



# U.S. VETERANS MAGAZINE

Providing Education & Employment Opportunities

FALL 2024

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EMPLOYERS,  
SD PROGRAMS  
& SCHOOLS

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# CHEF RUSH —FACING THE FIGHT



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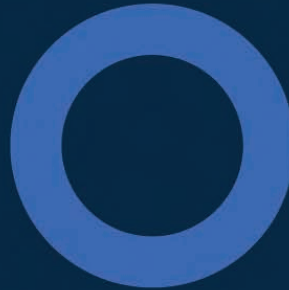
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From the Editor's Desk

# Navigating Change



In our fall issue, we celebrate the “Top Veteran-Friendly” companies, schools and supplier diversity programs as they appreciate and honor the vast talent and brilliance embodied by the veterans they employ and serve (page 13).

Our cover story on page 76 shares how Chef Andre Rush is “Facing the Fight” and using the holistic benefits of cooking and exercise to help him heal from tragedy and fuel his work to end veteran suicide. Rush encourages all of us to check on the veterans in our lives through buddy checks and active listening.

We continue focusing on career development, education and business opportunities at every stage after transitioning to the civilian sector. Whether you’re “Navigating Change” (page 24), “Launching a Career After Service” (page 40) or recognizing that “Recruiting Veterans is the Best Thing You Could Do for Your Business” (page 45), we’re here to support you at every turn.

With each new season, the *U.S. Veterans Magazine* team is deeply committed to serving you and rejoicing in your success.

Better together,

— Danielle Jackola  
Managing Editor, *U.S. Veterans Magazine*  
Director of Veteran Affairs



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**PRESIDENT/PUBLISHER** Mona Lisa Faris

**SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR** Kat Castagnoli  
**MANAGING EDITOR** Danielle Jackola  
**ART DIRECTOR** Miriam Wiegel  
**SUBMISSIONS EDITOR** Natalie Rodgers

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**  
Larry Broughton, Jim Farrell, Dr. LeNaya Hezel,  
Annie Nelson, Paul Peng, John Register, Brady Rhoades,  
Kate Sullivan, Brian Wieters

**DIGITAL MANAGER** Karin Sweet

**ADVERTISING**  
**SR. ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE** Sheila Hill  
**SR. ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE** Julie White  
**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE** Salwa Schipul

**DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**  
**PROJECT MANAGER BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**  
Tonya Kinsey

**PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION** Adam Richards

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subscription@diversitycomm.net

[usveteransmagazine.com](http://usveteransmagazine.com)

Send submissions to  
nrodgers@diversitycomm.net

The mission of *U.S. Veterans Magazine* is to be your trusted resource for employment, business and educational opportunities, both within the federal government and in corporate America, for veterans, transitioning service members and their families, service-disabled veterans and veteran business owners. DiversityComm, Inc. is a WBENC- and DOBE-certified company.



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References: 1. Summers S, Nunley R, Slotkin E. A home-based, remote-clinician-controlled, physical therapy device leads to superior outcomes when compared to standard physical therapy for rehabilitation after total knee arthroplasty. J Arthroplasty. 2022;S0883-5403(22)00929-9. doi:10.1016/j.arth.2022.10.009 2. Data on file with ROMTech.

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# From Service to Success: Dayton's MBA for Veterans

## UD Recognized as Top Veteran-Friendly School by U.S. Veterans Magazine

The University of Dayton (UD) has been named one of the top veteran-friendly schools by U.S. Veterans Magazine, reflecting its dedication to supporting military veterans in their educational pursuits. Recognized in the 2024 U.S. News and World Report, the UD MBA program ranks #53 in Best Online MBA Programs for Veterans. In addition, the UD MBA Online program falls within the top 100 programs in the country according to both U.S. News & World Report and Fortune Magazine's 2024 rankings. 2022-2023 graduates reported an average annual salary of \$109,000.

UD's MBA program, which offers a STEM-designated degree, is distinguished by its emphasis on creating excellent community service-minded business leaders. It touts collaborative and immersive experiences, particularly focusing on nonprofit organizations, technology & innovation, and disruptive business models. During the Servant Leadership immersion weekend—held on UD's beautiful campus—students engage with community leaders and work on service projects. This year they will work to finish a Habitat for Humanity house that was started in the fall by incoming UD School of Business Administration students. Concentrations and certificates are available in cybersecurity, marketing, finance, and business analytics. And, best of all, a 25% scholarship toward tuition is offered to veterans as well as active military serving at WPAFB.

## Flexibility and Support: Why Aaron Chose UD's Online MBA Program



Aaron Yerian, an MBA graduate and PMP-certified IT Project Manager, exemplifies the success of UD's veteran-friendly programs. With 12 years of service in the U.S. Navy's Nuclear Power Program, Aaron sought a career change and chose UD's online MBA program for its flexibility. "The Online MBA program was perfect for me," Aaron shares. "I was able to balance my schedule for the online classwork, work during the day, and attend classes in the evening."

Aaron's educational journey at UD was transformative. "The significant efforts of everyone associated with the Military and Veteran Programs and Services (MVPS) truly made my experience second to none," he recalls. Aaron emphasizes the value of aligning his technical background with business goals, which the MBA program facilitated. "Learning how to align information systems decision-making with business goals and focusing on project management were the biggest career impacts of my MBA experience."



University of Dayton  
MBA Program



## Donald Eads: From Army Infantry to Business Leader with UD's MBA



Donald Eads, a first generation graduate, served 12 years in the U.S. Army Infantry, including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. After his military service, Donald pursued higher education to transition into civilian life. “My goal was to break into and advance in business management and leadership roles where I could make a positive impact,” Donald explains. He chose UD for its strong academic program and flexibility, which allowed him to balance work and family life.

