

Priscilla E. Guthrie '71

Though she had worked on defense projects earlier in her long career with TRW, Inc., Priscilla Guthrie never pictured herself working in the federal government. She politely declined when a friend with an appointment in the administration tried to recruit her. "I wasn't willing to give up my retirement at TRW, where I'd spent my entire career to that point," she says.

That was before September 11, 2001. The terrorist attacks that day prompted Guthrie to call her friend and say, "I'll do anything to help." A few months later her friend called on a Wednesday and said they needed her there by Monday. Guthrie went without hesitation, even though it meant forfeiting some retirement benefits. Now in her fifth year as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Deputy Chief Information Officer in the Department of Defense, Guthrie works in the Pentagon—one of the buildings attacked on September 11.



As the primary advisor to the Department of Defense Chief Information Officer, Guthrie's main goal is to achieve network centrality, or net-centrality, across the department. She explains the challenge this way: "Historically, the military operated self-contained platforms, such as ships. If there was a need for the ship to communicate with Marines on shore during a conflict, they developed a customized interface." Her job is to make it easier and faster for not only the branches of the military to communicate with each other but also with coalition partners, such as the countries aiding the United States in Iraq. She compares the network to the Internet but says, "Obviously, for security reasons we can't put most of our information out there on the Internet so we have our own network." Guthrie says she loves her job despite the pressure inherent in developing systems where the ability to get data quickly can be a life-or-death situation.

Guthrie has never run from a challenge. Against her parents' wishes she applied only to Penn State. During her freshman year she switched to electrical engineering where, in the late 1960s, she was often the only woman in class. After graduating, she started at TRW in 1971 as a data entry clerk. The company told her they would give her a professional title after six months if she hadn't "run off to get married" by then. Guthrie stayed at TRW, working on defense projects during the Cold War years. She also served as program manager for a \$300 million operation to modernize the tax systems of the IRS and as vice president and general manager of TRW's commercial IT businesses. Before leaving in 2001, she was vice president for e-business, with a focus on improving the supply chain.

At Penn State, Guthrie served on the Dean's Advisory Board for the Women in Engineering Advisory Council, as a board member of the Penn State Engineering Society, and as commencement speaker in 2000. She currently is chair of the Leonhard Center Advisory Board. She also endowed a scholarship in engineering for entering students with financial need.

Penn State has previously named Guthrie an Alumni Fellow in 2003 and honored her with the Outstanding Engineering Alumni Award in 2001. Guthrie, who also holds an M.B.A. from

Marymount University, is a life member of the Penn State Alumni Association and lives in northern Virginia with her partner, Charles Stableford.