

By Joe Walker

## ‘Tomboy’ tackles tough Recovery Act work

Rebecca Daniels is a self-described tomboy who loves the challenge of working amid hazardous chemicals to clean up old buildings at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Paducah Site and prepare them for demolition.

The 43-year-old started work in late 2009 at Paducah under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. She was eager to prove to co-workers that she could excel for DOE cleanup contractor LATA Environmental Services of Kentucky, LLC.

“I wanted to earn their respect -- not because I’m a girl, but because I could do the job,” Daniels said. “And I’ve done that.”

Daniels underwent rigorous safety training to prepare for work. The only woman in a 13-member crew asked to be assigned to front-line supervisor John Jacobs because of his reputation for paramount safety and thoroughness.

“I trust him with my life,” Daniels said, “and I told him that.”

Working in multi-layered protective equipment, she helped remove hydrogen, fluorine and water tanks atop one of two buildings where workers fed uranium hexafluoride into the plant during the Cold War. Daniels donned the heavy clothing in mandatory short spurts to avoid overheating and guard against hazardous chemical exposure.

She and husband Mike are ex-Marines who ran a trucking firm that struggled during the recession. She also worked for a home-improvement retailer, but knew her job was in jeopardy when the company began shifting her duties to supervisors.

Seeking job security, the couple applied for work at the Paducah Site. Plant operator USEC Inc. hired Mike while Rebecca took the Recovery Act job. She hopes her training and experience will help her land a job with USEC once the Recovery Act work ends in 2011.

“It’s a blessing for one person in a family to obtain a job like this,” Daniels said. “But for two people in one family, it’s just about unheard of.”



Rebecca Daniels dons protective equipment before doing cleanup work at DOE's Paducah Site. She says job safety is paramount.



Rebecca Daniels tapes covering to the floor in a section of the old Feed Plant at DOE's Paducah Site. Recovery Act workers continue cleaning up the complex so that it can be demolished in 2011.