

# Online Journal of Space Communication

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Volume 8  
Issue 15 *Women in Space (Spring 2009)*

Article 7

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October 2021

## Profile of Leslie Blaker

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### Recommended Citation

Frost, Mary (2021) "Profile of Leslie Blaker," *Online Journal of Space Communication*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 15 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/spacejournal/vol8/iss15/7>

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Leslie Blaker currently supports the position of vice president of government affairs and development for DataPath, Inc. which is as of June 1st is undergoing a merger with Rockwell Collins, Government Systems of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In this role, Blaker leads DataPath's government relations initiatives and participation with key industry and federal organizations that inform and advise the U.S. government on vital communications issues. In addition, Blaker is responsible for the business development of strategic US DoD and Intelligence sector programs as they relate to satellite communications.

Blaker was previously vice president, development for SES Americom Government Services, Inc., formerly of GE Americom, now a wholly-owned subsidiary of SES Global, S.A. that serves the U.S. government in the areas of civilian and defense broadband satellite communications services. There her responsibilities included strategic program development and related governmental affairs. Blaker has more than 20 years of experience within the satellite industry supporting the U.S. government, including other senior executive roles at iDirect Technologies, Loral Orion and Loral Space Systems, GTE Spacenet, Hughes Network Systems and Northern Telecom.

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1) How did you get started in the satellite business?

After a start in my first position with what was then called Northern Telecom, I became a member and volunteer in a then "new" organization called "Women in Telecommunications" or "WIT". I met many wonderful people as part a member of this then start up organization, to include the then chapter President Dee Dolan. Dee told me about contacts she had with a firm then known as M/A-Com DCC in Germantown, MD, and their separate division M/A-Com Linkabit in LaJolla, CA. They were launching a new line of satellite communications services called "VSAT's" or Very Small Aperture Terminals for the commercial segment, and wanted to also pursue applications in the US Government as a possible vertical market. I met with the senior leaders of M/A-Com DCC at the time to include Jack Shaw, Pradman Kaul (2009 - Satellite Executive of the Year) and was hired as an Account Manager to develop Federal programs. M/A-Com DCC became Hughes Network Systems after a few years, and M/A-Com Linkabit evolved into multiple firms of the then pioneers working there such as Mark Dankberg, ViaSat, L-3/Titan Linkabit and others. It was also later through associations such as Women in Defense and industry networking that I also met other women pioneers in the industry such as Mary Ann Elliott, Founder and CEO of Arrowhead Space and Telecommunications, and Kay Sears, now President of Intelsat General. A solid lesson that networking and service to your industry is important to those young women considering a career in satcom.

2) How have you been involved in changes brought about in or by this business (innovations, technologies, services)?

Following my tenure at Hughes, and GTE Spacenet which became GE Spacenet and later SES Americom through acquisition, a small group of tenured colleagues from Hughes Network Systems and GTE Spacenet including myself became investment capital partners in a new venture originally called Comsoft Systems in 1994. Through what we now call our "friends, family and fools" round of capitol, Comsoft Systems leveraged what was then one of the first developments of a next generation, internet protocol, or IP network modem over commercial or military satellites. As the company evolved, and new investors were brought in, we re-branded the company to iDirect in 1999. Through this early venture, the current iDirect product line and other now competitive technologies available in the open market have evolved the way high speed broadband satellite communications services are effectively provided to both the commercial and military segments.

3) What do you think was the greatest event/situation/opportunity you experienced?

The greatest privilege I have had in my career was serving in the front line from a contractor's perspective in 1991 to effectively provide solutions to our warfighters during Desert Storm. Through GTE Spacenet I had led efforts supporting the US Army in a program since 1988 and still publically known today as TROJAN. Through our efforts with this program, we had successfully deployed one of the first US military implementations of commercial Ku band to the field. At the time of Desert Storm there was a pressing need to provide portable broadband communication in theatre. Working together with multiple industry partners, utilizing available commercial off the shelf solutions (COTS) components, we were able to integrate a trailer based broadband communications solution resembling the satellite news gathering trailers of that time. Within a 45 day window to meet critical mission requirements from start to finish, we deployed 14 satcom communications trailers into theatre, significantly influencing our troop's ability to perform their mission. Many of our team received the Commanders Civilian Award for Public Service.

4) What was the greatest obstacle?

I would offer the greatest obstacle I have faced in my service to this industry is actually more of a challenge. That is one of balance and equal commitment to both work and family. As women, balancing our professional roles and our commitment to those that depend upon us as business leaders, and our personal life remain pressing despite what all the books we have read and media influences tell us. My advice from experience on this is simple. Each of us has to dig deep to determine what is best for us as individuals, set priorities, and stick to them. If it doesn't work, change it. Of key importance is to first take care of yourself, physically and mentally. Give the gift of time to yourself daily to fulfill this. When we are full, we have the time to ensure the needs of our job and families are met without reservation.

5) What do you see happening in the next five years in this industry?

I predict that there will be a continued if not increasing reliance on satellite communications by both the commercial and US military sectors given the demand for mobile higher broadband data and video applications. This will also be driven by the availability to provide these solutions

through the exploitation of frequencies such as Ka, and new data compression technologies and ground segment equipment that are commercially supplied today in the market.

6) What advice do you have for women interested in entering the industry?

As has been evident in my career, seek a mentor, someone you respect that can assist in coaching and your professional development. Be of service to your industry, volunteer and equally mentor those who come to you for support in the future. Always maintain a current knowledge of our industry, emerging trends, and look for opportunities to develop your career with that path. Enjoy your tenure, as this is one of the most exciting fields I can image for women to be part of.