The UD MBA program provided Donald with valuable collaborative experiences through group projects, in-person immersions, and capstone courses. “Those opportunities to solve problems with a diverse group of professionals were very beneficial to my transition,” he says. The program’s emphasis on ethics and serving the greater good resonated deeply with him.



### Empowering Veterans: UD's MBA Program for Leadership and Service.

The recognition of UD as a top veteran-friendly school is a testament to the university’s dedication to supporting veterans. Aaron sums it up well: “It’s easy to say ‘we support [v]eterans,’ but it’s something completely different to sincerely value their experiences and create an environment dedicated to their success. “UD is a great school for veterans because the school’s values resonate with those who’ve served.”

Aaron Yerian highlighted the unique support he received from the MVPS at UD. “Navigating VA benefits can be a full-time endeavor. The staff, faculty, and volunteers eased that burden and helped create an environment where I felt my voice was heard, my needs were fulfilled, and I was afforded the opportunity to excel in the classroom,” he said.

Aaron’s career trajectory has been significantly influenced by his time at UD. “Since graduating, I earned my Project Management Professional certification and started a new position as an IT Project Manager, both of which were made possible by applying the skills and practical knowledge I gained from UD’s Online MBA.” His advice to fellow veterans is to focus on translating military experience into business value: “One of the many reasons I decided to pursue my MBA was to learn the language of business. Once you have that understanding, it’s easier to align and relate your experience in terms of deliverable business value.”

Donald Eads also praised the support system available to UD veterans. And he was on to something. In fact, UD is a recipient of the “Collegiate Purple Star” Award. The Ohio Department of Higher Education awards the Collegiate Purple Star designation to schools who meet and exceed federal and state guidelines for serving military affiliated students. These include providing designated points of contacts for student veterans, early registration, evaluating and awarding credit for prior learning, providing career services, supporting the Student Veteran Association, and more!

He also spoke highly of the MBA’s signature capstone program. “It was awesome to work with a small team to field our client’s requests, get a behind-the-scenes view of the business, apply business analysis techniques, and deliver a thorough report and presentation with our recommendations. I was very proud of our team because we were able to provide value to our client and represent the MBA program well.”

UD is proud of its active military as well as its veteran students and offers them a program that equips them with vital business skills and provides them with unwavering support. UD’s commitment to excellence and community ensures that veterans thrive academically as well as professionally, embodying the values of leadership and service.

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# USVM FALL 2024 VETERAN FRIENDLY RECOGNITION LISTS

At DiversityComm, Inc., we believe that inclusion and leadership are the foundations of success for any business or organization. Tracking the trends, staying aware of forward-thinking inclusion policies and being listed on the top lists of inclusion leaders is what it's going to take for businesses, institutions and nonprofits to continue growing and performing. According to one study from Ethisphere, ethical companies outperform their competition by 7.1%. Though, another study from i-Sight found that those on key

inclusion lists and rankings made more than double the profits of comparable companies. Our Veteran Friendly lists seek to recognize the organizations that have gone above and beyond to create more inclusive workspaces where talent can be recruited, developed and retained. We recognize them for their commitment to uplifting values and fostering a great workplace culture. "Inclusion is your superpower," declares Mona Lisa Faris, our visionary president and founder for more than 32 years. "Embrace it

wholeheartedly. When you grasp the true value of inclusion, you unlock unparalleled creativity, sharpen your problem-solving skills and enhance your leadership abilities. This powerful combination doesn't just boost profitability; it elevates your business to new heights, both in internal dynamics and in reputation." For more information, please visit [usveteransmagazine.com/methodology](http://usveteransmagazine.com/methodology).

To receive a survey for the next evaluation, please contact [surveys@diversitycomm.net](mailto:surveys@diversitycomm.net).

