemler award, and Major General Riley presented it to me. He said, ‘Joan, normally people have to die before they get an award named after them.’ I will always remember that.” This award is for the outstanding Corps of Engineers employee who best supports the river industry. “What is remarkable is that she has not only been recognized by industry but also by the environmental community. In 2018 she was recognized by Lieutenant General Semonite as the USACE Sustainability Hero of the Year. In addition, her team won the highest single engineering design award in USACE. In 2018, her team was awarded The Chief of Engineers Award of Excellence for their innovative and ground-breaking concept of Environmental Pool Management. This award exemplifies her passion to find win-wins in all that her teams

do. With zero additional dollars but a great deal of passion and innovation she refined how they manage the navigation pools to fully support navigation but also to create thousands of acres of needed vegetation for fish and wildlife.

Even with an award named after her, Joan has one regret in her career. “This was many years ago. My kids were just getting out of high school then. Dave Busse and I were looking at what classes I needed to finish my engineering degree. I was at a place in my life where it would have been extremely hard financially and time-wise to finish my degree. Dave told me don’t let that define me, that it is not who I am. He said, ‘You’re our go-to, and that is not going to change.’ So, I just dropped it, but looking back on it, I wish I had pursued it.” And Dave was right. Interestingly enough, the further Joan gets from home, the less it is even questioned.



*Joan (in pink) with her colleagues in Japan.*

Joan was selected to be the US representative in a technical exchange with Japan, she is the leader of her sub-CoP for water control in MVD (Mississippi Valley Division), and she annually leads a multi-agency, multi-major subordinate command Greater Mississippi Basin Forecasters meeting, among other leadership roles in her profession.



*Joan receiving the Sustainable River Hero Award from LTG Semonite.*

Joan believes women can thrive at the Corps and she advises them to “not let anyone tell you no or that you can’t do it, because you can. A perfect example is Liz Norrenberns. I’m so proud of her. She offers to do everything. Anything that comes up, she’s got it. You don’t get that from many people nowadays, and she’s proven herself. She is making the mark.” And she has big shoes to fill as well!





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# DEANNE STRAUSER

*Programs and Project Management Division, Project  
Development Branch, Chief (Retired)*

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Deanne Strauser first joined the St. Louis District as a summer student in 1981 while studying for her Engineering Management (Civil Engineering) degree at the University of Missouri-Rolla (now Missouri's University of Science and Technology). At the end of that first summer, she experienced her one and only discriminatory situation at the Corps, but it was one that would define her entire career. She and another student, Dave Busse, had worked for a specific supervisor for that summer and he was going to provide a performance review for each of them. "We looked at each other like, 'oh, well this is interesting.' Neither one of us had ever been through one. Of course, we had worked side by side all summer doing the same thing. Dave had his first and came out—thumbs up, piece of cake. And I went in for mine and was basically told by the same supervisor that I just needed to leave. I did not need to be an engineer. I was taking a man's position and I should just quit. I was in shock and I walked out of that performance review trying to hold it together..." She had just completed the first two years at Rolla (the two toughest years!) and had never self-identified as a woman engineer, so this criticism seemingly came out of left field. Deanne decided, right then and there, that she "was not going to listen to that. From that point

on, I just said, 'I'm going to do my best and I am going to be an engineer,' and I never once looked back...if anything, that just made me more determined." The final bit of irony came 30 years later, when Deanne retired from the same position once held by her first supervisor.



*Deanne in her office when she was Branch Chief.*

Undaunted, Deanne worked summers for the St. Louis District for an additional two years. When she graduated with her engineering degree, the government was on a hiring freeze, so she went to work for Emerson Electrical for three years as a project manager for their Electronics and Space Division. In 1988, the hiring freeze ended and she applied for a position with the Engineering Management Branch as the project manager for the district's support for others work. At the time, she was unsure if this was a career or not; her primary focus was on her family. "I really thought, based

on my work in the private sector, that the Corps would be a great place to help balance work, family, and career at that point, if I wanted a career. So that kind of influenced me because in the private sector I was working 60-hour weeks. It was different and I just felt like I'd be able to have more of a work-family balance." Her intuition was correct, but it wasn't until she was about half-way through her 30-year career that she really considered it a career and thought to herself, "yeah, this is it."

She spent five or six years in her first position and during that time the Programs, Project Management and Planning Division was established. She then became a project manager in that Division, working with special projects—much of it involving the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) work for about five or six years. From there, she became a project manager for the Planning and Project Management Branch and worked on traditional Corps work—CAP and other planning projects. When the Planning Division was regionalized in 1993-1994, Deanne became the District's Strategic Initiatives Coordinator, which was her favorite position to that point. She "really took a look at the Corps authorities and whether it was a CAP authority or other planning authorities or river engineering authorities and coordinated with state and local and other federal agencies to look at their needs and was there a way that the Corps could participate, and how did you get an

authority if you needed one, or an appropriation moving along, all those kinds of things; a lot of congressional involvement as well. But no, it was a fun job. Very people-oriented, both within our organization and outside our organization."

While she held this position, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005. The devastation was unimaginable. It was at this time, Deanne recalls, "that was really when the Corps became regional in delivering those projects in New Orleans." Deanne did her part to support those regional projects. When Hurricane Gustav hit on August 31, 2008, Deanne deployed to New Orleans. She spent two years as the "Hurricane Recovery Deputy, I guess, I don't know the exact title, but helping them get all of their projects built down there. Some that were in the midst of being built from Katrina and then Gustav hit so they had to start over. And I would have to say that was also very rewarding, but probably the highest stress job I ever had. It was an amazing opportunity and I met so many good people—not just from New Orleans District, but from the rest of our division there. It was wonderful in that regard, but we...our motto was Break Our Backs. I feel like I had a few fractures though."

When Deanne returned to the District, she applied for and was selected as the Chief of the Project Development Branch, which she describes as one of the most rewarding positions

in her career. When asked to describe her duties in that position, she replied: “Just think of the scope, schedule, and budget for every project that we basically have going on, that’s really what PM is involved in. And relaying that and the status of all of that for every project to our senior leadership, both at division and headquarters, and then to our congressional folks. Every year going through that and tracking it. And then of course managing, leading a lot of the teams that were delivering all those projects. And as a supervisor, I got to touch all those projects through all the project managers in my branch.”

During her last eight to ten years at the District, she assisted with all kinds of projects but one in particular stands out in her mind which she is particularly proud of—the Mass Graves Investigation Project in Iraq conducted by the Engineering and Construction Division’s Curation and Archives Analysis Branch. Just getting the agreement in place with the State Department was a challenge. And then she recalls, “getting phone calls in the middle of the night from Sonny (Dr. Michael “Sonny” Trimble) saying ‘I need hydraulic fluid.’” Throughout her career, she witnessed many incredible things—she too walked on the bed of the Mississippi when they were constructing the Mel Price Locks and Dam and she saw the construction of Mark Twain prior to the impoundment. She had the opportunity to see several projects from start to finish, something

a bit rare since the average time to complete a project is 15 years. She was involved in several emergency operations projects locally—flood fights and similar disaster recovery efforts within the District’s footprint. She describes one event: “it’s in the middle of the night starting to flood and we have to decide whether or not we’re going to have to evacuate people that live behind that levee...it was very inspirational to me that what we were doing...how important it was to people’s lives.”

