



News Release

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MVD AWARDS DAY

VICKSBURG, Miss., June 6, 2002 -- The Mississippi Valley Division/Mississippi River Commission (MVD/MRC), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, held their annual awards ceremony today. The following awards were presented:

GALLERY OF DISTINGUISHED CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES



[Mr. Wayne L. O'Bannon](#) was inducted into the Mississippi River Commission Gallery of Distinguished Civilian Employees. A special ceremony was held following the Engineer Day Awards ceremony, where a plaque with an engraved portrait of Mr. O'Bannon was placed on a gallery board displaying plaques of previously selected members.

The Gallery of Distinguished Civilian Employees was established in 1970 as a means of recognizing outstanding retired civilian employees of the Mississippi Valley Division/Mississippi River Commission. Mr. O'Bannon is the 44th inductee to the gallery since its inception.

He retired in December 1993 as chief of the Plan Formulation Branch, with more than 35 years of service to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Wayne was involved in nearly every Planning and Continuing Authorities project assigned to the Division. At the peak of the program, this involved an annual program of about \$700 million. He was the planning professional reference point for the entire division.

Mr. O'Bannon was a master at maintaining control of the Continuing Authorities and Planning programs and encouraging employees to provide competent, professional report to National needs. In this role, he made certain that planning considerations were prominent and appropriately balanced in the decision-making process. His role was crucial in assuring that the Division provided sound decision documents.

ERNEST P. BLANKENSHIP AWARDS

The Blankenship awards are among the highest honorary awards presented to Mississippi Valley Division employees by the local commander. The awards cover three categories: engineer/scientist, professional and technical/administrative. Established in 1987, they memorialize the commitment, dedication and knowledge of the long-time Mississippi Valley Division Executive Assistant, who died in 1973.

Engineer/Scientist Award



[Mr. David Sills](#) was the recipient of the Ernest P. Blankenship Engineer/Scientist Award. He is a civil engineer in the Readiness Branch.

Mr. Sills was recognized for his efforts during recovery activities following the September 11, 2002, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Mr. Sills was the primary Corps of Engineers representative at the Disaster Field Office, coordinating ongoing assigned missions with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, local government officials, other federal agencies and the government contractor. These missions included debris monitoring and oversight and debris landfill management.

Mr. Sills worked closely with Corps personnel to develop a method to estimate remaining debris quantities utilizing Geospatial Information System technology. Considerable diplomacy and the building of personal relationships were required to resolve issues arising from conflicting methods and viewpoints among agencies with differing agendas.

Mr. Sills was also recognized for his work as program manager for the development of the Catastrophic Disaster Response Plan for response to a major hurricane impacting the metropolitan area of New Orleans. The response plan required overcoming some unique challenges, as much of the New Orleans area is at or below sea level. Mr. Sills' efforts have led to the development of a dewatering plan which could be implemented should this tragedy occur. His efforts have greatly enhanced the division's preparedness in responding to a disaster of this magnitude.

Professional Award



[Ms. Karen Buehler](#) received the Ernest P. Blankenship Professional Award. Ms. Buehler was recognized for the outstanding performance of her duties as a public affairs specialist in the Public Affairs Office.

Ms. Buehler was responsible for managing the division's community relations, command information and public information programs. Three notable achievements during the year include the 2001 National Engineer Week "Salute to Engineers," Retiree Appreciation Day and her emergency/disaster response for the spring floods in the Upper Midwest.

Ms. Buehler was instrumental in developing the Salute to Engineers program in 1998. The program was so popular the first year that it has become an annual event during National Engineers Week. Salute to Engineers is a video teleconferencing event that introduces high school students to engineering as a career choice, and reaches students in 140 locations statewide. Organizing the event requires obtaining a minimum of 25 professional engineers to comprise different daily panels from various engineering disciplines with special attention on demographics.

Last year, Ms. Buehler researched, planned and executed a Retiree Appreciation Day for former Mississippi Valley Division employees and their guests. Organizing the event was very time consuming and required much coordination and attention to detail. Due to Ms. Buehler's professionalism, competence and hard work, the day was a success and will become an annual event.

Ms. Buehler was also commended for her selfless service, commitment and dedication in responding to the 2001 Upper Midwest Spring flooding. She provided invaluable assistance to the Public Affairs Office of the Corps' St. Paul District during this time of crisis.

