

The Federal Manager

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The Federal Manager (ISBN 0893-8415) is published by the Federal Managers Association, 1641 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-2818, to inform federal managers of management-related topics, professional development, and legislation affecting them. Statements of fact and opinion are made on the responsibility of the author alone and do not imply an endorsement by the editor, the officers or members of the Federal Managers Association® 2005. All rights reserved. Redistribution or reproduction of any part of this publication is prohibited without written permission. Printed in the U.S.A.

PRESIDENT'S PAGE



*FMA National President
Michael B. Styles*

What FMA's Mission Statement Means

The Federal Managers Association was founded in 1913, and after almost a century in existence, our mission has evolved over time into "Advocating Excellence in Public Service." This issue of The Federal Manager will give you a sense of what that statement means to our Association's membership.

Our cover story features eight Federal managers and the outstanding work they do everyday on behalf of America – without the full awareness of the American public. In reality, these are just eight of the scores of managers throughout government who are never in the limelight, but are shining examples of excellence in public service.

One such individual who also typifies this commitment to excellence is the recently departed director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), my friend, Kay Coles James. Kay opened her door to FMA immediately following her appointment by President Bush in 2001, and she never closed it during her tenure at OPM. She valued the importance of inclusiveness, and demonstrated it time and time again in bringing FMA to the table on critical Federal workforce issues. In this issue you will find a copy of my letter of appreciation to Kay upon the announcement of her resignation from OPM.

You will also see FMA National Vice President Darryl Perkinson testifying before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia on the new Department of Homeland Security personnel system. FMA has been involved from the very early stages of the Department's design and development process - thanks in no small part to Kay Coles James – and Darryl's testimony reflects our ongoing efforts to ensure that the system succeeds through adequate funding and training. This indeed is "Advocating Excellence in Public Service" at work.

This issue's "Between the Lines" section features a contribution from my friend, Mr. Kirke Harper, chairman of the Public Employees Roundtable or PER. FMA has served on PER's board of directors since it originated in 1982. Most of us in the Federal community are well aware that PER hosts the annual Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW), held the first week of every May. However, does the rest of America know about PSRW? This once-a-year opportunity to recognize the everyday work of public servants includes a wide range of activities that improve public understanding of and appreciation for their contributions. I urge you to spread the word in your local communities about Public Service Recognition Week in support of PER's efforts so that all of America can take a moment to celebrate excellence in public service.

Finally, on January 15, my good friend, John Priolo, stepped down from FMA's General Executive Board, where he served as Zone 7 President for six years. During that time, John has been instrumental in promoting grassroots mobilization and FMA's Political Action Committee. He coined the phrase, "If you don't know your elected members of Congress by their first name, you only have yourself to blame." John retired from Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard / Area last December after nearly 40 years of service and is enjoying his retirement. We will miss you, John, but we know you won't be far. Succeeding John is another great friend, Mr. Leonard Lew, who retired from Federal service after 33 years at the Sacramento Air Logistics Center, McClellan Air Force Base, Calif.

While "Advocating Excellence in Public Service" may be FMA's mission, it is manifest every day through the dedication of our public servants.. ■

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Retired Member-at-Large Annual Dues: \$36
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Single Issue Rate: \$7.50

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All materials submitted to *The Federal Manager* should pertain to public service managers. Copy should be double-spaced, no longer than 10 pages. Color photographs, 35 mm color slides, charts, or other illustrations should be included if possible. Text should be submitted on floppy disk, labeled with type of software and name of file. Also include a biography of author.

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Leading the Way

Today's Federal Manager

By Cathy Kreyche

A number of years ago I worked with a woman who had just taken a job in which she worked face to face with the federal workforce. She had come into the job believing the stereotype – that a government worker is less motivated, less committed, less effective, and, yes, maybe not quite as intelligent as his or her private-sector counterpart. Soon afterwards, she stopped in my office and told me that she was finding just the opposite is true.

The federal managers featured in this article comprise a small sample of the many bright, committed, accomplished people who work in the government in different parts of the country, with different agencies, meeting a variety of challenges. It's not likely you'll see their names in the headlines, but they form the backbone of the federal government. They ensure that things get done for the American people – for family farmers in the middle states and soldiers headed to war overseas; for Navy crews in nuclear submarines and soldiers coming home injured; for military officers receiving advanced education and for all Americans needing critical medical research.

Instead of seeing bureaucratic obstacles, these federal managers see challenges and opportunities. Why are they in the federal government? For some, the government presented an opportunity to better themselves; for others, it offered an opportunity to engage in meaningful work. Why are these federal managers good at what they do? The simple answer is that they are committed to their work, and they treat their coworkers and customers with honesty and integrity.

