



Debunking Urban Myths

The myth persists, despite many past efforts to dispute it: Seeking help for stress or mental health issues can brand an employee with a significant stigma and may even cost the seeker a coveted security clearance. Not so, says the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, which conducts security clearance investigations for Department personnel. DS flatly states that simply seeking mental-health counseling has never solely resulted in denying or revoking a clearance. Actually, says

DS, investigators view seeking such help as a positive step and a normal part of overall health and wellness.

DS Service Director Jeffrey Culver, speaking to DS agents who were early responders to the Haiti earthquake disaster, emphatically told dozens of volunteer agents who had spent hours in the center of the post-earthquake chaos, “Don’t keep all this inside of you. If you need to talk with somebody, let us know.”

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the White House recently issued an Executive Order requiring federal agencies to increase their hiring of people with disabilities by 100,000 over the next five years. The Department took a leadership role by establishing in 2009 the Disability and Reasonable Accommodations Division in the Office of Employee Relations. The division provides sign-language interpreters for hearing-impaired employees and readers for those with visual impairments.

When fully staffed, the division’s 13 employees will include a recruiter dedicated to recruiting persons with disabilities and a selective-placement coordinator who will match those with disabilities with job openings that fit their skills. The staff will also include four employees focused on assistive technology such as Job Access With Speech software and PAC Mate Portable Braille Display. It will play a big role in ensuring that the Department helps the overall federal government effort to become a model employer for people with disabilities.

Starboard, port, aft, forward—hardly terms associated with U.S. missions abroad. For colleagues in the U.S. Consulate General in Vladivostok, however, these nautical terms have become quite familiar because of a robust schedule of visits to the Russian Far East by U.S. Navy destroyers, cutters and mine sweepers. Working closely with the U.S. Pacific Fleet command, the CG staff often plans ship visits years in advance,

although actual schedules may not be fully developed until weeks before the ships arrive at the docks. Visits can include high-level policy discussions between U.S. and Russian naval officers and ceremonial events such as participation in parades and marches to mark the Allied victory in World War II.

The visits also expose local people to America and Americans in venues ranging from chess matches between sailors and local children to jazz concerts. Former Consul General Thomas Armbruster notes that the visits promote ties between the U.S. Navy and the Department while giving diplomats multiple opportunities to emphasize to Russia the importance of continued cooperation between the former Cold War foes.

Last but not least, a final salute to our colleagues en route to their final posting: *John Vincent Abidian; James E. Akins; Dorothy D. Bruins; Peter Collins; Francis P. “Frank” Coward; Susan K. Donnelly; Gerald “Jerry” Goldstein; Douglas Henderson; Eugene O. Kern; Dorothy L. Magee-Berkely; Marilen Jison Maher; James D. McHale; Maria L. Otero; George W. Pittarelli; and Thomas Joseph Roesch.* ■

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