Over the course of her career, Deanne had several mentors and colleagues to assist her (and she reciprocated in kind). She mentions Dave Busse, Dennis Fenske, Joe Kellett, Claude Strauser, and her husband, Brad Strauser (whom she met at the District). She laughingly tells of getting an education on the long commute between her home and the District office since both Brad and Claude worked in other offices in the District. She emphasizes the importance of knowing as many people as possible so if she had questions, she always had someone to ask. When questioned about her mentors she replied, “well, sure, but I also consider them colleagues and they picked my brain a lot too.” She also participated in the District’s Leadership Development Program as a formal mentor for many candidates. When mentoring these candidates, she always suggested they learn as much about the organization as possible and develop their networks far-reaching so

they would have those resources at hand. She describes the District as very family-like, even more so after she met her husband there.

Her work at the District, in comparison to her early job at Emerson Electric, was very supportive of her and helped her establish a work-life balance. The fact that her husband was very willing to help out during those times she was deployed didn't hurt either. The only thing she really laments is that they did not have telework as an option during her career, "I wish we had had telework. It would have made things so much better. So I'm thrilled that we can offer

would not have chosen to do that. When asked if she would recommend the Corps as a place to work to a young woman just starting her career, her reply was: "definitely, yes. Is there a yes in all caps?" Obviously her one negative experience at the beginning of her career only reinforces her response to this question. She served on several panels and hiring panels later in her career and stated her colleagues always "opened the field" to any competent candidates. She thinks Dave Busse, in particular, is one who always fights against discrimination and speculates that witnessing the aftermath of her first performance evaluation affected him as well—for the better.



*Deanne (front left) and the Project Development Branch personnel.*

that to people at times when it is needed." She also applauds the fitness programs because the goal is "to retire healthy." As her children grew older, she was able to take advantage of more opportunities. Her children were in college when she deployed for two years after Hurricane Gustav. If her children had been younger, she

The advice she would give to a young woman starting her career with the Corps? "Don't be afraid to get out of your comfort zone and don't be afraid to fail." Deanne received many accolades during her outstanding career—Superior Civilian Service Awards, Commander's Awards, and ultimately a Bronze de Fluery. When asked about these and if these were some of her proudest

moments, she replied, "it's a given (that I would be proud of these) but I don't really look at them. That's not why I did it." The awards are nice and certainly moments of pride, but the work is what was important.



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# CATHY VAN ARSDALE

*Operations Division, Readiness Branch, Emergency  
Operations Specialist*

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Cathy Van Arsdale's long career with USACE, began in 1995 while still in graduate school. "I was at graduate school at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale—physical anthropology—and I heard about this position, an internship with the Corps doing physical anthropology, and getting paid well for it. Even though it was an internship, it was like, "Oh my gosh, you mean I can work in this field, not just love this field? I can actually get a job in this field?"

The internship was with the Corps' Mandatory Center of Expertise for the Curation and Management of Archaeological Collections (MCX CMAC) working on a variety of Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) projects for MCX customers. As a physical anthropologist, Cathy worked to bring MCX customers into compliance with NAGPRA. "So, from soup to nuts. That meant going out, traveling a lot to different states doing site file and reports research, gleaning the information we needed from those reports, figuring out where the skeletons were in the closet. Literally." After analyzing the skeletons, Cathy and the others made recommendations to their customers on what to do.

Cathy's long-term goal was to become a permanent employee and that happened in 1998 when she accepted a full-time GS-9 position with the MCX. Beyond the benefits, she "wanted to be challenged every day and to do something different all the time. And working for the MCX for 20 some odd years, it gave me that. I got into things I didn't even know existed and things that I didn't know were possible. All archeologists, they always say, 'well we don't do dinosaurs.' Well I did work on dinosaurs, two in fact! Both were very well preserved T-Rex skeletons. One we had to move, with the Smithsonian Institution as our partner – I mean, who would have thought that I'd be able to do that? You can't envision that."



*The nation was able to follow the movement of the T-Rex across the country.*

So, how did the Corps of Engineers end up owning not one, but two T-Rex skeletons? Simple—the Corps is one of the government's largest stewards of federal lands and anything

recovered from federal land (which is managed by the government for the people of the United States) becomes part of the public trust—this includes minerals, fossils, natural resources, and historic and prehistoric cultural resources. The T-Rex, known as the Wankel Rex after its discoverer Kathy Wankel, had been found in 1988 at Fort Peck Lake, Montana, property which was under the control of the Corps of Engineers. Therefore the skeleton became the stewardship responsibility of the Corps. Since its excavation, the skeleton had been curated at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman, Montana. When the Smithsonian Institute started building their new Hall of Dinosaurs, they decided it was time to acquire an actual T-Rex skeleton rather than the casts they had used for years. Toward this end, the Smithsonian entered into a loan agreement with USACE for 50 years, with an option to renew the loan for another

50 years for the Wankel T-Rex. Once the loan documents were signed, the skeleton needed to be moved from the Museum of the Rockies to the Smithsonian's New Hall of Dinosaurs. In any curation project, it is necessary to conduct an exit inventory and condition assessment at the originating point and then an entrance inventory and condition assessment at the destination point.

This process provides a means to confirm that all elements were successfully delivered and with minimal damage done. Cathy was designated the Corps' representative for this process. "And so I was lucky enough to be able to go to Montana as the Corps representative and, with a Smithsonian representative and a Museum of the Rockies representative, to do a bone by bone, element by element conditional inventory." Once the exit inventory was completed, the skeleton

was carefully packed on a FEDEX critical services truck which made the trek to Washington, D.C in April 2014. Once at the Smithsonian, the truck was unpacked and the entrance inventory performed. This process was very high profile and members of the international press were present for every minute...and so was Cathy



*Cathy (second from left) with the inventory team at the Museum of the Rockies.*



as the Corps representative. Cathy recalls, “the local news media interviewed me, National Geographic interviewed me, BBC America... Washington Post...But every move was on camera, like camera, big camera, camera with a capital C...You had to watch every move and you had to watch everything you said. So yeah. It was enjoyable though. It was really neat.”

Cathy’s long-term goal was staying with the Corps. “I envisioned myself moving up and getting more and more responsibility and gaining more skills and learning more things. And I think I’ve done that. But eventually you hit a wall that you have to get around. Recent history has shown that I’ve had to get around walls and over walls and do something different in order to move forward and be challenged.” Even today, Cathy still plans to stay with the Corps: “to this day [I] don’t see myself not working for the Corps in some capacity.” In addition to working on several NAGPRA inventory projects, Cathy was involved in Native American consultation meetings. “These meetings can be very contentious at times but we have the same goal. It gives you a perspective that most people don’t get to see and a view of a way of thinking that we, as European or Afro European people, don’t often get to gain that insight on. It is so very valuable to just talk to people from different backgrounds and different perspectives. And then after the meeting they give you hugs, and they kiss you on the cheek,

and they slap your back and buy you a drink. And it’s like, ‘Okay, we did what we needed to do or we understand each other, let’s go have fun, let’s go to dinner.’ You can be yelling in a meeting but that’s just doing the job...now let’s be friends. I found that fascinating.”

