

MEDLEY

- a potpourri of diverse talent

Spring 2016

Vision Statement

To create a diverse workforce and promote a positive work environment where all employees are respected and valued for their contributions.

USDA-ARS-Midwest Area Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) Council members:

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Carl Bernacchi, Urbana, IN

Veera Boddu, Peoria, IL

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Yanfen Zhai, East Lansing, MI

Sherri Buxton, Peoria, IL, MWA Office Advisor

Debra Owens-Coleman, MWA ODEO Program Manager. Council in an advisory capacity.

Bringing Science and Community Together at Morris, MN

Written by Matthew Thom

Dr. Matthew Thom, Research Entomologist (Post Doc), with the North Central Soil Conservation Research Lab, spent some time on January 11, 2016 with 2nd and 3rd grade children, mostly Girl Scouts, at the Morris Public Library.

Dr. Thom shared information about insects, particularly pollinators, and the importance they play in enabling us to have delicious fruits and vegetables. The group asked each other questions about insects, and shared stories about interacting with lady beetles, butterflies, and bees. They were really interested in Dr. Thom's insect collections that spanned Oregon, Florida, and Stevens County, Minnesota.

The children were amazed to learn that Minnesota has around 400 different species of bees, many of which we mistake for wasps, flies, or some other kind of insect. Everyone had a great story about being stung by some kind of insect, and the kids learned that insect's sting when they feel threatened or are hunting for food. The kids were a great group, and Dr. Thom felt it was a great experience for all.

Programs like Girl Scouts, which are based on self-guided learning and achievement, are an important part of a child's education, and Dr. Thom was glad to have the opportunity to share his knowledge and passion for insects.

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Left to Right: Joseph Hattamer, Robin Brewster, and Robin Ogden

Veterans at Work for ARS in Marshfield, WI

Written by Wayne Coblentz

Background: The Environmentally Integrated Dairy Management Research Unit (EIDMU) is a relatively small research unit (4 scientists, 12 total employees) that is located approximately 3 hours north of Madison, in central Wisconsin. The unit is located on the University of Wisconsin Marshfield Agricultural Research Station, where there are 1000+ acres of cropland, as well as 550 dairy heifers and 128 lactating cows that are co-managed with the University of Wisconsin. Three USDA-ARS employees are veterans that have served on active duty in the Middle East. They include: 1) US Army Sgt. 1st Class (E7) Joseph Hattamer (15 years), who serves as building manager for laboratory and animal facilities at Marshfield; 2) US Air Force Technical Sgt. (E6) Robin Brewster (23 years), who currently serves as unit secretary; and 3) US Army Sgt. (E5) Robin Ogden (10 years), who serves as a biological technician.

Why do you like working for USDA-ARS?

- Flexibility** – All three veterans expressed appreciation for the flexibility offered by USDA-ARS with respect to their employment. Specifically mentioned were the convenience of flex time, credit time, and annual leave policies, which alleviate some of the stress associated with raising young families while working in jobs with a very rigid work-hour/schedule policy. Joseph Hattamer also appreciated the assurance and accommodation by USDA-ARS when normal work hours conflict with his continuing military duties.
- Variety of Work Responsibilities** – Robin Ogden really appreciates the daily variety in her work, which ranges from laboratory analyses of forage and concentrate feeds for dairy animals to collection of production data in the research barns.
- Work Environment** – All three veterans like the work environment at EIDMU, and expressed appreciation for the strong work ethic of their non-military peers, as well as the established priorities, level of professionalism, and mutual understanding exhibited by both USDA-ARS and University of Wisconsin personnel.
- Location:** Robin Brewster was particularly thankful for the opportunity to work close to her home; previously, she commuted to a job in Minneapolis, which is 3 hours away.

What skills did you learn in the military that serve you well in your current position?

Robin Brewster - work ethic; personal accountability; administrative discipline; and the ability to prioritize work responsibilities

Joseph Hattamer – construction, plumbing, and electrical training; work ethic, particularly seeing a project through to completion; taking ownership of projects; recognizing the value of everyone's input; working with people that have different personalities, skills, and cultural/ethnic backgrounds

Robin Ogden – training as an LPN, which taught her attention to detail, and how to conduct laboratory procedures; training in heating and air-conditioning systems, which is helpful in fixing or maintaining laboratory equipment. *Robin still expresses a desire to drive heavy farm equipment, and will do so if she gets a chance!*

Recently, Robin Ogden and Joseph Hattamer have been involved in outreach programs at public schools. Please tell the Midwest Area about your experiences.

