

DEOMI Marine recognized for her service at LATINA Symposium

Hispanic American Heritage Month Celebrated through Oct. 15

By Christopher Calkins
DEOMI Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- Marine Master Sergeant Maria E. Florentino, currently assigned with the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), was recently presented the Distinguished Military Service Award, recognizing her as an advocate for diversity through her distinguished leadership, mentorship, commitment, and service to her community which embodies the qualities that are at the core of the Service's mission.

She was recognized by LATINA Style 2015, the premiere organization honoring Latinas' achievements in our nation's capital.

Florentino serves as the DEOMI Non-commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) for Curriculum and Instructional Standards Office (CISO), and also serves as a Curriculum Developer. Her team develops and manages all DEOMI curricula; provides development programs to DEOMI faculty and effectively executes the curricula; and serves as the standards and evaluation arm of the Institute.

"I'm very honored to get the chance to represent the Marine Corps and my Institute. DEOMI's guiding principles are reflected upon Mission Readiness. In my opinion, one of the biggest things that can hinder mission readiness is when people use their own individual attitudes, values and beliefs to negatively impact another individual or a group of people, and or personal agenda," she said.

"Equity, dignity, respect, and cooperation among all individuals are essential values in the DoD work environment," she added.

Born in Mexico City, Florentino moved to Chicago at the age of six



Master Sergeant Maria E. Florentino was the sole U.S. Marine recently recognized for her service at the 12th Annual National LATINA Symposium – a national platform for Latina professionals addressing the most pressing issues affecting the Hispanic women in the United States. She is currently assigned to the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. (Photo by Christopher Calkins)

with her mother to join other family members living there.

She enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on November 4, 1993, and attended boot camp at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Paris Island, South Carolina, where she earned her first Marine job as a Food Service Specialist, and stayed there to help feed future recruits.

After serving in Japan, Virginia, and then California, Florentino raised her hand to attend the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute to become a full-time Marine Corps Equal Opportunity Advisor in 2010.

Upon graduation, she went back to Japan and then came back to DEOMI as the Marine Corps Liaison, and CISO NCOIC.

Over the past five years, she has learned first-hand what makes Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity professionals successful.

"Core values – regardless of our

branch of service – is our way of life," she said.

"Setting the example, having the courage to speak out when facing adversity, and most importantly, having the passion and the heart to make a difference in service members' lives are just a few characteristics that attribute to their success and exude in their character," she added with emphasis.

She also lauded the efforts – every single day – that are done here at the DoD's "Center of Excellence" for Equity Training and Research.

"Everyone deserves to work in an environment where they are treated with dignity and respect. It's what we preach and do every day. Diversity is all about empowering people; valuing, understanding, and using everyone's differences effectively to capitalize on all the strengths of each individual creating powerful and synergistic teams," she said.

Navy Commander Yolanda K. Mason, DEOMI Chief of Staff, said she is proud of Florentino's selection – and equally as proud of what she calls "Team DEOMI."

"What a great honor for Master Sergeant Florentino. It is the duty of each of us to work to make the Department of Defense a workplace of choice that is characterized by equity and inclusion, and one that is reflective of this great nation we represent," she said.

"Like the private sector, the U.S. military recognizes the need for a diverse civilian and military workforce that includes a greater range of individual competencies, including skills, education, and professional backgrounds. That's the reason we exist," Commander Mason said.

When asked about who was most responsible for shaping the mother, Marine and woman she is today, Master Sergeant Florentino's answer was both definitive and instantaneous.

"My mother has always been my inspiration. Her values, work ethic, and her huge caring heart are always with me. She has a tremendous appreciation for this country because it gave her the opportunity to provide a better life for her children," she said.

"She taught me to embrace and be proud of our Hispanic culture, which I proudly share with the love of my life, my twelve-year-old daughter, Yoselin," she said with a smile.

"Hispanic Heritage is more than just flags, food, and festivals. While all these are factors of our culture, we must take it a step further to acknowledge the values, norms, and histories. African, Asian, and indigenous roots are part of what defines us; therefore, we must embrace our diversity within our culture," she said proudly. ■