As a physical anthropologist, Cathy’s work has touched many nationally significant projects of the last several decades, including Kennewick Man, the African Burial Ground project in New York City, and the Mass Graves Investigations in Iraq as part of the war crimes trial of Saddam Hussein and Chemical Ali. Cathy is proud of her involvement. In each case the take home point was the humanity of what she was studying. These were people “who lived and loved and hunted and ate and had likes and dislikes. I think every physical anthropologist has to step back for a minute and say, ‘Okay, what’s the goal here?’ We want these people accounted for. We just want to say, you were here, you are here, and we’re doing our best to get you where you belong.” With Kennewick Man, “there were times when we were there that the Native Americans would come in to do ceremonies. They invited us very often to participate in that and it’s very moving when they’re chanting and it’s very emotional for them.” For Cathy it was a reminder that “this person that we’re working on is alive to them.” She also was involved in the inventory and eventual re-interment of several burials recovered from a 17th century African

Burial Ground in New York City. This was a cemetery in New York City for enslaved people that was long thought to have been destroyed by development. For Cathy, it was a very moving experience. “Eventually they were packaged in these boxes that were carved in Africa, wrapped in muslin in the way the community honors their dead, and taken by horse drawn carriage back to the location they were disinterred. It’s now a national monument next to the federal building [in Manhattan].”

In the later part of 2015, Cathy’s work diversified again as she was looking for more challenges. “I wanted to see where else I fit, because I saw that I wasn’t probably going to progress much where I was professionally. I did a detail in Emergency Management, and it just so happened that two weeks before my detail was to start, we had a major flood event. A lot of people call it the Christmas Flood. So I was required to start my detail a couple of weeks early. I had also done a detail in Regulatory a couple of years back, which I loved. If an opportunity had come up in Regulatory, I might be there right now. But then there was an Emergency Management detail and I was given the opportunity to do that. It was very challenging, completely foreign to what I’m used to doing, but I got good feedback that I handle myself well in emergency situations and I know I’m smart enough to do what needs to be done. When the job opportunity came up about a year later to

fill that position permanently, I thought long and hard. ‘Do I want to change my life at 50 years old?’ ‘Am I ready, mentally, to upend my entire career and start over at 50?’ Weighing the pros and cons, I applied and got the position.”

Cathy describes herself as a lifetime learner and someone who strives for harmony. “I have learned to try and adapt and bring people together in any situation. Common ground is what I strive for.” When asked to describe her favorite position, she noted, “On the one hand, I loved just putting my head down and looking at skeletons and objects and reporting the empirical data that I was seeing. However, I recently was able to do a detail as a Section Chief in the Curation and Archives Analysis Branch. And while incredibly stressful considering some issues in that office, I felt like I made a difference to individuals, as well as the branch. I like to think that I was a calming influence as a supervisor. In that position, I saw myself as an advocate for the people who feel they weren’t heard. And not to say that I couldn’t take into account management perspectives as well.”

In Emergency Management (EM), she notes that most training was on-the-job, often in the middle of a difficult situation. “It was funny because when I first started my detail, in my first couple of days, I would pick up the phone during the emergency and I would have a homeowner who’s trying to sandbag, and ran

out of sandbags, and is trying to get their home protected. Then the next call could be from the Governor of Missouri. So it was trial by fire. You jumped in with both feet and if you didn't know, you found out. Shortly after I started in EM, I also deployed to Baton Rouge for a month. They had had severe flooding. And I thought I was going down to enter data. But no, I was in charge of seven people. I was the staffing battle captain down there for the entire mission for a month. I didn't know that until I walked in the door. That certainly was a learning experience too. Again, both feet, jumping in, little or no information, little or no training. And I had to make it work."

Mentoring has not played a significant role in most of Cathy's career. "I have a hard time coming up with anybody who I would call a mentor for most of my career. I felt like I was winging it, for the most part. There's always people who give you advice or who you can ask 'what do you think about this,' but not as a consistent voice. I feel that recently Rochelle Hance was a mentor. She had the right balance of assertiveness, and compassion, and perspective to say, 'Okay, where should I fall on this?' She is highly respected as an engineer and a manager of people. And I look to her and think, well, 'that's what I want to be.' Overall she can handle people and she's not afraid to say no, not afraid to call BS on somebody, and not afraid to say 'I need this from you and I expect

it from you,' but not being unfair about it. So that was eye-opening to me and I had a very limited time with her to do that. I also had an official mentor during LDP and I did not take advantage of that relationship like I could have. I didn't understand what it meant to be a mentee and what my responsibility was to foster that relationship. And I, frankly, grew up thinking that I don't want to be a bother to anybody. One person now, who I feel I can go to and talk, and who is very open and a great professional is Ashley Cox. She's very smart, and again, not somebody to put up with BS. But again, I'm hesitant to bother her. She's a young woman with a family who is dedicated to her job. She's making a difference, considered an expert, and Deputy of Operations, which is huge in the Corps. And one of very few women in that type of position in the Operations Division."

Cathy doesn't see herself in a position to mentor. "There are people that I've helped. There's somebody right now who, I don't know if I'd call myself a mentor, but I'm a colleague who worked with her in Baton Rouge who's helping her try and get a job in EM in another district." Tammie Bush feels that Cathy was definitely a mentor to her as the collateral duty safety officer, then as a colleague at EC-Z, and finally as their acting deputy branch chief. When asked what she attributes her success to, Cathy points to being intelligent, flexible, adaptable, accessible, and pragmatic. "I think it's clear that you have

to be willing to do anything. You're never so high up that you can't make photocopies for somebody. You are never too high a pay grade to do any job." While she feels that sometimes people treated her differently because she is a woman, she doesn't feel it impacted the trajectory of her career. She notes that while attitudes may or may not have changed, workplace rules have. As for balancing a career and a family life, for Cathy, it depends on what's going on at home and at work. "If we're in flood and I'm working 12-14 hour days, seven days a week, family life is going to be different. And vice versa. I mean, my kid plays on three hockey teams, so like tonight, I have to be out of here by 3:30 on the dot in order to get him to a game tonight. When I deployed for a month, I came home to a son that made me promise never to be gone a month again. So yes, your job affects your family and your family affects your job." What advice would Cathy give a young woman who is just starting her career? "Be flexible. Don't sweat the small stuff. Don't worry about anybody else. If you want something, it's up to you to get it. There's going to be hurdles. There's going to be people in your way. That's their problem, not yours, honestly." One particular Corps project that holds special significance for Cathy is the Veterans Curation

## THE VARIED EXPRESSIONS OF CVA



*A fun tribute to Cathy and her work at the VCP.*

Program (VCP). The VCP was started to provide veterans a bridging experience from military service into the public sector and to process at-risk archaeological collections belonging to the Corps. "I remember the first graduation. It was the St. Louis Lab's graduation and I really had a relationship with the people that were in that room. I bawled my fool head off when I was up there giving my speech because it was personal to me that, even if we only made a difference for one person in that audience, that all this other BS was worth it because that one person's life was better, and they have a different path. They're going to college or they got a job or they just have more confidence. They jumped over the hurdle of coming home from war." Cathy is grateful for the opportunity to have helped them jump over some of the hurdles they experienced after they returned.



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# ROMANDA WALKER

*Public Affairs Office, Deputy Chief*

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Romanda Walker came to the Corps through a program designed to recruit college students with disabilities. “A recruiter reached out to me. I was part of a program called the Work Force Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities. This federal program takes people with disabilities and pairs them up with different federal jobs.” She worked for the St. Louis District for a few summers prior to accepting a permanent position. One summer she spent in Planning, working with other biologists in the district, but the other summers she spent in the Public Affairs Office. “After I graduated with my master’s, there was a job that came open in Public Affairs which is where I’ve been working ever since.”