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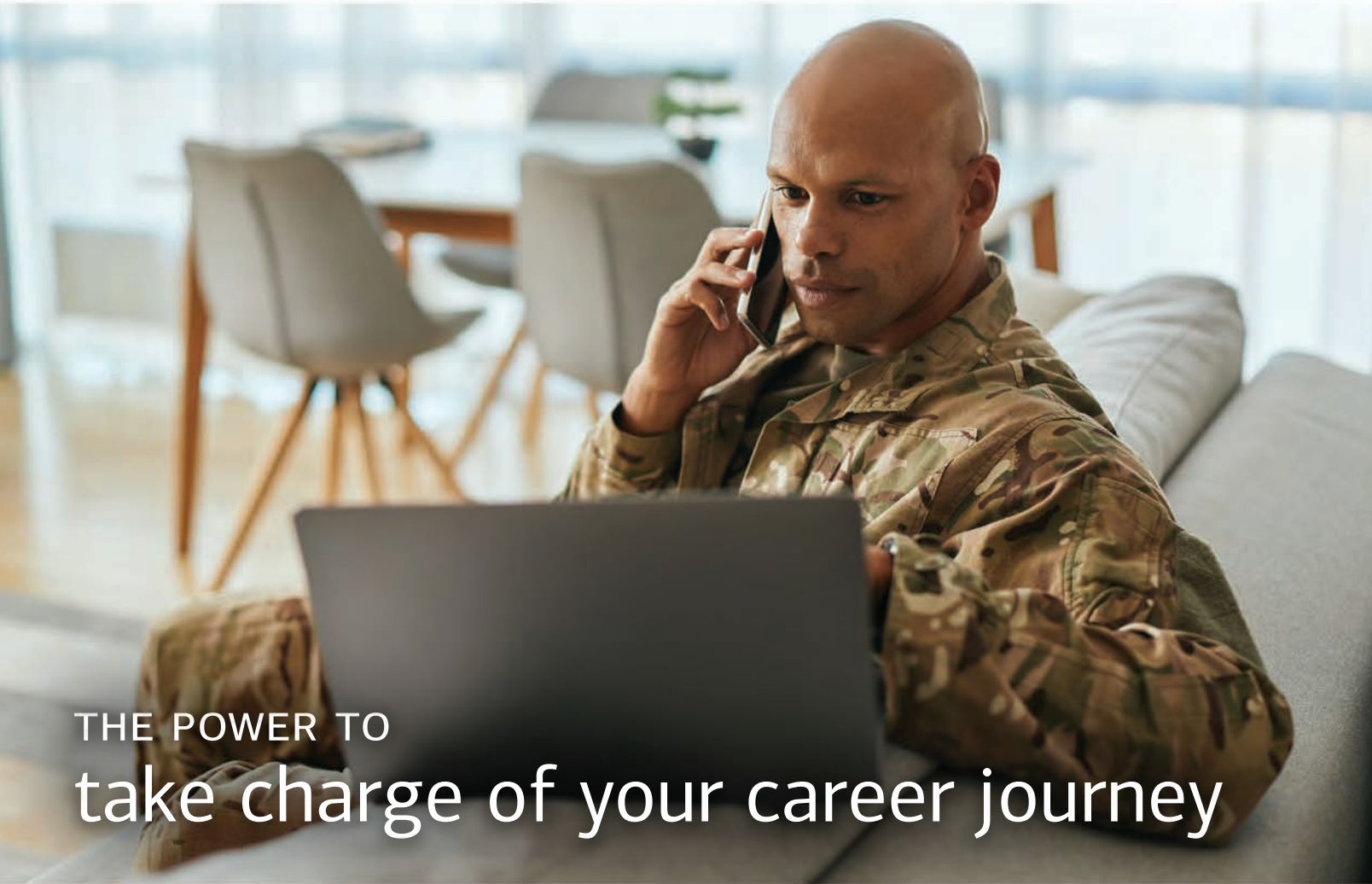
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# 2024 TOP VETERAN-FRIENDLY EMPLOYERS

- AAR Corp.
- Abbott Laboratories
- Academy Securities Inc.
- Accenture
- Adecco Group AG
- Advanced Technology Services, Inc. (ATS)
- AECOM
- Aerotek Inc.
- Aetna
- AIG - VALIC
- Albemarle Corporation
- Alight Solutions, LLC
- Altec, Inc.
- Amazon
- Amentum Services, Inc.
- Ameren
- American Airlines
- American Military University
- American States Utility Services, Inc. (ASUS)
- American Water Company
- Ameriprise Financial, Inc.
- AmeriVet Securities, Inc.
- Amgen
- Amica Mutual Insurance Company
- Apex Systems
- Applied Materials, Inc. (AMAT)
- Archer Daniels Midland Company
- Armed Forces Insurance
- Army and Air Force Exchange (AAFES)
- Associated Banc-Corp
- AT&T Inc.
- ATLAS Space Operations
- Auburn University
- Automatic Data Processing, Inc.
- Averitt Express
- Avis Budget Group, Inc. (CAR)
- BAE Systems plc.
- Bank of America Corporation
- Beacon Building Products
- Becton, Dickinson and Company
- Berkshire Hathaway Energy
- Bethel University
- BJC HealthCare
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana
- BNSF Railway Company
- bp America
- BPS Direct, LLC
- Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS)
- CACI International, Inc.
- California American Water
- Capgemini America, Inc.
- Capital One Financial Corporation
- CarMax Inc.
- CBRE Group, Inc.
- CDW Corporation
- Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
- Centene Corporation
- CenterPoint Energy
- Charles Schwab & Co., Inc.
- Charter Communications
- Chevron Corporation
- Cintas Corporation
- Cisco
- Citigroup, Inc.
- Citizens Financial Group, Inc.
- ClarkDietrich
- Clean Harbors, Inc.
- College of Lake County
- Columbia College
- Combined Insurance Company of America
- Conagra Brands, Inc.
- Concurrent Technologies Corporation
- Conduent
- Consolidated Edison, Inc.
- Consumers Energy Company
- Cox Enterprises
- CruiseOne/Dream Vacations
- CSX Transportation
- Cummins, Inc.
- Cushman & Wakefield
- CVS Health Corporation
- DaVita, Inc.
- Deloitte Global
- Dematic
- Discover Financial Services, Inc.
- DISH Network L.L.C.
- Dollar General
- Dominion Energy, Inc.
- DTE Energy
- Eastern Kentucky University - ECU
- Eastman Chemical Company
- Eaton Corporation plc
- ECPI University
- Encore
- EnerSys
- ENSCO, Inc.
- Equinix, Inc.
- Excelsior University
- Excentium, Inc.
- EY
- Farmers Insurance Group
- FedEx
- Fidelity Investments
- First Command Financial Services, Inc.
- First National Bank Corporation
- Fiserv, Inc.
- Flagstar Bank, N.A.
- Florida International University - College of Engineering and Computing
- Fluor Enterprises, Inc.
- Fordham University
- Ford Motor Company
- Form Energy
- FORVIS
- Frontier Communications, Inc.
- Fugro
- General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)
- General Electric (GE)
- Georgia Southern University
- Grainger
- Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation
- HCA Healthcare
- Herc Holdings Inc.
- Hill
- Hilton
- Honeywell
- Hormel Foods Corporation
- HP Inc.



