Lives of Service to Country and to the Public’s Health

At the intersection of military service and public health, you will find the remarkable husband-and-wife team of Odis and Pauletta Blueitt. Both were members of the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M who enjoyed over 25 years in service to country through roles in public health.

To reflect their passion for both, the couple recently established an endowed scholarship at the Texas A&M School of Public Health. The Pauletta D. Blueitt ’81, Col, USAF, Ret. & Odis R. Blueitt ’82, COL, USA, Ret. Endowed Scholarship for Public Health is to be awarded to students pursuing the new Bachelor of Science in Public Health (B.S.P.H.) with a preference for members of the Corps.

“With this endowment, we wanted to simultaneously honor the Corps’ core values and our passion for public health,” the couple said.

A retired Air Force Colonel after 28-1/2 years of service as a Health Care Administrator, Pauletta has the distinction of being in the 4th freshman class that enrolled women into what had traditionally been an all-male Aggie Corps of Cadets. Little did she know that her example would pave the way for many more female Aggies to join the Corps.

While serving as Chief of Program Analysis and Evaluation at the TRICARE Northeastern Office of the Lead Agent in Washington, D.C., Pauletta was appointed Director of the Emergency Operations Center, which was created in response to the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon and was awarded a Defense Meritorious Service Medal for her exemplary leadership in this capacity. Her final assignment was at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, as the Deputy Command Surgeon and Command Administrator at Headquarter Air Education and Training Command where she was responsible for the education and training of all Air Force medical personnel in all career fields, provided oversight for

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medical readiness tasking, and served as the senior Medical Service Corps advisor, mentor, and career manager for 175 health care executives.

Pauletta received her Master of Health Administration degree from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1989. She is a Life Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives.

"I think there were about 60 women cadets when I was in the Corps," Pauletta said. "It is wonderful to see such a tremendous increase in the number of women cadets today."

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The Corps is where she met her husband Odis who following graduation from Texas A&M was commissioned into the United States Army as a Health Care Administrator. Odis earned his Master of Business Administration from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville in 1989 and a Master of Arts in Public Management from Midwestern State University in 1997. A highly decorated Medical Service Corps Officer, he served 30 years in the U.S. Army Reserve, retiring in 2012.

While serving as Brigade Commander, Odis provided exemplary leadership in the aftermath of the tragic shooting that occurred at Ft. Hood, Texas, in November 2009. As one of his units prepared for deployment at the processing center, his soldier, Captain John Paul Gaffney, lost his life protecting others. After the incident, Odis deployed a team of mental health professionals to offer counseling to the soldiers and their families. He ensured Gaffney was awarded the Soldier's Medal in recognition of his valor and service and spent two years working tirelessly to establish the Captain John Paul Gaffney Reserve Center in honor of Captain Gaffney's supreme sacrifice and his legacy.

His leadership in the face of such tragedy does not surprise Gilbert Ramirez, Dr.P.H., head of the Department of Public Health Studies at the Texas A&M School of Public Health, who also began his public health career in the military.

"Military leadership is not defined merely by courage and strength – it is also defined by compassion for humanity. Soldiers are known for leadership through their service, and for the service they provide through exemplary leadership," Ramirez said. "Moments of tragedy bring these moments to the public's eye, but in reality these moments are constant in every soldier's life. We in the Department of Public Health Studies hope to instill these same values in our B.S.P.H. students."

Currently, Odis is Chief of Program Operations for the Defense Health Agency, which administers the TRICARE benefit, a program that provides health care for 9.5 million beneficiaries worldwide, including military service members and their families. He is board-certified in health care management and just like his wife, is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives.

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