Before coming to the district, Romanda had a different long-term goal, but her hobbies changed the direction of her career. “I wanted to be a doctor. That’s what I was actually going to school for. My undergraduate degree is in Biology, and my master’s is in Bio-Informatics. I did a lot with programming, website design, and graphics, just as a hobby, and I had that on my resume when I applied here. They needed someone in Public Affairs that could do that, so that’s how I got here.” Romanda credits Mary Markos and Dave Busse for having the greatest impact on her career. “She was a public affairs specialist when I came on full time. She really taught me the journalist’s skills that I didn’t have as a biologist. As a biologist, we write

our reports differently than the way things are written for the media. She taught me a lot of those skills and encouraged me to do more. Dave Busse was my mentor when I was in the Leadership Development Program. Whenever I had an issue or problem, I stopped by his office. He is a guy with a lot of knowledge.”

Romanda believes growing up with a disability created a work ethic that has contributed to her success. “When you have a disability, people always tell you what you can’t do, but my parents were very tough people that told me you’re going to do it and to figure out a way to do it. That type of attitude has transferred to other parts of my life, especially in my career. I’ll see something that I don’t know how to do, and I’ll teach myself so that I will be able to do it.”



*Romanda was crowned first runner up in the 2008 Ms. Wheelchair USA.*

Romanda feels that it was challenging coming in as a student and developing into a professional her colleagues would recognize. “When you come in as a student, people see you as a student. Transferring from that role as a student to a full-time permanent employee is not easy. Some thought I got the job just because of my disability. I felt like I had to prove to people that no, I got the job because I’m qualified. I think once people were able to see my work, then they started to respect me.” In addition to feeling underestimated because



*Romanda as Captain of Driving Force wheel chair power soccer team.*

of her disability and age, Romanda feels that there was an expectation that her role would be better fit by a man: “in my position in Public Affairs, we’re seen as the voice, and I think a lot of times people feel that should be a man’s voice. That is an expectation I struggled with.” She also indicates that working in a chronically understaffed office, often without a supervisor

for long periods of time, has also created some unique challenges. In spite of this expectation, Romanda feels empowered by working with other women to be the voice of USACE, “There are three women in our office now. I do our social media, our web, and speak with the media, and it’s in real time because any time you have a disaster you get a lot of concerned people. That’s important.”

Romanda may also be seen in the Emergency Operations Center any time there is flooding or

other crisis, answering phones as well as maintaining the district’s social media outlets.

“Being able to put those safety messages out there, speaking with the media—letting them know that our guys are out on the ground. It’s really, in a sense, satisfying. You do get those people that are concerned. I’ve received social media messages from people who are in a different country,

but their family is in that area and they want to know what’s going on, or are they okay.”

Romanda believes that while more work needs to be done to improve work life for women at USACE, she has noticed an improvement, and visibility is an important part of that change. “I feel like people do respect me more. They see my efforts. They see that I care about the District and

about the mission. Interacting more with senior leaders also helped to help bridge that gap. I want to continue to work on making that gap smaller.”

Romanda feels empowered seeing women in top level positions. “I’m inspired by Susan Wilson and Ashley Cox. They are women who have made it far in their career paths and they’re sitting up there on top with powerful men, calling the shots. I don’t know if that’s something that I aspire to be, but I admire them just because they are comfortable there if anything, and they also are very forthcoming in sharing their knowledge. There is also Phyllis Thomas. She’s a wealth of knowledge with what she shares and she’s very compassionate. She is a great resource of institutional knowledge. I admire her.”

One of Romanda’s most memorable experiences was when she went to Wappapello Lake. “I was working with Cindy Jackson, who was the Operations Manager at the time. The highlight of that whole trip was I got to shoot a rifle for the first time ever. Wappapello Lake worked with different partner agencies to adapt their weapons so the people with disabilities are able to actually use the weapons safely. I never



*Romanda at an Accessible Deer Hunt at Wappapello Lake.*

thought I’d be able to shoot a rifle, but the way they had it set up it was easy. It was very eye opening and powerful.” While Romanda values her role as a Public Affairs Specialist, there are other opportunities she would like to explore. “I do have a really strong relationship with our field sites, and I do admire our rangers. Eventually, I want to do a detail doing some stuff with interpretive services. I know it’ll definitely be a valuable experience because I’ll get to speak to the public on a daily basis and put on different programs.” In some ways a detail like this would only capitalize on the experience she’s already had. Currently she is part of the interpretive services outreach team and on the National Water Safety Committee.

One of her proudest moments was when she placed first in a national video contest. “The video that I created highlighted accessibility at



our projects.” She has worked on several notable video projects in the district, including the 2016 Women’s History Program. She and Tim Prescott worked together to create the video that ran in the background for that event.

Romanda would recommend USACE to young women beginning their careers. “There are a lot of opportunities to advance, such as women like Susan Wilson and Ashley Cox. I would encourage them to seek out other women mentors at the Corps because there are a lot of amazing women that aren’t always at the forefront. I definitely would encourage them to meet people, and let people know who they are. Get away from the desk and meet people; seek out mentors, especially women, in the district.”



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# SUSAN WILSON

*Deputy of Programs and Project Management Division*

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Susan Wilson's career began with USACE in 2004, starting as a project manager, even though most project managers usually spend time in Planning or Engineering in the district first. She and her spouse had recently returned to Missouri, their home state, and she decided to interview for a job in the St. Louis District office. She stayed, she says, because she liked what she found. Prior to that, she had been a business development analyst at Teledyne Brown Engineering in Huntsville, Alabama, where she worked with NASA and Department of Defense contractors. She holds a B.S. in Engineering Management from the University of Missouri-Rolla (now Missouri University of Science and Technology), professional engineer license, and project management professional certification. She also completed the St. Louis District Leadership Development Program, but her mentors and role models have been even more formative.

Susan speaks highly of the many excellent mentors she's had. She worked closely with Brian Kleber, who trained her in her role as project manager, and David Busse trained her as the business line manager. Dennis Fenske, who had originally hired her, mentored her in the Leadership Development Program and continues even in his retirement to serve as her mentor. She credits Mike Dace with helping her advance in the Corps. "He pushed me, was always pushing me to try and do more." And

Joe Kellett, she says, advised her "to think about what I wanted to do and think long term—and to take more on, do more things to further my career."

Although she worked with many male mentors, several women served as role models for her. She looked up to Jackie Taylor, and from Deanne Strauser, who retired as a branch chief, she learned that women in USACE could advance to high positions. She also worked closely with Cindy Jackson, whom she calls "a strong female leader." Karen Watwood was a particular inspiration to Susan. Karen is, she says, "so super capable in her job, her technical knowledge, and her ability to solve problems. She just figures out a way to get things done."

Susan's parents laid the groundwork for her success at the Corps. Her father, she says, "would always say the main thing is to not get excited," advice she's shared with her own mentees about staying calm. "You know, it's all relative," she says. "I may be busy and have a lot of meetings, but there's nothing really worth getting excited over. Just do your job." And her mother encouraged her as well, telling her she could do anything she wanted to do. "She instilled in me a great self-confidence."

Susan's career has spanned "the big three" divisions—Project Management, Operations, and Engineering and Construction. She was

young when she began at USACE, so although she liked her job as project manager and liked the people, she wasn't sure whether this was a long-term career move for her. But as she was mentored, she began to climb through the ranks and expand her repertoire of career skills. Around 2007, she became P2 coordinator and flood risk management business line manager, still within the Project Management Division. (P2 is project management software used in the Corps.). She moved to Programs around 2009, as the division P2 coordinator, where she got to know many people in the division staff. As always, it is the people she remembers most.

