

## Restoring the patina of public service

**T**here was a time when public service was one of the highest callings one could answer. For many, federal employment was more than a job; it was a vocation.



By **FRANK P. PUGLIESE JR.**

Regrettably, much of that luster has dimmed in the recent past for a variety of reasons that have been debated and dissected time and again. I am convinced we understand the problem in all its dimensions — from budgets to labor relations to politics to human relations. It's the solutions that confound us.

So, I am heartened when I see government initiatives and other programs designed to polish the image and renew the

good-government patina of public service. The Service to America Medals, which were awarded last week, are one important way to demonstrate that remarkable work can and does take place within the federal workplace.

Awarded by the Partnership for Public Service and sponsored by a number of organizations, including my own, DuPont, the Sammys, as the medals are called, showcase some of the most exciting, creative work undertaken anywhere today in either the public or private sector. And that's why DuPont has been a national sponsor almost from the beginning. By recognizing the achievements of sometimes overlooked and underappreciated civil servants, we hope to inspire others to join their ranks.

Federal service can be tremendously rewarding. I joined the federal work force as a GS-5 and rose to the highest

levels of executive service before my government retirement. My government career afforded me opportunities for great personal and professional growth, and I worked with some tremendously smart, talented people. We just need more of them in public service.

The work done by the federal work force often has a significant impact on what is accomplished in the private sector and how it's accomplished. Witness the first-rate leadership we're seeing from the Health and Human Services Department on pandemic preparedness. HHS is reaching out to the private sector, and we're responding in a coordinated and, I believe, effective way.

The Sammys and recognition programs like it are a great way to show appreciation to the federal employee. It's vital that the private sector send a strong message of thanks to civil servants — thanks not just

for the glamour accomplishments of the few, but the hard, day-to-day, in-the-trenches work of the many.

DuPont has a special connection with the federal government, which was our first customer more than 200 years ago. We have intersected with government in so many ways, from infectious disease control to alternative energy production to supporting the soldier of the future. And we have seen that when government encourages innovation, creativity and boldness of thought and execution, it fosters a culture and climate that attracts and keeps top talent.

What could be more exciting for any private-sector enterprise than to be working with a federal government populated by engaged, excited and fulfilled public servants? The National Do Not Call Registry that citizens can use to stop unwanted telemarketing calls,

the Mars Exploration Rover project, the popular eFile system that allows us to get tax refunds in as few as 10 days — are the work of federal employees. Everybody knows that good people equal good government. But attracting and keeping the best talent is the challenge.

When the U.S. can attract and keep the best talent in government service, everybody wins — every industry, every business, every nonprofit, every nongovernmental organization and every citizen.

The Service to America Medals are one more way to spotlight first-rate work accomplished by dedicated federal employees — and one more way to restore the patina of a selfless calling. ■

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