**FY 2011 Roger W. Jones Award Nomination**

Commitment to Effective Continuity of Government Essay

Mr. James H. Smerchansky

As the Deputy Commander, Systems Engineering Interoperability, Architectures, and Technology for Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM), Mr. Smerchansky recognizes and appreciates the fact that leaders are not born, they are grown. He often reflects back on his time as a GS-09 and acknowledges that he was molded into an effective leader and ultimately, Senior Executive Service-level employee through the dedicated efforts of his leaders and mentors throughout his career. It is this appreciation that drives his commitment to the successful development of technical professionals, managers, and executives.

Realizing that the government’s technical professionals actually started their careers as school-age children, Mr. Smerchansky emphasizes the value of nurturing any technical interests in America’s youth. Through his efforts, the command has initiated the first-ever Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) outreach to a Department of Defense (DoD) school by teaming with the middle school in Quantico, Virginia. In conjunction with experienced STEM personnel from the Naval Surface Warfare Center’s Dahlgren Division, the principal of Quantico schools, and the DoD Education Activity Assistant Superintendent for Virginia, MARCORSYSCOM is preparing a one-week Robotics Academy for the Summer of 2011 for approximately 60 students. The STEM initiative’s value cannot be understated as it ensures a future pool of scientists and engineers from which the government might someday recruit its future technical professionals.

Mr. Smerchansky is also capitalizing on a recent Office of Naval Research (ONR) STEM funding effort; whereby, MARCORSYSCOM can team with a non-profit organization to obtain additional funding for related educational outreaches. Under his guidance and direction in leveraging this program, the command will partner with the International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) Foundation, a non-profit agency associated with INCOSE that has thousands of engineers worldwide. MARCORSYSCOM and the foundation have submitted a white paper for consideration to conduct outreach to school districts in the vicinity of Quantico and San Diego, reaching and, more importantly, motivating children of both military and civilian families in these areas to set high goals and strive for excellence.

In addition to the STEM efforts under Mr. Smerchansky’s leadership, the command has, for the first time ever, participated in the Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) program. As this Department of the Navy (DON) program promotes MARCORSYSCOM at various institutions in order to attract and recruit recent college graduates, initial successes include allocation of four positions to the command. As a result of his advocacy and support, MARCORSYSCOM technical professionals will be mentoring two computer science and two engineering students, with the first graduates arriving in 2012.

Related to the SMART program is the command’s Intern program. Mr. Smerchansky is responsible for the success of DON interns allocated to MARCORSYSCOM that are assigned to developmental positions within the Marine Corps acquisition community. As the command currently has 20 interns, five recently completed the program and to Mr. Smerchansky’s credit, all five chose to stay and continue working at the command, occupying important technical positions within MARCORSYSCOM. Despite recent setbacks that restructure the government’s Intern program and delay normal intern recruiting, he spearheaded a plan to enroll an additional 12 interns this year to replace those who have completed or will complete the program. He further took the initiative to upgrade the intern’s required external rotations, directing select individuals to report to Marine Expeditionary Force units’ science advisors and Marine Forces Pacific ONR science advisors to get firsthand technical feedback from frontline operators using warfighting equipment.

As the aforementioned programs are not the only “firsts” for the command under Mr. Smerchansky’s technical leadership, he additionally led another MARCORSYSCOM first by conducting two job fairs to fill vacant technical positions in the workforce, with the first being the MARCORSYSCOM Job Fair in Fredericksburg, Virginia in May 2010 and the second being the Director of Acquisition Career Management Job Fair at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. in July 2010. His dedication drove intensive preparation and hiring efforts throughout the year and especially at the two job fairs, resulting in a size increase of 58 percent in the engineering competency. As the engineering competency is comprised of engineers, scientists, and information technology (IT) professionals, the engineering and scientist community’s population was increased by 53 percent, with the IT professional community’s population increased by 66 percent. Through his guidance, the engineering competency expanded greatly and is now able to provide much needed and enhanced technical support to the program management and acquisition communities.

Mr. Smerchansky not only concentrates on building the future technical workforce as evident above, but ensures that current professionals are supported with tools and career development opportunities. As the Competency Director for the entire MARCORSYSCOM technical workforce including engineering, IT, and test and evaluation professionals, he takes a strategic, holistic view of not only building careers but planning for succession in key positions, all while expertly balancing the needs of the organization versus the needs of the individual. Through advanced planning, he ensures that the command has the right workforce to meet critical needs, with individuals having the right experience and education to be successful in their jobs. Directly related to this effort, he made significant strides in formulating and maturing the technical authority construct within the command, empowering members of the technical workforce to voice their expert opinions in order to ultimately provide Marines worldwide with more capable and reliable warfighting equipment. Additionally, he took the lead in augmenting his workforce with additional knowledge resources by working closely with broader government technical communities and developing a list of nearly 200 technical area experts within their respective domains. The command’s technical professionals and their acquisition programs use these resources to access recognized government technical expertise as the need arises, enabling them to more effectively accomplish their duties.

Advocating for stronger modeling and simulation (M&S) in Marine Corps acquisition, Mr. Smerchansky revitalized the M&S organization at MARCORSYSCOM through assignment of dedicated civilian and military personnel. He established a strong foundation within the command for M&S to support the full spectrum of acquisition through the technical workforce’s prudent application of M&S tools. Demonstrating his commitment to workforce development and to ensure that this M&S capability continues and thrives within the command, he instituted an M&S training strategy to improve the MARCORSYSCOM staff’s knowledge level. As part of this strategy requires new engineering interns to complete at least one rotation in the command’s M&S office, he has instigated establishment of mandatory M&S training and is aggressively exploring workforce opportunities for M&S education at not only the certificate level, but also the graduate school level. Through these efforts, he has served as an excellent role-model and demonstrated his commitment to the careers of people who will serve as managers and executives in the future federal service.

Mr. Smerchansky has committed his time and efforts to building and sustaining a strong and credible technical workforce in the U.S. government, specifically within the DoD and Marine Corps acquisition communities. He actively pursues future “contributors and difference-makers,” from the earliest of ages to senior experienced professionals. Also recognizing the value in supporting the individuals who currently make up the workforce, he is willing to seek out and provide them with opportunities for continued growth. As these endeavors illustrate his commitment to developing the nation’s future leaders, he is well-deserving of this recognition.