From there, Susan did a stint as the chief of Operations Division-Technical Services Branch and was later hired permanently for the position, which she held for a couple of years. She worked a detail as the assistant chief of operations during a furlough, a particularly trying time. When she began the position, she came from being on furlough herself, and the role required her to put others on furlough. "It just kept getting quieter and quieter around here," she remembers. In December 2014, she was selected to be the assistant chief of Engineering and Construction. After several years in that division, she worked briefly as the Chief of Programs and Project Management before being permanently selected for the role in May 2018. Shortly after she started with the Corps, there was a gate failure at the auxiliary lock at Mel Price (Melvin Price

Lock and Dam), which allowed her "to see a lot of different people and see how we work in an emergency situation." This grace under fire and spirit of teamwork are core parts of her USACE experience, and Susan likes to be hands-on and right in the thick of it. "As a project manager, you're solving problems. That's always been my role," she says. She particularly enjoyed being deputy for Engineering and Construction, "because you get to work [across all branches] and you're solving different problems every day. It's always something new. I never knew when I came in what today's problem would be."

Although she relishes the nitty gritty of the job, she credits her success to her willingness to work with people and develop relationships, which has helped her advance and "take on those challenging projects," such as making the P2 coordinator job her own. "My thought was I either take it on so I can figure it out, because we've got to use it and know it better, or just ignore it." That position and the extra duty of being business line manager, she says, "helped position me and expand the people that I knew and worked with."

Mentoring is "one of my favorite parts of the job," she says, so much so that she's been unofficially limited in how many people she can mentor in the Leader Development Program. But she participates in several official mentoring programs and mentors unofficially as

well, and pushes back some on the restriction. “Sometimes people are looking for a specific thing that we may not necessarily have a lot of. So let me mentor them if that is what they are interested in.” Through the Leader Development Program, she has helped many find their place in the district and then “see where they can go.” She advises those early in their career that the Corps “will give you a lot of opportunities. It’s what you make of it, so take advantage of every option that they give you.”

For Susan, being female in the Corps has never been difficult, perhaps because the culture had already changed significantly by the time she began, and there were already more female engineers. But she’s “heard the stories about people.” She feels certain, however, that, in the St. Louis District, women have the same opportunities men do. But she has also faced disbelief about her position in the Corps, more so when she travels, “even within the Corps.” People frequently assume she is someone’s plus one. She also tells of how, on more than one occasion, when sitting on an interview panel and asking a candidate about diversity, they have replied “oh, I can work with all types, even ‘her type.’” One would assume

the dubious title of “her type” refers to women, as many of the panels consisted of her with the rest as males. On one occasion the individual expounded on how he could work with “her type,” never once saying the word women. Susan stated that many times the male panel members are more upset about the comments. One other situation where Susan was questioned about her position, involved introductions to an individual from another Corps district. There were three from St. Louis that were introducing themselves to someone visiting from another Corps office. After the St. Louis team members introduced themselves, the other individual looked surprised and asked the male St. Louis team member, “what, she is your boss?” To which the male replied, “Yes, she is; she says jump and I say how high?”



*Susan at Mel Price Lock and Dam.*

Being in the Corps as a parent was challenging for her, though she’s felt supported in that

challenge. She's taken advantage of the ability to work a nontraditional schedule, and at one point, she worked part-time. She says, "It never held me back from getting any job. It was never looked upon poorly. I always tell people it's an option we are supportive of." The Corps, she believes, wants to keep good people and does a good job of it, with several options for flexibility. In particular, the people she works with are "very good about letting me take care of my family responsibilities." When she's home with a sick child, Colonel Sizemore, her immediate superior, calls her at home to check in on the family. And David Busse, she relates, would sometimes ask her, "Why are you still here? Get home. You're supposed to leave."

Susan feels particularly proud of working in the St. Louis USACE District office when there's a flood event. "The district as a whole is just so good at it. People are willing to give up their personal lives, be out in the field, whether it's hot weather, cold weather" and to work as a team in "not ideal situations." And she can see the results in the communities and hear their praise for the Corps' efforts. "The St. Louis District is so good to work for and such a good group of people. It's all about relationships and communication," she says, "working with people and the unique qualities of each person, figuring out people who are different and how they can work together. We need that mix."



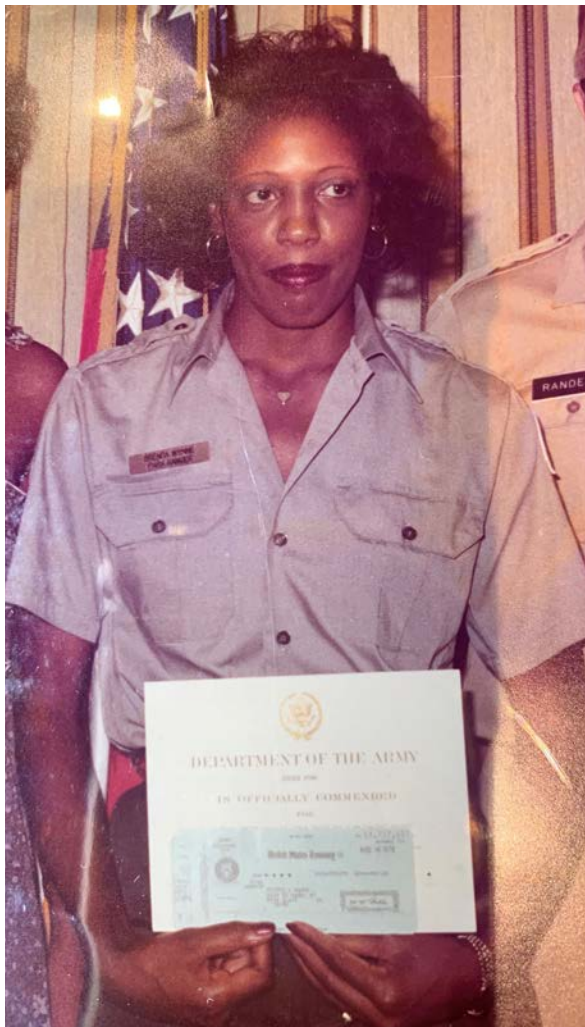
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# BRENDA WYNNE- GEORGE

*Contracting Division, Chief (Retired)*

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**B**renda Wynne-George started at USACE in 1978 as a cooperative education student while she was earning her Bachelor's degree in physical education. After her graduation in 1980, she became the first African American park ranger for the St. Louis District (at Carlyle Lake) and was featured in *Essence* magazine. Her trailblazing days were not limited to her time at Carlyle, however; she finished her career as the first female Chief of Contracting in St. Louis District.



*Brenda as a young park ranger.*

As a co-op working for the Little Rock District, she witnessed a young woman drown. “I was a park ranger out patrolling with my partner at the time, and this young lady was drowning in the Arkansas River. She was panicked. I took off my belt and my boots, and I dove into the Arkansas River to try to save this young lady. Unfortunately, I couldn’t save her. But it was a moment in my career that really stuck out. I was rewarded for that effort and I think that’s what really sealed the deal for me to get a permanent job with the Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District as a park ranger at Carlyle Lake. That was my very first job after graduating college in 1980.”

