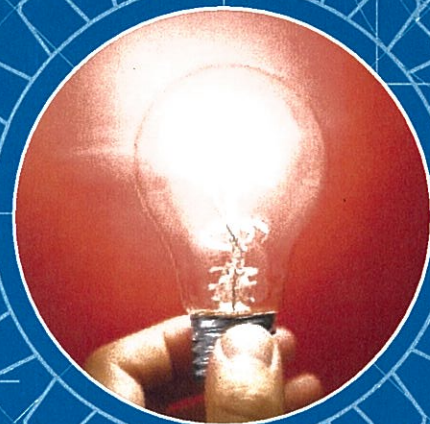


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Leadership Profiles

CAPT. JOAN E. DARRAH: OPENING UP THE MILITARY

BY GAIL ZOPPO | © 2009 DIVERSITYINC



CAPT. JOAN E. DARRAH
Servicemembers Legal
Defense Network

Inspired by an article about what women had accomplished in the U.S. Army, in 1972, Joan E. Darrah, then a senior in college, marched into a U.S. Navy recruiter's office in Boston, filled out an application and waited patiently. "At that time," she recalls, "they were only accepting 11 percent of women officer applicants."

Months later, she was accepted—and her initial three-year enlistment turned into a nearly 30-year career as a decorated naval intelligence officer, culminating in the rank of captain. "I absolutely loved the military," she says. "It gave me opportunities that I never would have been able to have."

But there was a negative side as well. Darrah lived for three decades in fear that her sexual orientation would be revealed. "As a gay person in the military, you

go to work every day wondering if this is going to be your last," she says, adding that under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, lesbian and gay active-duty personnel who are outed risk losing benefits.

"It's really hard to hide a part of your identity—and it's destructive ... I lived two lives," she says. "I wasn't even comfortable going to a restaurant with my partner."

She put her life on the line for her country; on 9/11, Darrah came close to being killed as she stood near the Pentagon moments before it was attacked. But her partner wouldn't even have received a phone call if something had happened to her.

Darrah retired as captain in June 2002. Since then, she has testified before the Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee's hearing on repealing "don't ask, don't tell" and currently serves on the Military Advisory Council of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network. "Don't ask, don't tell" is something awful that I had to live under," she says. "I know we can get rid of it and the military would be stronger."

FROM IMMIGRANT TO LATINA LEADER: CRISTINA LÓPEZ

BY DARYL C. HANNAH | © 2009 DIVERSITYINC

Cristina López had more than 20 years of experience mentoring women and working with immigrants before she was appointed president of the National Hispana Leadership Institute (NHLI) more than a year ago.

An immigrant from Colombia, López most recently served as the deputy executive director of the Center for Community Change, a national social-justice organization that works to attain rights for U.S. immigrants. Earlier in her career, she was vice president for institutional development at the National Council of La Raza.

"I have always felt a strong connection to the struggles that immigrants and Latinas face," says López.

Today, as president of NHLI, an Arlington, Va.-based nonprofit dedicated to helping develop Latinas as ethical leaders, López has assisted women who have taken on leadership roles in companies, law firms, education and the government. How is Lopez accomplishing this? Through the organization's talent-development initiatives: Latinas Learning to Lead, a week-long program for college-aged Latinas that combines leader-

ship training with technical and practical experience in public policy, effective communications and financial literacy; and the Mid-Career Leadership Program, a four-week course to help professional Latinas hone their strategic management and public-policy skills, while building personal strengths such as networking and cross-cultural communication.

"We understand that in order to be an effective leader, there are some intangible necessities ... that Latinas must be aware of," says López. "That's why we add a cultural-awareness aspect to our leadership training."

As for her goals, López says, "I want to make sure that Latinas gain the necessary leadership skills. NHLI has a reputation for producing national leaders, and I plan to help continue that legacy."



CRISTINA LÓPEZ
National Hispana
Leadership Institute