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With the help of our Military Talent Acquisition team, many veterans have transitioned from their military careers to a corporate career with Bank of America. Our military development rotational programs provide the opportunity to leverage their military experience and unique skills in our corporate environment. The programs expose veterans to career paths in Global Operations, Strategy & Management and Global Banking & Markets.

If you're interested in learning more, please visit

[go.bofa.com/VetPrograms](https://go.bofa.com/VetPrograms)



# 2024 TOP VETERAN-FRIENDLY EMPLOYERS

## continued

- Humana Inc.
- Hyundai Motor America
- Illumina
- International Business Machines Corporation
- Intuit, Inc.
- J.B. Hunt Transport, Inc.
- Johnson & Johnson
- JPMorgan Chase & Co.
- Kearney
- Kellanova
- Kelly Services
- KeyBank
- Kiewit
- KPMG LLP
- L'Oreal USA
- Leidos
- Levi Strauss & Co.
- Lexmark International, Inc.
- Liberty Mutual Holding Company Inc.
- Lockheed Martin Corporation
- Lowe's Companies, Inc.
- ManTech International
- Matheson
- Maximus
- McKesson Corporation
- McLane Company, Inc.
- Melton Truck Lines
- Merck & Co., Inc.
- Metlife, Inc.
- MGM Resorts International
- Michelin
- MITRE Corporation
- Morgan Stanley
- National Credit Union Administration (NCUA)
- Nationwide
- Navy Federal Credit Union
- NBCUniversal Media, LLC
- Nestlé US
- Newport News Shipbuilding (NNS)
- Noblis ESI
- Norfolk Southern Corporation
- Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation
- Northwestern Mutual
- Novartis AG
- Novolex
- Nucor Corporation
- Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU)
- Oceanering International, Inc. (OII)
- Old National Bank
- Olympus Corporation of the Americas (OCA)
- Oshkosh Corporation
- Parker Hannifin
- PENNYMAC
- Penske Truck Leasing Co., L.P.
- Pentagon Federal Credit Union (PenFed)
- Peraton
- Phillips 66
- Pike Corporation
- PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.
- Precise Systems Inc.
- Premise Health
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)
- PRIDE Industries
- Principal Financial Group, Inc. (PFG)
- Progressive Insurance
- Prudential Financial, Inc.
- Public Service Enterprise Group
- Randstad
- Research Triangle Institute
- Robert Half International Inc.
- Rocket Companies
- Roehl Transport, Inc.
- Roush Performance
- RTX
- RXO, Inc.
- San Diego Unified School District
- Sanofi
- Schneider Electric SE
- Seagate Technology Holdings plc
- Sempra
- Shell USA
- Siemens Medical Solutions USA, Inc.
- Smithfield Foods
- Sodexo, USA
- Sonoco
- Southern Company
- Southwest Airlines Co.
- Spectrum
- Stellantis
- Strategic Staffing Solutions (S3)
- Stryker Corporation
- Sunbelt Rentals, Inc.
- Sunrun Inc.
- Synchrony Financial
- Sysco Corporation
- T-Mobile USA, Inc.
- Telephone and Data Systems, Inc. (TDS)
- The Boeing Company
- The Cigna Group
- The Coca Cola Company
- The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company
- The Hartford
- The Home Depot USA, Inc.
- The Walt Disney Company
- TIAA
- Trane Technologies
- Travelers
- U-Haul International
- U.S. Bank
- U.S. Xpress, Inc.
- Uber Technologies
- Unilever PLC
- Union Pacific Railroad
- United Concordia
- United HealthCare Corporation
- United Rentals, Inc.
- United Services Automobile Association
- United Site Services
- United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)
- United States Postal Service
- USAA
- Veolia North America (VNA)
- Verizon Communications Inc.
- Veterans United Home Loans
- Viasat Holding, Inc.
- Walgreens
- Walmart Inc.
- Wells Fargo & Company
- Werner Enterprises, Inc.
- Windstream Holdings
- Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, Inc.
- Xcel Energy
- Xerox Corporation
- Zurich North America





# THE MILITARY SPOUSE'S GUIDE TO REDUCING FINANCIAL STRESS

It's common for military members to refer to their spouse as the CFO of the household. While it's a wonderful compliment, it comes with the responsibility and stress of properly managing the family's finances to reach their financial goals.

Building financial success is a long-term plan and doesn't happen overnight. It comes from years of learning, growing, making mistakes, and sometimes pure trial and error. Let's look at steps you can take to help reduce financial stress.

## GET ON THE SAME PAGE

Both spouses don't have to be involved in every detail of financial planning, but you should align on what you're hoping to accomplish. Consider going on a financial date, where you talk openly about your financial planning and begin to formulate a plan designed to reach shared goals. The first time you have this conversation may be difficult, but the more it happens, the easier it becomes.

## HAVE A PLAN AND STAY WITHIN A FAMILY BUDGET

One great benefit of serving in the military is a reliable stream of monthly income. You can use it to precisely build a budget which helps you pay off debt and plan for the future. Use your budget to map out your basic living expenses. Be sure to include saving for both short- and long-term goals.

## AUTOMATE YOUR FINANCES

Automate as much of your finances as you can, including bill payments and savings. Many banks offer free online services that make paying your bills automatic.

For savings, consider using automatic funds transfers to support your long- and short-term savings goals. This increases your chance for financial success.

These tips are just the beginning. Scan this QR code or select [this link](#) to review the rest of these tips and find other resources designed to provide support to military spouses and to help make life a little easier.