When the Corps went through a Reduction in Force (RIF) in 1982, Brenda left the Corps and started working for the U.S. Army Aviation and Troop Command, but base closures and the need to keep her family together led her back to the District. “I worked for the U.S. Army Aviation and Troop Command from 1982 until 1997. In that year, Aviation and Troop Command was closing. They were on the base closure list, and they were moving to Huntsville, Alabama. My husband, Timothy George, was working for the Corps of Engineers [St. Louis District] and didn’t want to move. I was fortunate enough to get back on with the Corps so that I would not have to move and separate my family.” Brenda had a clear goal when she returned to the Corps: “my long-term goal was to get back



my supervisory status and to become the chief of contracting. I had gone through an extensive intern program while working for the Aviation and Troop Command. I came to the Corps as a Contract Specialist. I was a GS 13 supervisor at the Aviation and Troop Command at the time of the base closure, and I took a downgrade to a GS 11, but I retained my pay...And in 1999, I believe, I applied for the Deputy of Small Business position. I was there a little over a year and then I got the Chief of Contracting job in 2000.” But this was not the end of challenges she encountered. While she had achieved her goal of becoming Chief of Contracting, she realized there were still inequities present in the Division when it came to the grade of the Contracting Chiefs. Brenda’s position was graded as a GS-13, yet the Contracting Chiefs in Vicksburg and New Orleans Districts were graded as GS-14 positions. It took a few years, but Brenda’s persistence and professionalism eventually won out and the St. Louis District position was graded as a GS-14.

Brenda took pride in her work as the Chief of Contracting. “Being ultimately responsible for the execution of the district’s contractual mission

was very rewarding for me. When we were tagged to help New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit, it was challenging getting those contracts awarded and successfully executed. That brought me the most excitement. We were able to accept the challenge and were very successful in getting all that money obligated and those contracts rewarded in a timely manner. I was very fortunate to do what I loved.”



*Brenda (at right in back row) and the Contracting Division in 2004.*

With a challenging career, Brenda credits her supportive husband for helping her balance her home and work life. “I traveled a lot, and he was very supportive. He was always willing to take care of the girls while I traveled. He encouraged me. We’d bounce things off of each other as far as situations or challenges I was having at work. If it had not been for him, I would not have been able to balance that and my kids.” She also credits her higher being—“I am not a fanatical

religious person, but it's like God controls my destiny. He controls every peak. He controls everything. I firmly believe that. And I give credit to that spiritual being for my success."

No other person has been more inspiration to Brenda than her mother. "She was my mentor throughout my career. I would always remember her words to me, and that no matter what the situation, no matter what the circumstances, you just have to remember who's in control. I passed that on to others. I was always of the belief that no one in the district controlled my destiny." Brenda shared that wisdom of taking control of destiny to other women at the District. "I was a part of the Leadership [Development] Program [LDP] as a mentor. I had Tan Gates. I had Jennifer Riordan in the curation area. There was other, a lot of the African American women, like Sheila Burnett, that would come to me and talk to me, and I would give them advice and words of encouragement. I always welcomed talking to others to encourage them and to try to give them some guidance."

Brenda felt that being a minority added additional challenges to being in a leadership position. "If you look at the Corps of Engineers overall, there are very few minority women in management type positions. Being a woman and a person of color, it was difficult to get a predominantly white male group of people to understand that I know what I'm doing. I was

treated differently, especially when I went down to Vicksburg, Mississippi. There's that old adage that we have to work twice as hard to get the same recognition. That's true. I have always felt very conscious of who I was. I wanted to make sure that when I spoke, I spoke with authority, the authority that I had, and I made sure that I spoke with knowledge. I always made sure that I had dotted all the I's and crossed all the T's before I went into a meeting or wrote a position on something because I knew that it was going to be scrutinized.



*Brenda enjoys her retirement in a more recent photo.*

Brenda observes that while opportunities are available, it is still difficult for women of color to enter leadership positions. "I worked with

a very, very smart engineer for years and this person had applied for the Deputy of Program and Project Management position at least twice while I was in the district and never got it. It was always filled by a white male. I still think that discrimination there still exists. I don't think they have an equal opportunity. I think they [i.e., women] perhaps have more opportunity, but I don't think that it's equal." Ironically, her words turned out to be prophetic, the current DPM for the District is Susan Wilson. While Brenda feels the Corps has work to do in order to have more inclusive workforce with more women of color in leadership positions, she has observed a change in the culture and believes there are great opportunities for women beginning their careers at USACE. She advises women new to the Corps to "get in there and understand our mission. Find what you can do to contribute to that mission and then do all that you can to make that mission successful. Leave your footprint. Find out what it is you bring to the table and do that. And stick with it and find pride in it."



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# BEVERLY YOUNGBLOOD

*Equal Opportunity Office, Equal Employment Specialist*

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**B**everly Youngblood joined the Department of Defense (DoD) in April 2011 working as an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Assistant with the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC) at Scott Air Force Base. Prior to that, she worked in the private sector as a supervisor managing call centers. According to Beverly, her first job was in a donut shop, “Some Kinda Donuts” as a customer relations representative. She worked there for six months from 4:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. making donuts; a job that she hated. Beverly stated, “working for ‘Some Kinda Donuts’ made me realize that I needed to continue my education because this was not the job for me.”

Beverly has a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration and a Master’s Degree in Management. She is also a DoD-certified Mediator. She explains that, “when I attended DEOMI, which is the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute as a soldier in the military, I participated in a 40-hour training class and upon completion became a certified mediator.” She has received two Commander’s Civilian Awards, one from Colonel Mitchell, USACE and the other from Colonel Ines White, SDDC.

A U.S. Army veteran, Beverly’s devotion to the Army is part of what brought her to the Corps. She still serves in the Army Reserve, although

she’s planning to retire on December 1, 2020. The day before the interview for this vignette, she reached her 30-year milestone. She stated that, “sometimes I wish I had enlisted into the active duty army instead of reserve. I’ve always loved the Army. When I was a 17 year old in high school, I remember writing a paper about what I was going to do after high school, and I said, ‘join the Army.’ I just didn’t want to join at that particular moment. It’s always been a part of me, and now that I’ve seen how my career has grown, it makes me wonder what I could have been had I enlisted into the active duty army.”

She is not surprised to have been with the Corps as long as she has. She stated, “I’ve never been a job hopper. Usually when I find a job, I try to stay there as long as possible; as long as there’s some type of promotion potential. And because I love EEO, I’m happy...It’s been great for me. I joined USACE in 2013 as a GS-9 and now I’m a GS-12, so it has worked out.”

Equal Employment Opportunity is a passion for Beverly. She was introduced to the world of Equal Opportunity (EO) as an Equal Opportunity Advisor in the military. She thought, “how can I make my EO Advisor skills work for me in the private sector, government sector, wherever?” She stated, “One day I got lucky. After being downsized, I was going through USA Jobs and just happened to see an EEO Assistant position open at SDDC. I applied and was offered the

job. As an EEO Assistant with SDDC, I was a GS-6 who fell under the 0360 series and capped out as a GS-7.” She told herself, “In order to advance in my career as an EEO professional, I have to become part of the 0260 series.” She received a promotion within the 0260 series and came to USACE in October 2013 as an EEO Specialist.



*Beverly in uniform; she has dual careers in EEO.*

Beverly has had a remarkably smooth career at USACE, without major challenges. “Honestly, I don’t feel like I’m being treated differently because I’m a woman.” From what she can see, she thinks women get the same opportunities for advancement and promotion. “I’ve seen both women and men get promoted at USACE.” When she has conducted staff assistant visits at the lake offices ensuring employees are aware of the services provided by the EEO office, she’s observed that the same conditions hold there.

Beverly indicated that sometimes it’s difficult to balance her job, other interests, and obligations. “I work for USACE. I’m a soldier. I teach GED classes at night and have a son. I’m a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. I have a lot going on. Sometimes I just don’t know which way I’m going, but I always make time for myself and try to keep everything in perspective. It’s probably gotten harder as I’ve gotten older, but it’s going to calm down because I’m retiring from the Army Reserve and I’m giving up teaching the GED classes.”