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Leading the Way

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While these brief snapshots can't do justice to a career, they provide a sense of the caliber of the people who work as federal managers. If you work in a federal agency, you will likely see something of yourself in this group. If you don't, and haven't met a mid-level federal manager, here's your opportunity.

"Be brilliant on the basics."



Jim Roppo

Jim Roppo calls himself "the manager guy," someone good at juggling a lot of balls and getting things done. In his 35-year career with the federal government he's worked as an Army civilian in Germany, Panama, New Jersey, and Texas. Now a public health analyst for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, he is developing standards for public health departments across the country. At 58 years old, "I'm at the point I can retire at any time, so I have a great deal of freedom," he said. What hasn't changed is his belief that government work has given him opportunities to be creative and make a positive contribution.

While troops were mobilizing prior to Desert Storm, Jim was an education service officer at Fort Hood. Soldiers or military intelligence officers headed for Iraq had no training in the language, a critical survival

skill. Jim was responsible for developing an Arabic language program – immediately. With no Arabic speakers anywhere near the base and no course materials, he gathered resources where he could get them. He and his staff recruited instructors from Dallas; they got course materials from the Defense Language Institute. Within a month the program was up and running. Then he helped develop the Brown Bag College Program. Taking courses through Central Texas College, soldiers could earn credit toward a degree through lunchtime classes.

Jim still gets things done in a way that brings people and resources together. In his current work with CDC, he is helping to develop standards for public health departments. Many lack technology, expertise, and trained staff. The CDC effort is still in its early stages. "We measure success now by our ability to get people together in a room talking," said Jim. "Ultimate success is when public health departments have a benchmark to measure themselves against departments in other states, and can use that as a tool to get funding and improve."

Jim also serves as an unofficial mentor and advisor both inside and outside of his work group, helping people learn how to "work the system" and get things done. "With a degree from Villanova University, I had a lot of options," he said. "But I couldn't see myself telling people why my company had the best widget... I wanted to do something that made a difference."

"I have a passion toward this."

John Cowan is not nearing retirement and not even thinking about it – or about leaving his job. He is 33 years old and working at a job he loves. John is a farm



John Cowan

loan specialist for the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Department of Agriculture, College Station, Texas.

FSA began in the 1930s as the Farm Home Administration. Its mission was to help keep family farms afloat during the Depression. Its task today is as challenging as it was seven decades ago. FSA serves as the lender of last resort for family-run farms denied loans through private sources. In Texas these farms may raise shrimp, catfish, cattle or crops.

The oldest of a family of five in Little River, Texas, John was looking to pay his way through college. As a sophomore at Texas A&M University, he took a part-time job as a student trainee in the Farm Loan Office in College Station. When he graduated with his degree in agricultural economics in 1994, he went to work full time with FSA.

At 25, he got his own office to manage. He told his staff, "I've got eight years' experience – you've got 20 to 25. I can't do the work myself and neither can you." The gap in age and experience didn't matter. "It helps not to come across with swagger and bluster," he acknowledged. "I wanted to create a collective unit, and it worked really well... It's the same when you're working with farmers. You don't come in and dictate. You communicate with folks. You say [to them], 'Let's look and see how we might do things better.'"

John is still the youngest full-time employee in the College Station Farm Loan Office. He oversees guaranteed lending, emergency disaster relief, and loan-officer training programs. As a farm loan manager, he enjoyed working side by side with farmers and helping to carry on the tradition of the family farm. Now he does that for young people as a volunteer for 4-H.

“It’s unbelievable the amount of trust they put in you.”



Danny Propes

Danny Propes is the farm loan manager for the FSA office that serves Adair, Russell, and Green Counties in south central Kentucky, just an hour from where he was born. Like John Cowan, Danny got his own start as a student trainee while completing his agriculture degree at Western Kentucky University. Now, at 55, Danny has worked for the agency for 36 years.

Danny not only manages the office, he also processes and services loans for family-owned farms, typically tobacco or dairy. When the price of milk drops, as it did from 2001 to 2003, small dairy operations can be pushed over the edge. A loan – and the practical advice and personal empathy loan officers provide on running the farm –

may help pull it back.

As Danny said, “I probably know as much about their [the farmers’] operations as they do.” At the same time, “You don’t dictate to them. You understand their needs and find out their goals and objectives.” Danny runs a small farm himself, which gives him credibility. “It’s unbelievable the amount of trust they [the farmers] put in you,” he added.

He’s also provided untold hours of training, mentoring, and guidance to full-time staff trainees throughout his career. Danny works hard to ensure a positive experience and a positive example for permanent staff and trainees. That experience has served Carolyn Cooksie well. After starting out in Danny’s office as a 16-year-old in the “Stay in School” program, she has risen to become deputy administrator for the Farm Loan Program nationwide.