# 2024 TOP VETERAN-FRIENDLY SUPPLIER DIVERSITY PROGRAMS

AAR Corp.  
Abbott  
Accenture  
AECOM  
AIG  
Albemarle Corporation  
Alight Solutions  
Ameren  
American States Utility Services, Inc. (ASUS)  
American Systems Corporation (ASC)  
American Water Company  
Apex Systems  
Archer Daniels Midland Company  
Arizona Public Service (APS)  
Armed Forces Insurance  
AT&T Inc.  
Automatic Data Processing, Inc.  
Avis Budget Group, Inc. (CAR)  
BAE Systems plc.  
Bayer US LLC  
Berkshire Hathaway Energy  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana  
BNSF Railway Company  
Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS)  
CACI International, Inc.  
Capgemini America, Inc.  
Capital One Financial Corporation  
CarMax Inc.  
CDW Corporation  
Centene Corporation  
Cintas Corporation  
ClarkDietrich  
Client Solution Architects (CSA)  
Combined Insurance Company of America  
CoreCivic  
Covenant Logistics Group, Inc. (CVLG)  
Cummins, Inc.  
Cushman & Wakefield  
CVS Health  
Dominion Energy, Inc.  
DTE Energy  
Eastman Chemical Company  
Eli Lilly and Company  
EnerSys  
Explosive Countermeasures International, Inc.  
EY  
Ford Motor Company

Frontier Communications Parent, Inc.  
Fuse Integration Inc.  
GDMS  
General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)  
Guidehouse, Inc.  
HCA Healthcare  
Herc Holdings Inc.  
Highmark Health  
Hilton  
Honda  
Humana Inc.  
Hyundai Motor America  
International Business Machines Corporation  
Johnson & Johnson  
JPMorgan Chase  
Kaiser Permanente  
Kelly Services  
KPMG LLP  
Launch Technical Workforce Solutions  
Leidos  
Lexmark International, Inc.  
Liberty Mutual Holding Company Inc.  
Lowe's Companies, Inc.  
MassMutual  
McKesson Corporation  
Merck & Co., Inc.  
Morgan Stanley  
MSC Industrial Direct Co., Inc. (MSC)  
NBCUniversal Media, LLC  
Nestlé in the United States  
Norfolk Southern Railroad  
Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation  
Northwell Health, Inc.  
Northwestern Mutual  
Novartis AG  
Old National Bank  
OTC Industrial Technologies  
PeopleTec, Inc.  
Precise Systems Inc.  
PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)  
Principal Financial Group, Inc. (PFG)  
Prudential Financial, Inc.  
Public Service Enterprise Group  
Quality Technology Services  
Randstad  
Research Triangle Institute

Robert Half International Inc.  
Rocket Companies  
Roush Performance  
RTX  
San Diego Unified School District  
Sanofi  
Schneider Electric SE  
Sempra  
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Clemson University  
Cleveland State University  
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Johnson University  
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Nebraska Methodist College  
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Nevada State University  
New Jersey Institute of Technology  
New Mexico State University  
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University  
North Carolina State University at Raleigh  
North Carolina Wesleyan University  
Northeastern Seminary  
Northern Arizona University  
Northern Kentucky University  
NUC University  
Ohio Business College  
Ohio University  
Oklahoma City University  
Old Dominion University  
Oral Roberts University  
Oxnard College  
Pacific Lutheran University  
Park University  
Pasadena City College  
Pennco Tech  
Pennsylvania Gunsmith School  
Pensacola State College  
Pentecostal Theological Seminary  
Phoenix College  
Phoenix Truck Driving Institute  
Phoenix Truck Driving School at Fort Bliss  
Pikes Peak State College  
Princeton University  
Providence College  
Purdue Global  
Purdue University  
Quinnipiac University  
Radford University  
Regent University  
Regis College
- Rice University  
Rider University  
Roadmaster Drivers School  
Roanoke College  
Robert Morris University  
Roberts Wesleyan University  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
Rocky Mountain College  
Saint Leo University  
Saint Xavier University  
Salve Regina University  
Sam Houston State University  
San Diego College of Continuing Education  
San Diego Global Knowledge University  
San Diego Mesa College  
San Diego Miramar College  
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Santiago Canyon College  
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# Navigating Change: Jeff Pagano on Nonprofit Resources for Smooth Transitions

By Paul Peng

When service members leave the military, the realization of “Where do I go from here?” occurs way too often. By default, many service members return to school to obtain a bachelor’s and hopefully land a successful career upon graduation. Others start looking for employment to provide for themselves and their families. Yet, many veterans seldom know that nonprofit organizations and resources are available to them and their loved ones to assist with this transition.

I had a chance to sit down with Jeff Pagano, the head of the Orange County Veterans Military Family Collaborative (OCVMFC), a free service for veterans to utilize for housing, employment, networking and much more, to learn about his transition and resources



Jeff Pagano (L) in the Marine Corps.

COURTESY OF JEFF PAGANO

that are available through the nonprofit sector.

## What made you want to join the military?

I joined the OC Sheriff’s Department Explorer program at 16. My uncle was a Marine Corps aviator in Vietnam, and I always admired his clear-minded, confident and strong character. In 1987, I wanted to be in law enforcement before turning 21, and the U.S. Marine Corps gave me that opportunity right out of high school.

## Tell me about your experience guarding Marine One and seeing George H.W. Bush daily.

In 1988, after I graduated from Marine Bootcamp at MCRD San Diego and the Military Police Academy in Texas, I was recruited by a couple of military guys in business suits who were interviewing recently

graduated MPs for HMX-1 Presidential Security aboard Marine One, the Presidential Helicopter Squadron. I served under the very last part of President Reagan’s administration and then President Bush’s administration until 1989.