Technical/Administrative Award



[Mrs. Linda J. Renfroe](#) was the recipient of the Ernest P. Blankenship Technical/Administrative Award. Mrs. Renfroe was recognized for exceptional performance of her duties as administrative support assistant in the Planning and Program Management Division.

Her competent and thorough knowledge, sound judgment and efficient execution of assigned functions contributed to the successful accomplishment of the mission of the the Mississippi Valley Division.

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Mrs. Renfroe exhibited superb technical competence, as well as innovation, in all areas of her job. Her performance as a credit card holder, which is a very time consuming and highly responsible duty, was outstanding and above reproach. In addition, she devised a computer database to track the status and provide easy access to numerous fact sheets, greatly simplifying management of these documents.

EEO OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



[Mr. Louis Logue](#) was the recipient of the Equal Employment Opportunity Outstanding Achievement Award. Mr. Logue is chief of the Operations Division.

Mr. Logue was recognized for his support of the Equal Employment Opportunity program. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Wage Grade Training Program and its implementation in all six districts of the Mississippi Valley Division. He is devoted to ensuring that employees in the wage-grade system receive equal opportunity in training, advancement and career achievement.

The Wage Grade Training Program provides the opportunity for lower graded employees to receive the training and experience needed to obtain a riverboat pilot's license, thus enabling the employees to compete for higher-level positions.

Additionally, Mr. Logue was very successful in getting minorities to enter the program and continues his efforts to increase minority participation in the Wage Grade Training Program.

In addition to being an avid supporter of equal opportunity in his own job area, Mr. Logue is an eager advocate for the civil rights of all individuals within and outside the Mississippi Valley Division.

WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD



[Mrs. Gwen C. Edris](#) was the recipient of the Woman of the Year Award. Mrs. Edris is an administrative officer in the Executive Office.

Mrs. Edris was recognized for her outstanding achievements and her numerous contributions to the Mississippi Valley Division/Mississippi River Commission, the Executive Office and her dedication to the Vicksburg and Warren County community.

Mrs. Edris has worked in the Executive Office for 22 years, working with and guiding three Executive Assistants, nine Division Commanders and numerous military and civilian members of the Mississippi River Commission during her tenure. She has served as a mentor and an example for others within the Executive Office and other offices within the division and its six districts.

In addition, she has broadened the knowledge of the public in the work of the Corps of Engineers and its related programs by speaking on Corps activities and representing the Corps on several committees and boards within the community.

Mrs. Edris is also involved in a number of activities in the Vicksburg/Warren County community, to include being a member of: the Advisory Board of the Vicksburg Convention Center and Auditorium, as well as its Financial and Administrative Committee; the Advisory Council of the Jobs for Mississippi Graduates for the Vicksburg-Warren School District; the Corps of Engineers' Chapter of the Chamber of Commerce; the Lions Club; the Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary; the Southern Cultural Heritage Center; the Little Theater Guild; the Keep Vicksburg-Warren Beautiful Committee; the American Cancer Society Relay for Life; the Heart Association; and the Lymphoma and Leukemia Society.

The purpose of this annual award is to give special recognition to the woman who has evidenced outstanding achievements in her career field, assistance to other women in their advancement, guidance to youth and outstanding community service. This award was also accompanied by the Commander's Award for Civilian Service.

STUDENT EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



The Student Employee of the Year Award is given to a student who has accomplished assigned duties in such a manner as to have clearly established a pattern of excellence during the past year.

This year's award was presented to [Ms. Janalyn M. Hennessee](#), a student aide in the Public Affairs Office.

Ms. Hennessee was recognized for her contributions to the Public Affairs Office. Due to the heavy workload in the office, Ms. Hennessee was asked to take on additional tasks and duties. She did so willingly, enthusiastically and without question. During often hectic and stressful times, Ms. Hennessee performed her duties in a very professional manner.

During the year, Ms. Hennessee was solely responsible for researching, organizing, scanning and distributing media clips from local newspapers for the division office. She also updated and maintained the division-wide electronic clip file. In addition, Ms. Hennessee provided invaluable assistance in the research, planning and execution of many division significant events.

Her efforts contributed significantly to the overall successful operation of the Public Affairs Office.