- The most recent program was scheduled with freshman American History classes at Auburndale High School. The teacher scheduled the program because she wanted students to understand more about veterans.
- Robin and Joseph were asked to talk about their military experiences and deployments to the Middle East. Robin used scanned photos that were placed in a PowerPoint program, while Joseph presented a digital recording within a YouTube video. Both veterans said they did not have enough time to talk about all the things they wanted to discuss. Joseph enjoyed challenging the students with some military/history trivia.
- Robin and Joseph both felt that the students were a bit intimidated, but they did ask questions about camaraderie, living conditions, climate, field equipment, and methods of communication with family and friends at home. Robin served during Desert Storm in the early 1990's, and communicated to her family and friends by phone, while Joseph was recently in Afghanistan, where communication was largely by Skype.
- Students were especially interested in a display of duty and dress uniforms brought to the program by Robin and Joseph.
- Although students were somewhat intimidated initially, the teacher later reported that the program generated considerable classroom discussion throughout the days following the event.

What did you like best about this type of outreach?

Teasing the students about the necessity of learning math to be successful in life.

Stressing military history, but not in textbook form, which usually isn't personal. Joseph enjoyed emphasizing that all missions are different, and that history classes rarely talk about small missions successfully completed, nor the sacrifices made to complete them.

Joseph also emphasized a desire to convey a 'good message' to students. He thought it especially important to establish the seed of the civilian soldier as a positive, noting that people often remember, or think about, only the negative aspects of the military.

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Both veterans further emphasized the excellent work experience they received in the military, and that military service offers many opportunities – if you take advantage of them.

One local program included a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Kenneth Strumpf, who earned the award based on service in Vietnam. Mr. Strumpf currently lives in Tomah, WI. Robin Ogden was able to attend the program at Auburndale High School, and later had dinner with Mr. Strumpf, which was particularly rewarding.



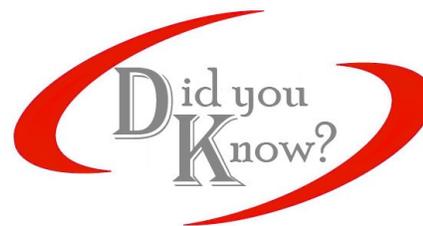
Robin Brewster (Turkey, Kuwait)



Robin Ogden (Saudi Arabia)



Joseph Hattamer (Afghanistan)



You can earn credit for diversity training when you participate in a Special Emphasis Observance event (i.e., Women's History Month?)

- ◆ How? There are two options, as applicable:
 1. Record your own learning in AgLearn if the learning item allows users to do so upon completion of the learning item. Access AgLearn and go to Record Learning, or contact your Location AgLearn Administrator or Debra Owens-Coleman, Acting MWA Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity Program, at debra.owenscoleman@ars.usda.gov or 979-260-9416.
 2. Your Designated Location AgLearn Administrator can record the learning item in your Record Learning.

We'd love to highlight your Outreach event or share your story.

Contributions can be sent to your unit's ODEO representative.

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EEO and Compliance Branch: 202-720-3410, 800-340-4289,
TDD: 202-720-3303

Reasonable accommodation: 202-720-6161

Outreach and Recruitment Branch: 202-720-6161

Cooperative resolution program: 202-720-6161

WWW.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/

Hiring Veterans and People with Disabilities

Written by Mary Weber

It is important for hiring managers to be familiar with the many hiring authorities available for hiring veterans and people with disabilities. These special authorities represent some of many flexibilities that hiring managers may use at their discretion to meet their hiring goals.



The **Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA)** is an excepted authority that allows for appointment of eligible veterans without competition. Veterans must be in receipt of a campaign badge for service during a war or in a campaign or expedition; **OR** are a disabled veteran, **OR** are in receipt of an Armed Forces Service Medal for participation in

a military operation, **OR** are a recently separated veteran (within the last 3 years), **AND** separated under honorable conditions. Veterans can be appointed under this authority at any grade level up to and including a GS-11 or equivalent. After successfully completing 2 years, veterans will be converted to the competitive service. Veterans' preference applies when using the VRA authority. The VRA authority may be used to fill temporary (not to exceed 1 year) or term (more than 1 year but not to exceed 4 years) positions. Individuals employed in a temporary or term positions under VRA, will not be converted to the competitive service after 2 years. There is no limit to the number of times individuals can apply under VRA.

