

Government Whistleblower Paula Pedene Earns PRSA Top Honors

NEW YORK— The [Public Relations Society of America](#) (PRSA) selected **Paula L. Pedene APR, Fellow PRSA**, as the Society's 2015 Public Relations Professional of the Year awardee. Pedene is the owner of Paula Pedene & Associates, a Service-Disabled Veteran and Woman Owned Small Business. She will receive the award at the PRSA [2015 International Conference](#) during the Monday Networking Luncheon on Nov. 9 in Atlanta, Ga.

The Public Relations Professional of the Year Award honors the individual who, in the previous year, represented the best in public relations as an outstanding example of the management function that establishes mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends.

"Throughout her life, Paula has demonstrated a high level of courage and fortitude we all should aspire to reach," said **Kathy Barbour, APR**, PRSA 2015 National Chair.

"Whether we are referencing her service to our country through the Navy or her public affairs role with the Veterans Health Administration, she has shown fearless determination and strength, and she embodies the ethical code we each pledge to follow as PRSA members."

Pedene was one of the first whistleblowers at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System (PVAHCS). In 2010, in collaboration with **Sam Foote, M.D.**, she disclosed mismanagement of fee basis funds, and reported a hostile work environment to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Their disclosures were verified in a November 8, 2011 [OIG report](#). In 2012, when new leaders arrived at the PVAHCS, Pedene was reprimed against for these whistleblowing activities. The new leaders removed her from her public affairs officer role, which she held for 20 years, for an alleged computer infraction. This supposed infraction resulted in Pedene spending two years in the basement as a clerk in the VA library.

During this time, she heard from Veterans about the long waits and delays and became aware of the issues in working the Electronic Wait List. Again, collaborating with Dr. Foote (on her own time) she strategized with him, offering PR advice and counsel, sharing important contacts in Congress, the media and other venues, followed the congressional hearings on the wait time issues and began monitoring news reports to help counter any VA inaccuracies. She did this while undergoing five unsubstantiated investigations in defense of her whistleblower reprisal case. Dr. Foote and Pedene along with several others, were successful in these VA wait time disclosures according to both a [May](#) and [August 2014](#) VA OIG Report. In 2014, Pedene won a settlement in her whistleblower case against VA with the help of her employee representative Roger French, her lawyers at Minahan and Muther and with the [Office of Special Counsel](#).

"I'm humbled to accept this award," said Pedene. "I did what I needed to do to support Dr. Sam Foote in exposing the unethical practices in the VA wait time scandal. It took enormous efforts on the part of many individuals who stood strong, even when it meant

standing alone. When people ask me what I learned from this experience I can honestly say that God had me where He needed me to be to help our Veterans. They are our true heroes and deserve our support. I am honored to be recognized by PRSA particularly, because there were so many of our colleagues, who stood by my side. They demonstrated the meaning of true friendship.”

Pedene, a United States Navy veteran, was the first female co-anchor for the nationally broadcast show, “Navy News This Week.” She also served as a news reporter/anchor at the Far East Network in Tokyo and at Broadcast Detachment 27 on Midway Island, providing stories through the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. After leaving the Navy, she worked as a freelance reporter for Cox Broadcasting in Washington DC, with PBS on the nationally broadcast TV Show “For Veterans Only” and with the State Department’s United States Information Agency as a news anchor/reporter for “America Today.”

Pedene has also served the Society. As chair of the PRSA Health Academy, she guided the 800-member Professional Interest Section. She also served on the [PRSA Phoenix](#) board for seven years, where she was elected president and recognized as a Percy Award Recipient for her leadership in reenergizing the Chapter. Most recently, she was named Chair of the [PRSA Western District](#), where she serves as a liaison to 11 PRSA Chapters with more than 2,000 members across five western states.

Throughout her impressive career, Pedene has earned three Silver Anvil Awards for Institutional Programs, Reputation Management and Community Outreach, along with more than 80 other government and nongovernment awards. She also created two nonprofit organizations – the Veterans Medical Leadership Council and [Honoring Arizona’s Veterans](#), where she volunteers her time as the Phoenix Veterans Day Parade Coordinator and serves as a public relations practitioner.

The 2015 PRSA International Conference will be held at the **Atlanta Marriott Marquis**, November 8 – 10. A full lineup of speakers and [registration information](#) can be found at the Conference website.

About the Public Relations Society of America

PRSA is the largest professional organization serving the U.S. public relations community. With a mission to “advance the profession and the professional,” PRSA provides news and information, thought leadership, continuing education and networking opportunities; sets standards of professional excellence and ***ethical conduct***; and advocates for the ***business value of public relations*** and ***greater diversity*** among public relations professionals. Based in New York, PRSA comprises 110 local ***Chapters***; 14 ***Professional Interest Sections*** that focus on specific industries and practice areas; and the ***Public Relations Student Society of America*** (PRSSA), which is active at more than ***340 colleges and universities***.