

## Observance Month Spotlight Series: 'Can Do'

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PANAMA CITY, FL – Naval Support Activity Panama City recognizes Sailors and civilians in a series of articles during special observance months. For the month of March designated as Women's History Month, the installation spotlights Facilities Engineering Acquisition Division Director Lt. Maria Beltre, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Southeast, Public Works Department Panama City.

Beltre was born in the Dominican Republic. In 2002, she moved to Rhode Island.

While attending school, learning English and becoming a U.S. citizen, she was unknowingly making decisions that would shape her future.

Beltre discovered her passion for engineering after being exposed to the profession during her high school's Engineering Career Day. In college, she majored in geotechnical engineering.

In her junior year at the University of Rhode Island, she learned about the Navy and the Civil Engineer Corps during a local recruiting fair. Shortly after, she applied and was accepted into Officer Candidate School, an ideal career path where her unique skills could be put to good use.

"Being a Seabee is not about numbers, but about the people. We all know each other," Beltre said.

She came to Panama City on the heels of Hurricane Michael with the installation still in the infancy stages of recovery.

As the FEAD Director, she is in charge of three branches consisting of about 16 personnel. Her team along with the rest of the Public Works Department have spent countless hours restoring the base since October 2018.

"Wherever we go, we are there to support the mission and warfighter," Beltre said.

She led the efforts to get NSA Panama City into the fourth and final phase of rebuilding after the storm. Additionally, she overcame the challenges of repairing government property, and ultimately continue the mission.

Her desire to serve the country that gave her an opportunity to a better life was one of the reasons that attracted her to the military.

The military pay chart was another factor given that service members are paid based on rank.

"The first step in equality is equal pay. An O-3 gets the same pay, whether male or female. It's very different in the civilian world," Beltre added.

Since the inauguration of former President Barrack Obama, Beltre has seen a slow change in equality.

"Kamala Harris becoming the first female Vice President of the United States is a step forward. "You need to be qualified, not just a minority," Beltre said.

For the last four years, Beltre has been caring for her father.

"I had to translate for my dad. He is very independent, but needed medical attention. It was very difficult," Beltre remarked.

While preparing for the Principles and Practice of Engineering exam, defending a graduate school master of engineering thesis and facing challenges of looking after a parent, Beltre took advantage of military resources to help during that crisis.

As a Seabee, Beltre lives by the motto, "We Build, We Fight." Those words along with her can-do attitude motivated her to persevere.

In 2020, Hurricane Sally brought erosion to the base and the global pandemic changed everything. All of those experiences add to her lengthy resume while also attesting to good leadership.