A second hiring authority for veterans is the **Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998 (VEOA)**. VEOA is a competitive service appointing authority that can only be used when filling permanent, competitive service positions. It cannot be used to fill excepted service positions. It allows veterans to apply to announcements that are only open to status candidates, which means current competitive service employees. To be eligible for a VEOA appointment, the veteran's **latest** discharge must be issued under honorable conditions **AND** must be either a preference eligible **OR** a veteran who substantially completed 3 or more years of active service. When agencies recruit from outside their own workforce under merit promotion (internal) procedures, job opportunity announcements must state VEOA is applicable. VEOA eligibles are not subject to geographic area of consideration limitations. When applying under VEOA, veterans must rate and rank among the best qualified when compared to current employee applicants in order to be considered for appointment. Veterans' preference does not apply to internal agency actions such as promotions, transfers, reassignments and reinstatements. Current or former Federal employees meeting VEOA eligibility can apply; however, current employees applying under VEOA are subject to time-in-grade restrictions like any other General Schedule employee.



The **30% or More Disabled Veteran** flexibility allows any veteran with a 30% or more service-connected disability to be non-competitively appointed. Veterans are eligible if they retired from active military service with a service-connected disability rating of 30% or more; **OR** have a rating by the Department of Veterans Affairs showing a compensable service-connected disability

of 30% or more. This authority can be used to make permanent, temporary (not to exceed 1 year) or term (more than 1 year, but not more than 4) appointments in the competitive service. There is no grade level restriction. When using this authority to appoint on a permanent basis, individuals are first placed on a time limited appointment of at least 60 days and then converted to a permanent appointment at management's discretion. When the authority is used for temporary or term appointments, the individual will not be converted to a permanent appointment

The Schedule A Appointing Authority is an excepted authority that agencies can use to appoint eligible individuals who have a severe physical, psychological, or intellectual disability. To be eligible, individuals must show proof of their disability. Documentation may be from any licensed medical professional (e.g., a physician or other medical professional certified by a State, the District of Columbia, or a U.S. Territory to practice medicine), a licensed vocational rehabilitation specialist (i.e., State or private), or any Federal or State agency, or agency of the District of Columbia or a U.S. territory that issues or provides disability benefits. Medical documentation should distinguish between disabilities that are temporary, or transient, versus disabilities, which are chronic, permanent, on-going, or unresolved with no end in sight. Hiring managers can use this authority to appoint at any grade level and for any job (time-limited or permanent) for which the individual qualifies. Veterans' preference applies under this authority. After 2 years of satisfactory service, the individual may be converted, without competition, to the competitive service. There is no limit on the number of times individuals can apply under this authority.

Another recruitment source for hiring individuals with disabilities is **The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)**. The WRP is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal employers nationwide with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs. Annually, trained WRP recruiters from federal agencies conduct personal interviews with interested candidates on college and university campuses across the country. Candidates represent all majors, and range from college freshmen to graduate students and law students. Information from these candidate interviews is compiled in a searchable database that is available to hiring officials in federal agencies. WRP is recognized by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as a model strategy in its guidance to federal agencies regarding the recruitment and hiring of people with disabilities in response to

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Executive Order 13548, Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities. Since the program's expansion in 1995, over 6,000 students and recent graduates have received temporary and permanent employment opportunities through the WRP.

The **USDA Portal for Veterans and People with Disabilities** is the result of Secretary Vilsack's commitment to increase the employment of Veterans and Persons with Disabilities at USDA. The portal serves as a resume repository for veterans and persons with disabilities for employment consideration. Hiring managers may non-competitively fill positions with individuals whose resumes are housed in the Portal. Resumes that best match the duties and responsibilities of the position are forwarded directly to hiring managers for their review and consideration. When there is not an adequate supply of resumes in the Portal, **VA for Vets, Veterans Employment Services Office (VESO)** can assist. VESO will develop a job opportunity announcement, specifically targeted to the veteran community, and post it. VESO reviews all resumes and issues certificates directly to the selecting official via USA Staffing. Hiring managers who would like to review and consider resumes from the Portal may forward a copy of the position description to Mary Weber at Mary.Weber@ars.usda.gov.

