

## PEO(A) bolsters program strength through mentoring

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Mentor Sharon Gellerson (right) answers questions and gives career advice to prospective mentees Mike Felps (left) and Tony Meath (center) during one of the five 10-minute rotations at PMA-261's Sept. 18 speed mentoring event.

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – Twenty-four members from the H-53 Heavy Lift Helicopters program (PMA-261) participated in a speed mentoring event on Sept. 18 at Exploration III in Lexington Park.

Why speed mentoring for this crew of “heavy lifters”?

Based on the popular speed dating concept, speed mentoring is a relatively new idea that's quickly gaining momentum here at NAVAIR – and especially within Program Executive Office Air Assault and Special Mission Programs (PEO(A)).

Deputy PEO(A) Todd Balazs participated in the Tactical Airlift, Adversary and Support Aircraft program speed mentoring event held in July, and was so impressed with the results that he is encouraging each of the PEO(A) programs to conduct their own speed mentoring event.

September 21, 2012

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Especially in times when personnel are forced to do “more with less,” Balazs believes mentoring can help further develop NAVAIR’s already-skilled workforce. “We need to continue developing the best equipped, the best trained workforce,” said Balazs. “Throughout our careers, we have so many development opportunities. When you have a mentor, together you talk about these opportunities, strategize for your future, and talk about tackling challenges and balancing priorities.”

Col. Bert Pridgen, PMA-261 program manager, and his deputy, Jay Stratakes stepped up to the challenge to host the first PEO(A) event. Pridgen encouraged his team to take advantage of the participating mentors’ experience.

“As you all know, developing our folks is a top priority, for both their career and program team success. We always need to do our jobs better tomorrow than we do today,” said Pridgen. “Mentoring can help us do this, so while you’re here, ask important questions of the leadership who took time to be with us today.”

Director of Propulsion and Power Department Tony Cifone addressed the group and also participated as a mentor. “My mentor offered me new and different perspectives, which I think was very beneficial to my career. When you’re working long hours, day to day, focused on your job, a mentor outside of your program or competency structure will provide you a different perspective that could open up other options you’ve never even considered.”

Focusing on rapid information exchanges, time-efficient interactions and a systematic structure, speed mentoring helps a prospective protégé – now popularly known as a mentee – to better target a potential mentor based on their face-to-face meetings.

Heather Glockner, CH-53K program planning and control lead, participated as a prospective mentee, and as a result, is now seeking a formal mentor. “This was a wonderful chance to ask questions and obtain guidance from some of NAVAIR’s leadership team,” said Glockner. “I was somewhat intimidated going into the event, but once we started, the setup encouraged open two-way communication. I would love to participate in similar events in the future and highly recommend co-workers to participate.”

H-53 In-Service Sustainment Integrated Product Team Lead Cmdr. Bill Mellen found the event worthwhile. “I almost passed up the opportunity to participate because of competing priorities in my schedule, but I’m glad I made time to attend. I greatly profited from the wealth and diversity of experience that the mentors brought and the candid answers they provided,” said Mellen.

NAVAIR’s Mentoring - Externally Directed Team helped coordinate the event; if you would like information on hosting your own, please contact Veronica Miskowski at 301-757-8391.

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NAVAIR's PMA-261 manages the cradle-to-grave procurement, development, support, fielding and disposal of the entire family of H-53 helicopters, which includes the CH-53D Sea Stallion, CH-53E Super Stallion, MH-53E Sea Dragon and, currently in development, the CH-53K Super Stallion.