



50th Anniversary of the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration

On February 22-23, 2013, the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration (TSPPPA) celebrated 50 years since its inception in 1963. The festivities began on the evening of Feb. 21 with the Distinguished Alumni Awards ceremony, followed by a networking happy hour. The 2013 award winners are: **Commander Timothy Cronin**, MPA '08, U.S. Coast Guard; **Dale Didion**, MPA '83, President, The Didion Group; **Christa Fornarotto**, MPP '05, Associate Administrator for Airports, Federal Aviation Administration; **Dr. Nancy Potok**, PhD '09, Deputy Director and Chief Operation Officer, US Census Bureau; and **Michael Stinziano**, MPA '04, State Representative, Ohio General Assembly.

The second day of the celebration featured a policy forum where alumni and friends of the Trachtenberg School gathered for conversations about public policy and public administration. The forum was opened by keynote speaker Hon. Thomas M. Davis, former Virginia Congressman and Chairman of the House Government Reform Committee, former chief elected official of Fairfax County, and current Director of Federal Government Affairs for Deloitte & Touche LLP. The conversation with Hon. Davis was moderated by Christopher Smith, MPA '86.

Three simultaneous panel presentations followed Congressman Davis' welcome. The topics were Public Administration: Where have we been and where are we going? (moderated by TSPPPA Professor Emeritus Dr. Mike Harmon and featuring Tom Catlaw, PhD '03, Guy Adams, MPA '77, and Nancy Potok, PhD '09); Real World Application: The Challenges of Implementing Healthcare Reform (moderated by TSPPPA Assistant Professor Dr. Elizabeth Rigby and featuring TSPPPA alumni Jeff Grant, MPA '93, Jennifer Kates, PhD '12, and Jeff Levi, PhD '99); and Navigating to Happiness: A Career Framework (led by TSPPPA alumnus Frank DiGiammarino, MPA '95).

TSPPPA Director Dr. Kathy Newcomer closed the day by moderating a conversation with this year's five Distinguished Alumni Award winners. The awardees discussed their professional roles, as well as their successes and challenges in public service. Some thoughts on their experiences follow.

“I was the executive officer of a Coast Guard cutter out of Cape Canaveral, Florida with 80 people on board. As the executive officer you’re really responsible for the management and daily operation of the entire ship. You have such an influence over all 79 people below you, both in their personal lives and also in their professional lives. I took pride in developing them to be better Coasties, better fathers, better husbands. The Coast Guard allows me to work side by side with people to do a common mission. It’s that daily interaction with my shipmates and chance to lead people that I cherish the most and that I find the most rewarding.”

-Timothy Cronin, MPA ’08, Commander, US Coast Guard

“Just before I graduated from GW, I started work in the Office of Management and Budget under David Stockman. I was in my early twenties. After six years, I was selected to be on a small team, live in Saudi Arabia, and negotiate agreements on behalf of the US government, face-to-face with senior Saudi officials. Since then, I have lead a multi-national public affairs firm, a nuclear energy company, and reported to several boards of directors. Every day there are elements of what I learned in the public administration master’s program that I use to make decisions. I think it is somewhat unusual to actually rely on the evaluation and decision making tools you learn in classes. I have much to thank GW for.”

-Dale Didion, MPA ’83, President, The Didion Group

“Be fearless. Don’t be afraid to tell the truth, to ask questions, to ask for what you want, because you might actually get it. I know in my career one of the things all of my bosses have consistently said [is that] even when the news wasn’t good, I always told them the truth. And you get respect that way. And at least people know you are honest. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. A lot of people sometimes think, ‘Oh, everybody else in this room knows what they’re talking about, I better not ask my question.’ But nine times out of 10, everybody has questions. Ask questions. Find out what’s going on because that’s how everybody learns and grows.”

-Christa Fornarotto, MPP ’05, Associate Administrator for Airports,
Federal Aviation Administration

“I started to think about my day more like a business. And I said okay, so I’m like the COO of a company that has 14,000 employees all over the country. Many of them work from home. My revenues are close to \$1 billion per year and I have many customers who depend on me to deliver a product on time, accurate information, that they are making crucial business, social, and funding decisions based on. How do I go about my day as the COO of what could be a Fortune 500 company with the same kind of pressures? My day really revolves around meeting my customers’ needs, taking care of the employees, and making sure that they have what they need to do their job.”

-Nancy Potok, PhD ’09, Deputy Director and Chief Operation Officer,
US Census Bureau

“One of the experiences I had [at the Trachtenberg School] was a Leadership and Management [class] with Professor [Lori] Brainard. For a small group project we did the food stamp diet. We tried to evaluate if you could eat healthy while allocating what a normal allotment for an individual on food stamps would be. And that whole experience of being in someone else’s shoes and trying to evaluate what’s going on...is something I do when I evaluate when [a constituent] calls. And that’s always been very helpful, and that is a project I’ll always remember.”

-Michael Stinziano, MPA ’04, State Representative, Ohio General Assembly