These are just some of the hiring flexibilities available to hiring managers for veterans and people with disabilities. If you are interested in utilizing any of these flexibilities, please contact your servicing Human Resources Specialist for further advice and guidance.



Have you met Dr. Alberto Pantoja, Associate Area Director?

Q. How did you prepare yourself for this current position?

Dr. Pantoja: I have taken several leadership courses, but most of my training was on-the-job. For example, from 1989 to 1993, I was Research Fellow and then Chief Rice Entomologist at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Cali, Colombia. The main thrust of the Rice-Entomology section at CIAT was the development of area wide integrated pest/crop management strategies and training trainers in Latin America and the Caribbean. From 1993 to 1995, I was Deputy Director for Research for the Puerto Rico Agricultural Experiment Station (PRAES). From 1996 to 1999, I was Head of the Depart-

ment of Agricultural Engineering and Biosystems at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus. From 2001 to 2003, I was Associate Dean for Research for the PRAES. With a \$14 million budget, six research sub-stations, and over 350 employees; the PRAES is part of the United States Land Grant College System. At PRAES, I coordinated research efforts in three dependencies of the College of Agricultural Sciences, seven academic departments, and six research sub-stations. In 2003, I joined USDA, ARS as Research Leader and Location Coordinator for the Subarctic Agricultural Research Unit (SARU) in Fairbanks, Alaska. The SARU research portfolio supported four ARS National Programs (NP); NP 303, Plant Diseases; NP 304, Crop Protection and Quarantine; NP 106 Aquaculture; and NP 301 Plant, Microbial, and Insect Genetic Resources. The SARU focused in the development of new knowledge to increase the understanding of the biology and ecology of invasive plant and insect pests in order to improve their management in high latitude agriculture, especially in plant hardiness zones not found in the contiguous US. The SARU also conducted research on food technology and fish by-products utilization. Prior to returning to ARS as MWA Associate Director, I served (2011 to 2015) as Regional Crop Production and Protection Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). At FAO, I coordinated a regional initiative that aimed to increase and improve the provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry, and fisheries in a sustainable manner. This initiative is one of FAO global five strategic objectives. I believe the research and administrative experience gained with ARS on Alaska's unique natural resources, coupled with international experience at CIAT, FAO, and the University of Puerto Rico provided skills and abilities to define, coordinate, and implement multidisciplinary projects in geographically dispersed areas and fields of knowledge needed for the Associate Director Position.

Q. How would you describe your own management style?

Dr. Pantoja: I believe that job satisfaction, quality of work, and innovation are better achieved when employees are involved or take part in the decision-making process. Using a formal management style definition, I will be classified under the Management by Walking Around style (https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_72.htm). I recognize that the walking around style is not always possible on the current position, but in addition to site visits to research locations, modern tools allows for virtual visits and frequent contact with research locations. I have an open door policy.

Q. What are the most critical qualities for leading the workforce?

Dr. Pantoja: Leading a workforce as dispersed, diverse, dynamic, and creative as ARS research programs requires more than research, academic, training, administrative, budget management, and project evaluation experience. Listening, accepting and leveraging differences in criteria are key points in leading a successful workforce as diverse as ARS. The leader should also be dedicated, creative, fair, and energetic to overcome difficult issues and focus to get through high volume routine activities (e.g., Annual Reports, ARMPS, and ARIS approvals).

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Q. What advice would you give to early or mid-level employees interested in leadership?

Dr. Pantoja: Employees with interest in leadership should first establish a reputation and gain stature before committing to leadership positions. USDA, ARS offers opportunities for training and development like the Office of Personnel Management, SES Candidate Development Program, details and special assignments that expose and prepare employees for leadership opportunities. These training opportunities, not only prepare the employee to occupy a leadership position, but allows a *test drive* to identify if leadership positions are of interest before making a long term commitment.