Beverly attributes her success to “taking advantage of opportunities when they are presented. She sees the value in completing any task given to her, even if there is no compensation involved. If an opportunity presents itself, I’ll say, ‘Okay, I can handle the task.’ For example, we have soldiers who are required to complete specific military trainings. I had just finished

Master Resilience Training (MRT) and I'm EEO in the military; someone was needed to provide the soldiers training and I said, 'I'll do it.' I wasn't looking for anything just trying to keep my skills updated. I volunteered and an opportunity presented itself, which worked in my favor." Beverly would recommend anyone starting at the Corps to do the same. "When an opportunity is presented to you, you need to take it, because you never know when you might need it later." She thinks the Corps of Engineers is a good workplace for young women to begin their careers. "For me, I like stability, and I think working here would give someone just starting out stability."

Treva Smith and Tandika Gates have both been influential mentors for her. "Smith at SDDC pretty much provided me with a foundation for being successful within DoD. She always told me to work beyond the grade that you are currently working in. She would tell me, 'If you stay ready, you won't have to get ready.' She was right," Youngblood says. "Once I left SDDC, Tan became a mentor. She developed me by giving me challenging opportunities and encouraging me to trust my judgment. When I transferred to USACE, I could relate to her, because she had started out as an EEO Assistant as well. I could see that even though I started as an EEO Assistant, there was potential for me to move up. I've witnessed two (2) EEO Assistants climb the ladder of success, and that confirms

that there is promotion potential within this profession."

Tan Gates passed some priceless advice on to Youngblood. "She always told me 'You don't have to do anything outside of your character to advance. Just remain humble and everything will fall into place.'" Another piece of advice she passed on is to let your actions speak for you. "I'm an introvert. I speak when necessary and allow my actions to do the rest. It is my opinion that people see me and say, 'Okay, she may not speak often but she's definitely about business.'"

Beverly has developed and coordinated several Women's History month events since her arrival at MVS. "In March 2019, I decided to keep the program small and decided on a Lunch and Learn. The Women's History Month theme for 2019 was 'Visionary Women: Champions of Peace & Nonviolence.' It was to honor women who have led efforts to end war, violence and injustice to change society. While working in private sector, I was employed at a law firm and met Judge Renee Hardin-Tammons, who at the time was an attorney as well as a judge in Berkeley, Missouri. I'm very big on networking and kept in touch with her after I left the law firm. At the time of this program, she was an Associate Circuit Judge in St. Louis County. I thought she would be the perfect fit for the theme and invited her to come and tell her story on how commitment, character and courage

assisted her in achieving success. We had a great turnout of female as well as male employees.”

Beverly has also done mentoring through the Clyde C. Miller Program. She maintains some of these relationships and speaks of one young woman she mentored through the program, Destinee Valentine-McSellers. “She was here four years ago. She’s married, expecting her first child and doing great.” Beverly continues to maintain prior contacts while developing new ones. Another example of this skill was when she had the opportunity to develop and organize the Women’s History Program for the District in 2016.

The St. Louis District Women’s History Program for 2016 is one of Beverly’s proudest moments. “I thought outside the box because I tend to be creative. For that particular event, I wanted it to look like a red carpet event, and that’s what we turned it into – a red carpet event that celebrated the district’s Women in Leadership accomplishments.” Using her networking skills yet again, she arranged for Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Kevin McKeller, retired from Surface Deployment and Distribution Command to come and present each honoree with a SDDC coin. The event provided all women within the district an opportunity to visualize that it does not matter where you start in life, there is always potential for growth and success. It was well received. She feels the

program was important and made an impact on women’s lives. “It was really special, because we took the time to select the ladies and make the red carpet event memorable. We had a nice fellowship afterwards, and I think they actually got a lot out of it. My goal was for the ladies to visually see that you can do anything with perseverance. You can start as an EEO Assistant and work your way up the career ladder. It is possible.”





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# JULIE ZIINO

*Southwestern Division, Executive Officer*

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Julie Ziino spent six years doing interpretive service and working at several parks starting as a GS-1 Park Ranger with the National Park Service (NPS) before coming to the Corps. Her husband also worked for the NPS, and in 1991, they transferred to her hometown in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. “At that point,” Julie says, “I switched over to the Army Corps of Engineers.” She wasn’t sure just how long she would be in St. Louis because NPS rangers generally were reassigned to new parks every three to five years. If her husband was reassigned to another park, she would be moving again. Fortunately for the Corps, he was allowed to stay at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (more commonly known as the Gateway Arch), so Julie made the St. Louis District’s Riverlands Office (now the Rivers Project Office) her home for the next 10 years. Her career with the District began as a temporary GS-4 Park Ranger position. From there, she moved into a developmental, but permanent, position as a GS-5/7/9 Park Ranger.

Julie’s career with the Corps began with 10 years in the field, during which she “came into the District office the Public Affairs Chief position for a four-month detail.” After returning to the field for a bit, she says, “I was pulled up into the Executive Office when Jen Greer took a detail to Washington, D.C.” The position became permanent, and she held it for 16 years. Since then, she has worked as a GS-14 Executive Officer in the North Atlantic Division in

Brooklyn, and now, she says, “I’m a GS-15 in Southwestern Division, the Executive Officer. And Texas is much warmer than New York.”

When asked about her favorite job, she says that “all of them are a heck of a lot of fun. You’ve got to make it fun. But my dream job growing up was Park Ranger. The best part was being someone who engaged the public every day and told our story. There are folks that know nothing about the Corps and folks that know a lot about the Corps, then there is this big gap in the middle. That’s where we focused our attention, embedding ourselves into the community, being relevant so that people understood the Corps mission. Plus, you get a cool hat,” she jokes. “I mean, come on.”

One of her favorite memories of the Corps is of when Trumpeter swans first came to Riverlands. “They were being re-introduced into the Mississippi flyway, and they had traveled down from Minnesota and were banded and tracked. Charlie Deutsch was a young Park Ranger; I think he was still in high school. He and I were out there on a cold winter day counting Trumpeters and trying to get their numbers, and this trumpeter swan just loved Charlie. Trumpeters typically don’t come up to people, but this one just loved him and hated me. It would chase me away, and I had to jump into the car because I thought it was going to attack me. But it loved Charlie. When I left the St

Louis District a few years ago, the team at Rivers Project gave me the most beautiful photograph of trumpeter swans on Field Pond. Charlie just chuckled.”

When asked about her mentors, Julie names several—Pat McGinnis, Jennifer Greer, and several St. Louis Commanders. “For the Corps,” she says, “first and foremost is Pat McGinnis. Pat had very high expectations. If you did not meet those expectations, it was like disappointing your father. He was such a visionary for the project; his thought process was five years, ten years ahead of mine. It was really fun to take his vision and make it work.” It was Pat who put Julie in charge of the development and construction of the National Great Rivers Museum co-located with the Melvin Price Locks and Dam in Alton, Illinois. She recalls Pat McGinnis handing that project “over to me and said, ‘here, make this successful.’ But he didn’t leave me...we embedded ourselves into the community and we challenged the community—what do you want? What do you want this to be? Building those relationships with the community, having those working meetings, bringing a design contractor on board and sharing with them, here’s what the community wants.” She’s particularly proud of the team she built at Riverlands: “a lot of those team members are still with the Corps and in some awesome leadership positions,” she says. When she was debating whether to

apply for a temporary position as the acting Executive Assistant, which would mean a move to the District Office, her assigned mentor in the Emerging Leaders Program, Charlie Hess, told her, “Well, you have to,” she says. “It was just pretty blunt and out there. ‘If you want to contribute in the way you have the talent to, your next step is the Executive Office.’ He was right.” About Jennifer Greer, she remarks that “filling her shoes was very difficult, but she helped guide me and we remain friends today, which is a blessing.” And the best advice she’s ever received was “from Colonel Skip Setliff, when we were trying to build trust in New Orleans: ‘Presence can lead to trust; trust can lead to influence.’ I have hung onto it. It sits under a glass on my desk.”