I was allowed to witness many moments in history that others do not get to see behind the scenes. I was on a mission in Saudi Arabia on Thanksgiving Day 1990 when President Bush, with Mrs. Bush by his side, gave his speech to our troops who were about to go into Iraq (Operation Desert Shield).

We traveled often and extensively to almost every state in the U.S. I remember the first time I got to salute the President as he came aboard Marine One with the First Lady, Barbara Bush. President Bush had just been inaugurated earlier that month. He was

over 6’ tall, and I am only 5’7” and had to get a height waiver to be an MP. He walked up to the stairs of Marine One while the crew chief and I snapped a crisp, coordinated Marine salute. I yelled out over the noises of the airfield, “Good morning, Mr. President!” He bent down to see my eyes under my cover, saluted and said, smiling, “Good morning, Marine!”

## Tell me about OCVMFC and how it helps and provides resources for transitioning service members and veterans.

I am lucky as I love what I do for a career working for UC Irvine as the program manager and convener of the OCVMFC. Our Collaborative is comprised of over 150 public and private service organizations working together to help veterans and their family members thrive here in Orange County,



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Jeff Pagano speaking at UCI.



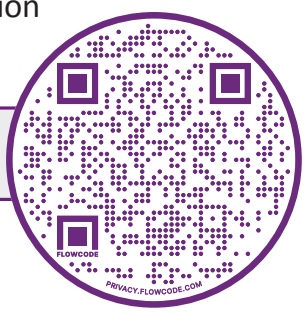


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Presidential lift HMX with former President George H.W. Bush. Pagano is the Marine on the far right.



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OCVMFC steering committee meeting.

California, where our veteran population is around 105,000, and most of our veterans are over 65.

It is a 100% volunteer program and has 12 working groups and committees that take deep dives into serving our veterans and their families, including housing, health and wellness, education, children and families, employment, legal aid, older adult veterans and women veterans, to name a few. As a mentor of mine and former boss once told me, “Veterans help other veterans; it’s in our DNA.”

**What advice would you give to transitioning service members and veterans?**

My best advice would be to be prepared and have a plan before you get out of the military. Be proud and identify yourself as a veteran. Remember, now you must provide for yourself with income, affordable housing, food, health care and transportation.

Make sure you register with your County Veteran Service Office and enroll in the VA Healthcare System (even if you don’t think you need it).

Also, remember that most civilians don’t understand veterans. They don’t know the immense responsibility and leadership experience we are given in some of the harshest environments at early ages. It is difficult for employers to understand your military experience and how that could translate into what they need as employees. This is where veteran service organizations can get you prepared and connected to a worthwhile career in the civilian world.

The process takes time and training, and your efforts should start almost a year

before discharge. If you are considering going to college, connect with the local community colleges and see if they have a Veteran Resource Center. They will help you navigate the minefield of mistakes countless veterans have made before you. If you are running into trouble and are suffering from mental health issues, it is okay to get help! You are not alone. Reaching out for mental health services with the VA, privately, or through other veteran service organizations is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of courage.



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Thanksgiving 1990 Saudi Arabia Presidential Mission.



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Pagano speaking at the OCVMFC general meeting.



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# Power, Status, Influence: Veterans Navigating the Corporate Hierarchy

By John Register

After six years as a Soldier and 10 years as a sports specialist and associate director in the Army, transitioning to a nonprofit was like stepping into a new environment.

I couldn't understand why my performance appraisals were always three out of five, regardless of my efforts. One year, I landed a \$15 million grant, and the next year, with average performance, I received the same evaluation.

I was attending a

mastermind program for my professional speaking business. I told one of my colleagues about an encounter I had with Secretary Hillary Clinton. I was on an advisory committee appointed by then Secretary of State Colin Powell and served under Secretaries Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton. Each of us introduced ourselves to Secretary Clinton, but she already knew who we were. I felt like an imposter among people with impressive

accolades. When it was my turn, I caught her eye, banged my hand on the table, and said, "Madam Secretary, I'm a Razorback."

Her eyes lit up, and she smiled. She banged her hand on the table and replied, "Well, John, we're just going to have to call the hogs after this is over."

We connected over our shared University of Arkansas affiliation. She then asked what I wanted to accomplish. I said, "I would like Paralympic

athletes to be sports envoys like our Olympic counterparts."

She asked her aide to note it. Mission accomplished.

In our mastermind meeting, Hilary Blair told me that I had executed a hijacking of power and status. I was confused.

"Power is static. It does not move unless taken by force," said Blair. "Status is fluid. Just like a hockey puck, it can switch from person to person," she continued. "Secretary Clinton had the power in the room, and



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everybody else was trying to elevate their status, but when you banged your hand on the table, you assumed the power. Then, very quickly, when she banged her hand back, she took the power back," Blair concluded.

**It is imperative to understand the rules of engagement for navigating the corporate structure.**

That was it. That's also why I could not understand what was happening with my employer. People were fighting and positioning themselves to gain higher status to get closer to power.

This is the difference between the civilian corporate world and the military world. In the military, our promotions are structured. We attend school, earn promotion points and elevate our knowledge, skills and abilities to receive the next rank. In the civilian world, your knowledge, skills and abilities can be passed on, with someone else elevated over you and you becoming their trainer.

It is imperative to understand the rules of engagement for navigating the corporate structure.

**Understand Your Value**

You need to believe in yourself. No matter how long you have served, you have been in positions that many of your civilian counterparts have not. This is an asset. With this asset, you can be visible and lead from the front. Put yourself out there intentionally and

purposefully with your civilian employer.