Q. You have a high stress job, how do you recharge yourself?

Dr. Pantoja: There are many ways to recharge and take care of yourself. Exercise or other relaxing activities, even when traveling, are effective and easy recharging activities. Although it is work related, sometimes visiting employees in their work space and learning about their ideas, progress, and needs provides relief to administrative related stress. Personally, I enjoy jogging, biking, and outdoor activities.

Q. What kind of changes have you witnessed concerning outreach, diversity, and equal opportunity since you started your career with ARS?

Dr. Pantoja: I have been away from ARS for over 4 years and have not had enough time yet to see all changes in the agency. During the few months that I have been on board, I sense a more diverse work force, especially in leadership positions and also noticed a strong and active Special Emphasis Program.

Q. If you had one significant change to make in ARS, what would it be?

Dr. Pantoja: The temptation is to focus on providing more resources and better facilities; however productivity is not only limited by resources and work facilities. I believe the working environment is important to generate a sustainable increase in research productivity. As the agency moves to a more diverse work force and with current tendencies to *do more with less*, employees have to find balance between research activities versus the demands for other administrative activities. Frequently, I hear from the field (researchers and Research Leaders) about the increased time demand to complete activities that take away focus from research. This is an area that needs attention.

Q. Most people seem to like the status quo. How do we institute constructive changes without disrupting what people consider the good things at ARS?

Dr. Pantoja: I feel this is associated with skills mix, leadership, research needs, and vision. If we have a diverse and creative workforce where employees are involved or take part in the decision-making process, we can preserve what works, improve from past experiences, and bring about innovation to the agency.

Q. Do you have any “out-of-the box” ideas on how to address the large number of ARS employees that are/or will soon be eligible to retire?

Dr. Pantoja: The agency is moving in the right direction with training opportunities, diversity in the work force, telework, the possible phased retirement program, and similar programs that provide opportunities to a wider pool of possible employees. As the programs are implemented, other ideas will emerge to alleviate the possible shortage of personnel.

Q. What advice would you give for a new ARS supervisor that manages a group of high-energy research people?

Dr. Pantoja: I believe that if the right person has proper resources, the latitude to operate, and a creative working environment, they will be productive and efficient. Supervisors should identify the best candidates, facilitate the resources and make themselves available to assist the employees.



St. Paul Scientists Judge the Twin Cities Regional Science Fair

Written by Deborah Samac



ARS Scientists participating were (left to right): Erena Edae, Katie Liberatore, Ted Jeo (holding Flat Stanley), Deborah Samac, Bruna Bucciarelli, and Marissa Miller (photographer).

The Twin Cities Regional Science Fair was held on February 26, 2016 in Minneapolis, MN. Six ARS scientists participated in judging the projects to identify the top projects in Plant Science and Environmental Science at the 6th grade, middle school and high school levels to receive special Agricultural Research Service awards. The winners received a book and Certificate of Appreciation. The ARS scientists also judged papers and projects to receive the Minnesota Department of Agriculture awards for Agriculture in the Classroom. Over 550 students entered projects in the fair.

Special Emphasis Programs/Observances/Resources and Information

By Debra Owens-Coleman

The main objective of the Special Emphasis Program is employment and career development for special emphasis groups. To facilitate accomplishing the objective, two areas are the focus: (1) analysis of factors that affect recruitment and advancement and (2) special events to celebrate and educate.

March was Women's History Month. The National theme "Working to Form a More Perfect Union: Honoring Women in Public Service and Government" honored women who have shaped America's history and its future through their public service and government leadership.

Check out this activity: [Test Your Women's History IQ](#) or access <http://www.nwhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016copymaster.pdf>

Resources and Information:

- * [National Women's History Project](#), (707)636-2888, www.nwhp.org;
- * [4,000 Years of Women in Science](#), <http://www.astr.ua.edu/4000WS/>;
- * [Ms. Foundation for Women](#), <http://forwomen.org/?gclid=CNXqzdXvy8MCFYdj7Aodl0cAmw>

The following are the Special Emphasis Observances, and resources and information for April through July 2016:



Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, April 28th -- (4th Thursday of April)

National Theme: "Sparking AHA! Moments"

Resources and Information: [Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Foundation](#), <http://www.daughtersandsonstowork.org/>
Phone: (800) 676-7780



Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May)

National Theme: "Walk Together, Embrace Differences, Build Legacies."