Julie has paid it forward as a mentor herself. “Mary Markos came on to the St Louis District as a U.S. Army intern. Mary was of such a caliber that you certainly remember her, and she was very passionate about making sure we were telling our story. That resonated with me, working so closely with the District Commander and making sure that they are in the right place with the right people saying the right thing. I saw Mary being able to make commanders successful. I latched onto her and kept her close, and I think we made a good team. Mary is now the Chief of Public Affairs for the Southwestern Division. She sits right next to me. I think we mentored each other, actually.”

Julie takes particular pride in the St. Louis District's emergency management responses to natural disasters throughout the nation. "When Katrina hit," she says, "the team rallied and volunteered to do whatever, whether it was on the coast, in New Orleans, doing the Blue Roof team, whatever. I remember Colonel Setliff getting the phone call from [Brigadier] General Crear saying, 'Go unwater the Superdome.' He looked at me like, 'How do we do that?' Everybody rallied to serve and be helpful to a group of people who were so impacted. That was a really proud moment for me, and being able to stay down there [in New Orleans] and help out was personally impactful to me."

Working in New Orleans during post-Katrina recovery efforts (officially known as Task Force Guardian) was also a significant challenge because her children were still young. "I was maybe a little crazy, but to me, my job was to be there for the Commander, to do whatever I needed to help him and the District succeed. There was no question in my mind that I was going to New Orleans with him. He questioned it, because of my family, but I didn't want to be that wussy employee saying, 'No, I have to stay home because of my family.' Leaving them for almost a year—I did get to come home occasionally—was a challenge. It was a good one, and it made me stronger. It certainly had a positive impact on my boys. There's always some negative impacts, but they are both very

resourceful, independent young men. They were able to get themselves up in the morning and get themselves cleaned up and dressed and fed, then my sister would pick them up and take them to school."

While Julie experienced some challenges balancing her family and her work, the Corps offered flexibility that helped. "I have a really hard time saying no," she says. "I worked long hours, odd hours, and was blessed with bosses that gave me flexibility to be where I needed for my kids or my family or to take off two weeks in the middle of the summer for a mission camp with our church. I don't know how I did it. You just do it. Plus, I have an awesome husband who was there when I couldn't be there and my kids were independent and resourceful. I didn't have to worry about them."

With her children grown and her husband retired, Julie's challenges have changed. She wants to spend time with her husband and any grandchildren she may have, and she sees technology making that possible. "I take my laptop home every day and I can hammer things out at 10 o'clock at night. It helps me make sure that things are running the way they're supposed to. Today, I needed to come in a little bit later, and that's okay, because we have the ability, and I'm in a position where I can do that." She attributes her success to "trying to learn as much as I can about what we do. I

would drive Dave Busse crazy, sit down in his office and say, ‘Okay, help me understand this.’ I think I did that because of a drive to learn and because my job as the Executive Assistant was to provide the best advice I could to the Commander and the leaders of the District. I wanted them to rely on me, and I tried to earn that by knowing the policies, our customers, our partners, and the relationships.”

Although she saw women being treated differently in other places, she didn’t see it in the St Louis office. “It shows the caliber of people we have in the St Louis family,” she says. “I think it has to do with the region also. I’ve worked in different places, and each District is a little bit different. St Louis is pretty much even keel. I look across the District at the women in leadership roles in St Louis District, and it’s impressive. That says a lot about the civilian leadership of the District. They treat people well.” However, she also says “certain people, the older generation of engineers” treated her differently as a non-engineer, and “that gets back to having to earn respect, having to know what I was talking about.” Julie would recommend the Corps to women starting a career, and would tell them “to build relationships, to build trust. I would tell them to learn as much as they possibly can about who they are and who they serve, then make sure they’re always stay relevant in what they do. I would tell them presence can lead to trust, trust can lead to influence.”

In her office, Julie has a hard hat autographed by George W. Bush and his wife Laura, with whom she “was honored” to participate on a tour of the Corp’s work in restoring New Orleans after Katrina. “I’m proud that I have a [bronze] de Fleury from Colonel Hall,” she says when asked about her awards. “I’m looking around my office, and there’s certainly some commander awards and some very nice gifts that are very meaningful to me. But I think the best award is that I that still have relationships and friends that I care about and that care about me. That’s the best reward.”



*Julie with President George W. Bush in post-Katrina New Orleans.*

## DE FLEURY RECIPIENTS

In the late 1980s, the US Army Corps of Engineers adopted a means to honor those individuals who have provided significant contributions to Army Engineering. This award was named after Francois-Louis Teissedre de Fleury, a French Engineer in the Continental Army of the newly formed United States. The Engineer Regiment makes four award levels of the de Fleury medal—steel, bronze, silver, and gold.

As a reference, here is the list of women who have worked in the St. Louis District and the level awarded.

Burnett, Shelia* .....	Bronze	Choisser, Brenda.....	Steel
Coffey, Frances (Beth)* .....	Bronze	Haslett, Sarah.....	Steel
Collins, Jane* .....	Bronze	Hegger, Janine.....	Steel
Craig, Rosemary* .....	Bronze	Hilligoss-Volkman, Erin.....	Steel
Engelman, Kathy* .....	Bronze	Hinton, Yvette.....	Steel
Greer, Jennifer* .....	Bronze	Hollenberg, Samantha.....	Steel
Heberer, Mary.....	Bronze	Miller, Jana .....	Steel
Hollis, Mitzie .....	Bronze	Townley, Ruth.....	Steel
Jackson, Cindy* .....	Bronze		
Stemler, Joan* .....	Bronze		
Strauser, Deanne* .....	Bronze		
Wynne-George, Brenda* .....	Bronze		
Ziino, Julie* .....	Bronze		

\*Participants in this project.

ST. LOUIS DISTRICT SALUTES THEIR  
*Women in Uniform*



St. Louis District is very accomplished and fulfills a variety of missions. What truly makes our District unique, however, are the people who make all these great things happen. The history of the District has been recorded in District Histories, but this volume speaks to a slightly different perspective. During its history, St. Louis has been home to many remarkable women, who have left an indelible mark on this District (and others). We have gathered the personal stories of 39 of these women—from all walks of life, from different eras, different educational backgrounds, and different offices—to augment the existing documented history. In these pages are stories of challenges, triumphs, life lessons, and the occasional tragedy from which everyone—men and women alike—can learn from and enjoy. As personal as these stories are (and some are quite candid), ultimately this book shows how the District has evolved through the years, ever making improvements, sometimes backsliding, but ultimately moving forward to make it a great place for everyone to work. We still have some room for improvement, but we are definitely on the right track.

It is ironic that the year in which this volume was produced (2020) was also the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. On a note a little closer to home, 2020 also marked the command of Mississippi Valley Division's first female commander and first female president of the Mississippi River Commission, Major General Diana Holland. Perhaps we've come farther than even we realize!

# A CONFLUENCE OF *Women's Voices*