**SALUTE**

In the Army, we had a method to remember how to scout and bring back information on an opposing force to determine what type of attack might be required: the SALUTE report. SALUTE stands for Size, Activity, Location, Unit, Time and Equipment the enemy had.

We can use the same type of SALUTE report when gaining intel on the corporate ladder we are trying to climb.

**Size:** Identify the size of the teams, departments or divisions within the organization. Understand the hierarchy and the number of employees at different levels.

**Activity:** Observe and document the activities and key projects undertaken by departments or leaders in the organization.

**Location:** Note the physical and organizational locations of key players and departments, e.g., office locations and the organizational structure.

**Unit:** Identify key terms, departments or business units and the roles within the organization.

**Time:** Understand the timeliness and deadlines for important projects, promotions and review cycles.

**Equipment:** Assess the resources, tools and technologies used within the company. It's about mapping and implementing what we have done into the new corporate structure.

Had I taken the time to do a SALUTE report in the association I was working for, I might have had more success.

**Find a Mentor**

This might be a military or a civilian mentor. Talking to someone who has successfully

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navigated the route you are about to take will help you balance your perspective of where you might be in the corporate structure.

My friend and HR expert Kelley Hicks says, "Don't limit who that mentor is. They need to match your energy and your interests and give you the energy to advance.

"You might need to know if this environment will tolerate the way you used to approach things from a military standpoint. The mentor can help you learn the protocols for that environment. Be open to learning," she continued.

### Lead From the Front

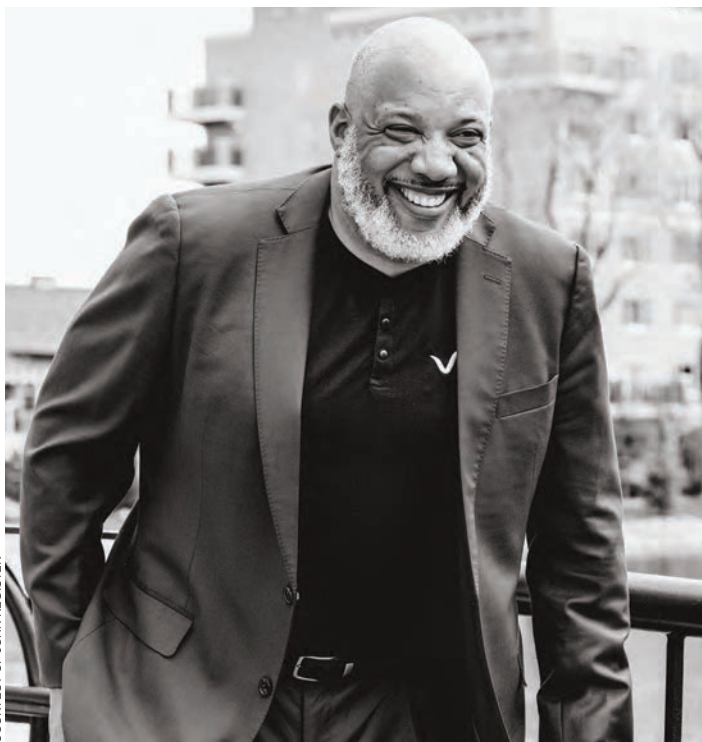
Find new ways to do things in the company. Be visible and lead from the front. Put yourself out there intentionally and purposefully. Believe in yourself.

Join an ERG/BRG: If your company has an employee

or business resource group for military veterans, join it. Resources like these are invaluable in helping like-minded people move the organization's mission forward. It's the fastest way to get the lay of the land and also identify other people like you who might have the same issues. At the end of the day, it helps the company perform better.

You have transitioned before. You just might not have thought about it in the context of climbing the corporate ladder. You entered a new environment every time you permanently changed stations (PCSd). Every time a new commander came in to take over your unit, you entered a new environment. Every time this happened, you learned the lay of the land and adapted. Climbing the corporate ladder is no different.

Power resides with you. You are in control of your destiny. Happy climbing.



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*John Register, a certified speaking professional, empowers business leaders to overcome corporate barriers and elevate performance. With his unparalleled experience as a Paralympic medalist and U.S. Army veteran, Register teaches how to sever limiting beliefs and elevate actionable strategies to secure victories in business. Book Register at [JohnRegister.com](http://JohnRegister.com) for your Veterans Day Program to transform adversity into triumph.*

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**Pictured:** RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger with faculty of the University of Arkansas

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— Marcia Bunger, Administrator of  
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# Working for the USDA Risk Management Agency

## **Bryan McQuary Senior Risk Management Specialist, Risk Management Agency**

I was born and raised in rural Southwest Ohio. I wasn't raised on a farm, but I went to school with farm kids, had relatives that owned farms, spent a lot of time around agriculture, and my first paying job was picking and selling sweet corn direct from a friend's farm. Our house also backed up to thousands of acres of corn and soybean fields which allowed for easy access to ATV activities post-harvest. When I graduated high school, I was focused on getting a teaching degree but one of my part time jobs was working at a cargo airport unloading and loading aircraft and sorting packages.

Eventually the wear of working to pay for school became too great and I decided that I should let Uncle Sam pay for my education. I wanted to be a pilot, but without an undergraduate degree I decided to go ahead and enlist. Having worked at an airport I already knew many of the occupational options the Air Force would have available and chose air traffic control. A short nine months after signing my name to that contract I had already finished basic training and technical school in June 2000. Another eleven months later and I was a facility rated tower controller at Moody AFB near Valdosta, GA.

During my years in I would also get stationed at Lajes AB, Azores, Portugal and then finish up at Keesler AFB, Biloxi, MS as an ATC instructor my final four years in.