Resources & Information: [Federal Asian Pacific American Heritage Council \(FAPAC\)](#); <http://www.fapac.org/>
[Asian Pacific American Network in Agriculture](#); <http://apana.annuk.com/>



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month (June)

National Theme: "Be Bold and Support Each Other."

Resources & Information: [National LGBT Community Organizations](#);
<http://www.lgbtcenterstl.org/national-lgbt-community-organizations.html>

Additional resources for diversity awareness material and ideas for special observances (catalog, pins, videos, etc.) are available from the following resources:

ARS EEO Video Library: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/files/ARS%20Video%20Library%20Catalog1.pdf>

Diversity Store: www.diversitystore.com; Phone: 800-200-5964; Email – hmsdc@aol.com

Smithsonian: <http://www.si.edu/>; Phone: 202-633-1000; Email: info@si.edu

USDA Department-wide Monthly Observances – Links for Websites: <http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.html>

Observance events/activities should be conducted in a most cost-efficient manner. Contact Debra Owens-Coleman, Acting MWA Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) Program Analyst, at debra.owenscoleman@ars.usda.gov or 979-260-9416 for additional information.



Do you know where to find us??

http://www.ars.usda.gov/main/site_main.htm?modecode=50-00-00-00#

Courtesy of:
Luis R Martinez—MWA ODEO Council Representative (Ohio)



USDA-ARS-Midwest Area Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) Council members:

- Kelli Adkins** – Kentucky
- Jacki Morrison** – St. Paul, MN
- Wayne Coblentz** – WI – Senior Co-Chair
- Javier Gonzalez** – Indiana
- Tom Coudron** – Missouri
- John Kovar** – Iowa
- Kathy Eystad** – Morris, MN
- Veera Boddu** – Peoria
- Luis Martinez** – Ohio
- Carl Bernacchi** – Urbana
- Yanfen Zhai** – Michigan
- Robert Matteri** – Sponsor
- JL Willett** – Sponsor
- Alberto Pantoja** – Sponsor
- Debra Owens-Coleman** – ODEO Program Manager - Advisor
- Sherri Buxton** – MWA ODEO Technical Advisor

Vision Statement

To create a diverse workforce and promote a positive work environment where all employees are respected and valued for their contributions.

Woman’s History Month

About Women’s History Month

Woman’s History Month provides our country the privilege of honoring the countless contributions that American women have made throughout our history. These contributions have enriched our culture, strengthened our Nation, and furthered the Founders’ vision for a free and just republic.

Women’s History Month had its origins as a national celebration in 1981 when Congress passed Pub. L. 97-28 which authorized and requested the President to proclaim the week beginning March 7, 1982 as “Women’s History Week.” Throughout the next five years, Congress continued to pass joint resolutions designating a week in March as “Women’s History Week.” In 1987 after being petitioned by the National Women’s History Project, Congress passed Pub. L. 100-9 which designated the month of March 1987 as “Women’s History Month.” Between 1988 and 1994, Congress passed additional resolutions requesting and authorizing the President to proclaim March of each year as Women’s History Month. Since 1995, Presidents

Courageous Women Who Have Made a Difference

Jacqueline Cochran—Harmon Trophy Recipient

During her aviation career, from the 1930s through the 1960s, Jacqueline Cochran (d. 1980) set more speed and altitude records than any contemporary pilot, male or female, and was the first woman to break the sound barrier. During World War II, she was instrumental in formation of the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs). This photograph was taken ca. 1962 when she received the Harmon Trophy for establishing eight World Class records in jet planes.



Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester—Awarded the US Silver Star for Gallantry



Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester of the 617th Military Police Company, out of Richmond, Ky., received the Silver Star, for her actions during an enemy ambush on her convoy.

Hester's squad was shadowing a supply convoy March 20, 2005 when anti-Iraqi fighters ambushed the convoy. Her squad moved to the side of the road, flanking the insurgents and cutting off their escape route. Hester led her team through the "kill zone" and into a flanking position, where she assaulted a trench line with grenades and M203 grenade-launcher rounds. She then cleared two more trenches, at which time she eliminated three insurgent aggressors herself.

Sgt. Hester is the first woman since WWII to be awarded the Silver Star.

Find More Information on Woman's History Month at <http://womenshistorymonth.gov/>