

Enid News & Eagle

In-sourcing May Bring 19-year Career at Base to an End

By Jeff Mullin September 2, 2010

ENID — When pilots at Vance Air Force Base, whether instructors or students, need something sweet, they know to go to the base bookstore.

There Mona Stiles, who has run the bookstore for the past 12 years as an employee of Lear Siegler Services Inc., keeps a candy jar filled with Snickers on her desk.

“I don’t know if that tradition will continue,” she said.

Stiles is one of those who will not have a job at Vance after Sept. 30 if the defense department continues with its plans to convert some contract jobs to government service positions.

The Defense Department is in the process of hiring 76 simulator instructors and support personnel to take jobs now held by employees of Lear Siegler.

This is the result of Resource Management Decision 802, announced more than a year ago by Defense Secretary Robert Gates. RMD 802 called for hiring 34,000 civil service workers in place of contractors over the next five years. The change, which Gates said was being made to save taxpayers money, was to take place by Oct. 1, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

However, last month Gates announced the in-sourcing process was being halted because the anticipated savings were not being realized.

Unless the word comes down from the Air Force to halt the in-sourcing process, Stiles’ 19-year career at Vance will come to an end. All Lear Siegler employees had a chance to apply with the government to keep their jobs, but Stiles chose not to, because she was told she would have little or no chance of being rehired because she is not a veteran and has no government service experience.

“I do feel like experience is walking out the door,” Stiles said.

The Vance bookstore offers not only today’s hot bestsellers, but books of regulations, maps, charts, academic books, reference publications, technical orders, flight guides and checklists every pilot at the base needs.

When a pilot comes to the bookstore Stiles knows exactly what he or she needs. Each T-6 pilot needs a stack of books 2 to 3 feet tall, for example, Stiles said.

"It's not like Walden's," she said, referring to the Waldenbooks chain stores. "It is a technical bookstore. You need to be trained."

Stiles said it took her six months to learn the basics and a year to become truly proficient when she first took the bookstore job in 1998. Prior to that it had been run by officers awaiting pilot training. She got the job after the young officers manning the bookstore ran out of checklists, sending an entire flight of student pilots to the flight line without them. After that the decision was made to hire a contractor to run the bookstore in order to provide continuity.

When Stiles first took the job she was told, "If you run out of books you are fired. That is an incentive. I have not run out of books."

Stiles is, however, running out of time unless the defense department acts soon.

"If they stop the in-sourcing I will definitely go on working here," Stiles said.

State Sen. Patrick Anderson, along with U.S. Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe, and U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas, have spoken out against the in-sourcing plan, and members of the Vance Instructor Association have contacted the Pentagon asking the Air Force to heed Gates' call and keep the current contract employees in place.

In an e-mail to Air Education and Training Command officials, Kevin M. Denny, vice president of contracts for URS Federal Support Services, Inc., the parent company of Lear Siegler, offered to waive the 60-day advanced notice of intent to exercise the next contract option, to "explore all avenues with the intent of offering a voluntary cost reduction on the contract to generate the anticipated savings on the contract associated with the in-sourcing initiative," and offered to "work closely with the contracting office to assist them in meeting their 10 percent cuts in each of the out years in this program."

City of Enid military liaison Mike Cooper briefed a group of Oklahoma congressional aides during their tour of Vance Thursday and said they are aware of the situation.

"There are a lot of efforts through our congressional offices to make sure the right decision is being made," Cooper said. "I think there will be more to follow. I feel confident we will get the right answer, whatever that answer is."

For Stiles and her colleagues, the right answer would allow her to keep her job.

"I love this job so much," she said. "It is part of my personality. I really want someone to come in here who is interested enough to take care of our boys and girls, because they look over the skies. I did it for the students."