



PARISA FETHERSON

The **DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS/A AWARD** recognizes Park University alumni who have distinguished themselves through career, service or community achievements.

After graduating high school and working a part-time job, Parisa Fetherson, '06, wondered where her life would lead. She had never heard of the U.S. Marine Corps. But after being captivated by a high school boyfriend's stories about his boot camp training to become a Marine, Fetherson quickly found her way to a recruiting office in Baltimore. "I vividly recall the recruiters showing me videos and brochures," she said. "I wanted to tell them to stop wasting time. Without a doubt, I wanted to be a Marine. I just needed to know how quickly I could get started."

Unlike those who dread the intense challenges of boot camp, Fetherson, a high school basketball, volleyball and track athlete, said "bring it on." She enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1979, and with a ceaseless drive to learn and lead, she continued up the ranks, becoming a sergeant major in 2001 (now retired).

NEVER DWELL ON OBSTACLES

While being female was never a concern to her, Fetherson soon realized being a woman Marine made a difference to some. "I've had some rough times; there have been those who tried to make me feel less than I am. But I didn't accept their opinions," she said.

She attributes her strength of mind to growing up during the civil rights era. "As a young girl, I couldn't understand why people were treated differently based solely on the color of their skin. To this day, I don't understand it," she said. "I decided then that I'd always do whatever it takes to be the best person I can be. I've never been detoured because someone else looked at me differently. And I've never dwelled on obstacles. I've always focused on moving forward toward what I want to achieve."

Throughout her 26 years of active duty, Fetherson traveled the world — from Australia to the Philippines — and along the way, met her husband of 34 years, retired

Sgt. Maj. Ron Fetherson, while they were stationed in Japan. Together, they raised a family: son Lamont, and daughters Monica and Tracey. Following in her parents' footsteps, their youngest, Tracey, is an active duty Marine captain and was recently featured in The Washington Post in a story about the courage of women Marines.

ALWAYS MOVING FORWARD

The Marine Corps also helped Fetherson realize her dream of a college education. "I had no idea how to make it happen, but as soon as I realized it was possible with Park, I went for it." After earning a bachelor's degree in social psychology from Park, she went on to earn a master's degree in education.

Since retiring from active duty, Fetherson has held positions as an organizational trainer and academic adviser. She is currently the director of personal and professional development programs at Marine Corps Base Quantico (Va., where Park has a campus) and is president of the VA-1 Crossroads Chapter of the Women Marines Association.

Fetherson continues moving forward to achieve new dreams, most recently as the co-chair of the Women Marines Association's national Centennial Celebration. This year commemorates 100 years since women were allowed to enlist in the Marine Corps.

"Being a Marine demands some of the toughest training and most arduous work," Fetherson said. "But I can't imagine anything else that could have given me the same satisfaction in my life."