Danny sets the tone of his operation by modeling a good work ethic in the office. Weekly staff meetings ensure good communications between loan officers and program technicians, as loan officers are frequently out of the office at banks or visiting farms. “To be effective in this job, you must be honest, dependable, and trustworthy,” said Danny. The farmers’ trust appears well founded.

“The concept that government [workers] don’t do anything is so far from the truth.”

During his three-year tour of duty, the Army trained Alvin (Andy) Anderson to work on diesel trucks and watercraft engines. Now, 28 years later, he’s moved from truck engines to submarines. As assistant production department refueling man-



Alvin Anderson

ager at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, he oversees the refueling and defueling of nuclear-power submarines.

Andy spends 60 percent of his time doing administrative work – providing information and reports on the work he oversees – and 40 percent on the deck plate, keeping supervisors informed, personally monitoring schedule and performance and, most importantly, safety. He says he gets to the office early and leaves late, like 90 percent of the managers at the shipyard.

As a manager, Andy is straightforward about responsibility, expectations, and consequences. “It’s very basic,” he said. “Most of the time you earn what you get.” Andy’s found that there’s a right way to communicate. After a bad experience with a manager, he vowed to himself, “If I ever got there, I wouldn’t be like that.”

“The way you give it [criticism] means a lot,” said Andy. “Explain what’s expected, where you’re headed, what’s your goal. ... When someone makes a mistake, wait until the proper time to talk to that person.”

How does he motivate people to get the job done? “You make them feel part of what’s being accomplished, you get their buy-in,” Andy said. “When people ask a question, you don’t shut them off. They’re asking because they want to know. You need to understand that rather than be patronizing.”

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Leading the Way

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Andy exhibits the same steady commitment outside of work with 20 years of involvement with his local Parent-Teacher Associations.

“We’re out there to protect life.”



Joe Boyle

A number of societal forces in the 1960s and 1970s brought Joe Boyle to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The civil rights movement, the Vietnam peace movement, the Second Vatican Council's renewal and modernization in the Roman Catholic Church, and the environmental movement all gave Joe the sense that "things need[ed] to change." A big part of that sense was his awareness that the environment needed help. Even though at the time he was "not particularly sold on the government," when EPA was formed, he saw an opportunity to make a difference. It turned into his life's work.

After earning a master's degree in geological sciences at the University of Illinois/Chicago, in 1977 Joe became the first scientist hired by EPA, Region 5, the

Great Lakes area, and began work on the hazardous waste program.

Joe is now the chief of the Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Branch within the Waste, Pesticides, and Toxics Division. The branch enforces RCRA, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Branch staff members conduct approximately 250 inspections a year at locations where hazardous waste is generated, treated, stored or disposed. These inspections, and the enforcement orders that follow detected violations, ensure compliance with state and federal requirements designed to protect human health as well as the environment. Motivating the highly committed scientists and engineers working for him is never a problem. He simply helps them hone their powers of observation and channel their commitment to EPA's mission and apply the law fairly and accurately. He is proud of his staff and their work.

"I thank my lucky stars that I've had the opportunity to apply my intellect and energies to this particular field in this particular way," said Joe, "to have an impact on how public policy is put in place for the common good."

The common good is an important theme in Joe Boyle's life. Outside of the office he is involved in a church group that works to combat racism and ethnic insensitivity in the Chicago area.

Early in his career at EPA Joe participated in drafting the first nationwide regulations for the control of hazardous waste. He finds the work he has done and continues to do satisfying. Having served through many administrations and administrators, Joe believes "the continuity of service by our government's managers is a major reason why our country stands out in the world as a strong, dependable nation."

“People need change to stir things up.”



Gary Dent

Gary Dent is irrepresible. He loves his job and he loves to talk. (He says he's making up for the lost time when he was a kid.) Gary is an educational analyst for the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, Calif.

The path that took him to this postcard spot on the California coast was a four-year stint in the Marines, then a career at Mare Island Naval Shipyard where he worked his way up: shipfitter, foreman, general foreman, senior general foreman, planning branch head, and finally environmental operations branch head. Late in his Mare Island career, Gary was one of 25 selected to teach Total Quality Leadership.

Gary now manages programs for the superintendent and the provost of NPS, while also serving the deans, chairpersons, and approximately 500 faculty. He's the information man, providing data about the student body that supports the work and the mission of the school, such as providing the admiral with the number of students who became flag officers after they received advanced degrees at NPS.

