

Champion of COVID Response

Lori Harmon
District Manager

Social Security Administration

Years of Service: 27



Summary:

I am nominating Lori Harmon for the COVID champion award. Throughout this entire COVID-19 pandemic environment, Ms. Harmon has truly exemplified what leading in a "storm"...looks like. Not only has she led our staff through the myriad of changes associated with leading/managing in a global pandemic, especially with equipment challenges/delays, she also faced the unthinkable....there was a fire in Ms. Harmon's office that could have had far reaching ramifications were it not for her quick thinking. Her poise, resourcefulness and critical thinking resulted in no one being harmed and minimal disruption to public service.

Description: Ms. Harmon is the manager of one of the largest field offices in Area 7, and before the highest volume of visitor traffic in the entire Chicago region; therefore, the pivot from public facing to working from home "on a dime" would appear daunting, if not impossible. Yet, Ms. Harmon, effectively lead her team through that significant change, seamlessly, ensuring every staff member had the necessary equipment to continue serving from their homes (alternate duty stations). The agency's transition to a maximum telework environment occurred on March 24, 2020, shortly thereafter, Ms. Harmon discovered not all of her staff had the necessary phone equipment, primarily headsets, that would allow them to answer the phones from their ADS (a critical need under the circumstances as the phones would be the primary means for the public to reach us). Understanding the urgency "of the hour", she quickly made the required contacts to the ADO and our field services specialist to start the process of securing the needed headsets. Ms Harmon quickly discovered she wasn't the only manager in this predicament, so there would be a delay. Therefore, she could have rested on her "laurels" but instead, immediately, worked with the ADO team to partner with other offices using a call "transfer feature" to ensure her service area wouldn't suffer loss of service due to the "missing" phone equipment.

Not too long into the maximum telework environment, in mid to late June, the Chicago North office underwent so routine roof repair, that ultimately resulted in a fire. After working another 10 hour day, Ms. Harmon had gone home when she received the call notifying her that her office was on fire. She immediately notified the ADO, and though cautioned otherwise, Ms. Harmon chose to go see the damage for herself. Upon arriving at the office, it was clear the damage was greater than thought. As a matter of fact, the smoke and water damage was extensive, making the building "unsafe". Yet in order to protect the public's personable identifiable information (PII), with permission from building inspectors, she and a member of her management swiftly checked on the belongings of about 30+ employees, and where warranted, moved them to safety.

Because of the damage, the office needed to be closed for approximately 3-4 weeks. However, Ms. Harmon knew the impact that would have on service, so again, her quick thinking, led to her collaborating with a neighboring office manager to have her dire need interviews taken at the other office, and her staff's print traffic re-directed to another office... again to ensure seamless service to the public. Despite the "discomfort" of the residual odor, Ms. Harmon reported to her office every single day. She worked tirelessly with the lessor and the contractors to ensure every safety measure was taken, e.g. industrial fans installed, ventilation system updates, furniture coverings, etc.

It's also important to note that our Chicago North FO has a 4 member management team, but in the early months of the maximum telework environment, Ms. Harmon had one member working from home under quarantine (WAHQ) and she selflessly offered another member to a neighboring office, resulting in her having only 2 members of management on site to handle the extremely high volume of mail, print traffic and dire need interviews. Again, Ms. Harmon has gone above and beyond to model leading by example...thought leadership, and passion for dedicated and commitment service in spite of "the storm".