Celebrating Dinah

We are deeply saddened to inform you that Dinah F. B. Cohen, the pioneering former director of the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP), passed away peacefully on March 23, 2018 following a brief and brave battle against cancer.

Dinah made it her life’s work to create a better, more inclusive future for individuals with disabilities. In her federal career, she worked at the U.S. Administration for International Development, Naval Research Lab, and as most of us recall, at the U.S. Department of Defense. As CAP Director from 1990 to 2013, Dinah implemented the world’s largest centralized accommodations program, providing assistive technology and services to DoD employees, wounded, ill and injured Service members, and to employees at 69 partner federal agencies. Moreover, she was well-known as an outstanding presenter and trainer, reaching thousands and thousands of individuals through her dynamic delivery of disability and inclusion curriculum.

Sharon Terrell-Lindsay, CAP Program Analyst and long-time colleague and friend of Dinah’s, commented on Dinah’s passing:

“I would be remiss if I didn’t say how I met Dinah because I would remind her every chance I got, that she didn’t want me. I came to CAP off of Priority Placement and that was the only thing Dinah couldn’t control (she sure tried), and we all know how she changed laws that she didn’t like, but this was one law that she and I both came to appreciate that she couldn’t change!! Once she realized I had truly joined her team, we were bonded forever. We have laughed about this for...
19 years including one of my recent visits with her. She was one of a kind and my daughter and I both were benefactors of her generosity and kindness, and we will miss her surprises in the mail and random emails just to say hi! I felt empowered by Dinah who never accepted no for an answer, made people listen when she spoke, and was an inspiration to me to become so passionate about the program and its purpose that has helped so many.”

Dinah received numerous awards and honors throughout her career recognizing her leadership, accomplishments and dedication, including the prestigious Service to America Citizen Services Medal, Vice President Gore’s Hammer Award, the Quality Award from President George W. Bush, and the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Civilian Service.

In a 2007 interview, Dinah said, “I enjoy the public sector because I really feel we can have an impact on not just the people we are working with directly, but a much bigger scope. The reason I stay so engaged and so passionate about what I do is customer service. When I go out, I will meet some of my customers and they will let me know the impact that we’ve been able to have on their lives. It’s what makes each day special.”

Though Dinah’s passing is a great loss for the CAP family and wider disability community, her tireless work and dedication to her mission of accessibility and inclusion will continue to impact and improve the lives of people for years to come.

Dinah often wondered if her work would make a difference – to help increase access, inclusion and opportunity for people with disabilities in the federal sector and in society. We are pleased to confirm that although more work needs to be done, Dinah indeed made the world a better place through her spirit, passion and life’s work.
A Poem for Dinah
by Michael Young, CAPTEC Manager
and friend to Dinah

You began your journey, a beacon;
a wonderous pinpoint of light.

Brushing away webs of darkness
as your family shed pain from their flight.

The joy of your arrival was tempered;
they said your heart was not strong.

No one could imagine (except likely for you)
to what degree they’d be proven wrong.

The structural difference significant,
they said no cure could be found.

But even then you bucked expectation;
the hallmark of your renown.

Though your heart had a structural weakness,
with a limit of its physical capacity.

Your soul and your spirit soared to compensate;
to create your awesome tenacity.

Changing minds, realities and laws;
this was what you chose as your stand.

When told you couldn’t or can’t, your reply;
"Bupkus! Talk to the hand!"

You championed those on the periphery,
those bypassed with a shamed disregard.

When the naive
could not grasp the logic,
you persisted
and swayed the old guard.

Your physical limitation didn’t become your cage;
rather you made it your key.

You hammered and forged and altered it
so that others could join and work free.

Your life’s work was impactful;
the nation, the state, more diverse.

The barriers and walls in other’s paths,
easier now to traverse.

Your fight and your work now are finished.
The tasks are ours now to address.

As we advocate, promote and fight the good fight,
we know that you’ll acquiesce.

We ache with the loss of our mentor.
We miss your bright laugh, dearest friend.

May we always remember your lessons,
and see your vision through to the end.
A social media group was formed by Dinah Cohen’s friends, family and colleagues to provide a platform to send messages of love and support to Dinah during her illness. Here are some remembrances...

There are many funny and poignant stories I could tell about my 25 years of friendship with Dinah. It is hard to pick one. But Dinah and I tried to celebrate our birthdays together someplace different every two years. Several years ago, we chose Savannah. We were taking a trolley tour around the city. At one stop, a Forrest Gump impersonator boarded the trolley and in an identical Forrest accent entertained us with stories. Dinah was like a little kid she was so excited. We all know she loved the movies and I don’t think she would have been any more excited if Tom Hanks had boarded the trolley. We’ve laughed about it many times since.

I will miss her terribly. She was a wonderful friend, confidant, educator and entertainer to me. She will always be in my heart and on my mind.”

– Dianne McLeod Hadley

When I think of the phrase ‘like a boss’ Dinah Cohen comes to mind. She was THE boss. She had high expectations of her team and expected nothing less than perfection as we rattled off our ‘the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program is a centrally-funded program that provides assistive technology to wounded service members and federal employees with disabilities’ speech. She was a candid leader blending tenacity, humor and compassion. She was also known to call me at my desk and ask me to come help her operate her Facebook quite regularly. I’d laugh every time I’d get that call. When you met Dinah, you instantly felt the passion she had for her work in the disability community. It’s an honor to have been a part of her team at CAP. She will be missed by many and the world has lost an incredible disability advocate.”

– Christine Moyer

Dinah was smart, funny and one of the very few really great presenters on disability inclusion. I never tired of hearing her speak. I remember when Judy Gilliom called me to ask ‘off the record’ what I knew about this person named Dinah Cohen, as she was considering offering her a new position at the Pentagon. I could honestly tell her that Dinah’s reputation was excellent and she wouldn’t regret hiring her. And I am certain that everyone whom Judy called ‘off the record” said the same. Dinah went on to make CAP the go-to agency for high tech accommodations. She will live forever in the annals of disability history.”

– Maggie Roffee