As a manager at Mare Island, "My approach was to be very honest and fair with

people." His interpretation of "honest and fair" may push the boundaries of even the most fair and honest people. When he received a bonus, he split it among his people because, in his words, "[it was] those people's efforts that actually got me the bonus."

Gary is a "people person" who is committed to continuous improvement, both at work and in his life. "I like to take the best of what I see and incorporate it," he said.

He sees everything in life as a choice. "People tend to say they 'have to go' when it's actually that they choose to go," Gary said. "If you don't like what's going on, get involved in changing it."

As for retirement, even after 34 years in the government, "I'm too young to retire. What am I going to do, get another job at Wal-Mart?"

"People respect and deserve the truth, always."



Juanita Holler Mildenberg

Juanita Holler Mildenberg, a fellow of the American Institute of Architects (FAIA), is director, Division of Property Management (DPM), Office of Research

Facilities and Operations at the National Institutes of Health. If her title is a mouthful, her job is a handful. Juanita oversees all property management activities for NIH, along with approximately 450 employees, for NIH's owned and leased buildings. She runs a comprehensive facility management program; predictive, preventive, and emergency maintenance; and a construction management program to support alterations, renovations and repairs, and provide utilities.

Juanita started her career at NIH as a summer student working in the Division of Engineering Services. After finishing her degree at Catholic University of America, NIH hired her as a "rookie architect," primarily designing renovations to the 500-bed clinical center research hospital on campus. Aside from a one-year stint in the private sector and five years at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Juanita's worklife has been at NIH.

Assuming her current position two years ago gave Juanita her first opportunity to supervise a blue-collar workforce, employees ranging from boiler plant operators to carpenters to automated systems specialists – quite a switch from the engineers, scientists, and architects she had worked with. To learn what everyone did and what it was like to do it, she spent about a day working in each of the units for which she was responsible.

Facing budget cuts in the late 1990s, she consolidated three units responsible for the maintenance of different buildings on the NIH campus by creating one central call center to report any maintenance problem in any sector. After about six months of analyzing the different approaches to reporting trouble calls, integrating the three units, and planning the new system to be operational 24/7, the call center was

running smoothly and duplicate efforts were eliminated.

What works as a manager? "I'm always honest [with people]," said Juanita. "Sometimes they don't want to hear what I have to say, but I believe they respect and deserve the truth, always." The paint shop still wants her back, but she's declined (too much painting to do at home) and she is far too busy leading DPM as well as being the certifying official for the current A-76 re-study.

"I can sit back and say I had an impact."



Jimmie Ward

One person's problem is another person's challenge. Of course, Jimmie Ward doesn't ever refer to "problems." To him they're opportunities to create success stories.

The Department of Veterans Affairs recruited Jimmie from the University of California/Davis to merge the Air Force and VA hospitals when Mather Air Force Base was closed. His latest success is as outpatient nurse manager in the 55-bed VA

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Leading the Way

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hospital in Mather, Calif., where he supervises the specialty clinics. Since he took his current post, the VA Northern California Health Care System has recognized the Gastroenterology Clinic as the most efficiently run clinic in the system.

Jimmie has worked in health care for over 40 years. Starting as a nurse, Jimmie completed an MBA from California State University/Dominguez Hills in 1975.

How did he get his reputation for turning around organizations? "I start with staff," he responded with a hint of a Texas accent. "You allow people to be in control of their environment."

In his current environment Jimmie supervises 22 nursing, clerical, and administrative staff and faces the challenge of greater need for health care, both from soldiers returning from Iraq and the increasing number of aging veterans. The continuing need to master new technology makes training staff a high priority, ensuring they have the competencies to perform their jobs.

In managing his staff, Jimmie focuses intently on the positive. "Everyone is trainable," he said. "It's a matter of how you motivate them to accept the training. ...Everyone can contribute something." By identifying individuals' strengths first, they are more likely to work to fill in the gaps in their personal skills. The result? Jimmie can report less than 1 percent turnover of staff under his supervision throughout his career.

Jimmie's community work also focuses on health care and public health issues. As a member of the 100 Black Men of Sacramento, he mentors youths, often directing them toward health-care occupations. When will he retire? Five years? Well, maybe a bit longer. He still has goals to achieve: the health care project he's working on in China, grooming his successor at Mather, and if he makes it to 2012, 50 years in health care. ■

Cathy Kreyche is a communications strategist with Management Concepts. Previously she worked as new product development editor with Management Concepts, developing books, newsletters, and electronic products. She has also served as managing editor for Holbrook & Kellogg, a publisher of resources for the government workforce. She holds a master's in history from Indiana University, Bloomington.

All managers featured in this article are members of the Federal Managers Association.

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