I also deployed for a total of fourteen months to Iraq over three deployments, the first and last of which were ATC and the second where I was a third/local country national escort (escorting Iraqis and other nation contractors on base). Ultimately my career was cut short due to combat-related injuries and the Air Force medically retired me in 2012.

For me, the military is called the uniformed services and federal employment is called civil service, which says a lot about the role we play in society. The ultimate responsibility in these positions is to serve our great nation and to ensure that we not only maintain, but also improve it. I believe most veterans naturally feel at home as civil servants as it allows us the opportunity to fulfill an innate desire to continue our service in a different format.

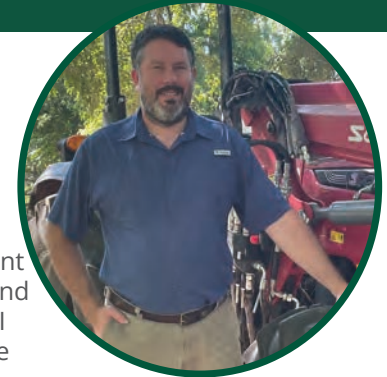
With that said, federal careers also allow veterans extra flexibility over many other jobs to handle appointments and disabilities that are a direct result of our military service.

Following my retirement from the Air Force, I started a handyman business and began growing vegetables in our backyard and raising chickens, ducks, and rabbits. Working with, and being responsible for, these living things significantly helped with the emotional injuries that I incurred from my deployments. So, when I stumbled upon RMA in a USA Jobs search in 2015, I thought it would be great to get into USDA, get a federal job, and potentially set myself up with in roads to more agricultural experience.

I am now a Senior Risk Management Specialist and in this role I serve as the final decision maker in changes and improvement

to commodities assigned to me. My position is but one tile in the mosaic that creates the picture of RMA. I had no idea when I started what RMA was or what they did, it took me two years to accurately articulate what I did after I was hired on. It was in my first years that I came to understand what RMA does and why it is so essential. Most of society takes agriculture and the security of their food and their jobs for granted. For farmers, their job is their life and the literal life-sustaining force for all of society. We buy many types of insurance to protect our cars, our homes, valuable possessions, health, loss of life, business risks, and so on, so it's only appropriate, and even more critical, that those who feed our nation and the world have a lifeline, via crop insurance, to keep them going following a devastating event. Having been with RMA nearly nine years now, I have been told countless times how crop insurance saved the farm.

RMA consistently scores as the best agency to work for in USDA and as one of the best agencies in the entire federal workforce. I believe a major part of this is the direct impact that we each have on the program. Our work is highly technical and varied, and unless there's a deadline approaching, that allows us to pick and choose what we may do each day.



**Bryan McQuary  
Senior Risk  
Management Specialist**



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# The Power of Public Speaking: A Path to Professional Development

By Larry Broughton



Larry Broughton

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Transitioning from military service to the civilian workforce can be both an exciting and challenging journey. Professional development is key to a successful transition for many U.S. military veterans and transitioning service members. One area of professional development that stands out is public speaking. The ability to effectively communicate, inspire and lead through speech is a powerful skill that can transform careers, build businesses and create lasting impact.

## Overcoming the Fear of Public Speaking

It's well known that many

people have an overwhelming fear of public speaking, often ranked higher than the fear of death. This anxiety can be paralyzing, preventing individuals from seizing valuable opportunities. However, it's important to put this fear into perspective. Veterans have faced challenging situations demanding courage, resilience and quick thinking—qualities essential for effective public speaking.

Consider the grand scheme of life and the experiences you've already navigated. Facing an audience pales compared to the pressures and dangers encountered during military service. Remember, like any other skill, public speaking can

be developed and mastered with practice and dedication. It's a temporary discomfort that leads to long-term personal and professional benefits.

## The Influence of Great Leaders

Throughout history, many of the most influential leaders in business and politics have been exceptional public speakers. Their ability to articulate vision, motivate teams and persuade audiences has often been the cornerstone of their success.

Consider Winston Churchill, whose speeches during World War II galvanized a nation and inspired resilience in adversity. His words rallied the British people and unified Allied forces toward a common goal.

In the business world, leaders like Steve Jobs demonstrated the power of public speaking through his iconic product launches at Apple. Jobs' presentations were not just about introducing new technology; they were masterclasses in storytelling, engaging audiences and building a loyal customer base.

## The Role of Public Speaking in Professional Development

For veterans entering the civilian workforce, mastering public speaking can open doors to numerous opportunities. Here's why it's essential for various professional roles:

### 1. Managers and Leaders

Effective communication is

crucial for all leaders. Managers who can convey ideas, set expectations and inspire their teams are more likely to foster a positive work environment and achieve organizational goals.

### 2. Sales Professionals

Success in sales often hinges on the ability to persuade and build relationships. A confident and articulate sales pitch can differentiate a product or service in a competitive market.

### 3. Aspiring Entrepreneurs

Public speaking skills are invaluable for those looking to launch their own businesses. Whether pitching to investors, negotiating with partners or marketing to customers, the ability to present ideas convincingly is a critical asset.

### 4. Career Advancement

For anyone seeking a promotion or new opportunities, being able to speak confidently in meetings, presentations or networking events can significantly enhance visibility and credibility within an organization.

## Steps to Becoming an Effective Speaker

Becoming an effective and inspiring public speaker is a journey that involves continuous learning and practice. Here are some actionable steps to help veterans develop this vital skill:

### 1. Start Small and Practice Often

Begin by speaking in low-pressure environments. Volunteer for small



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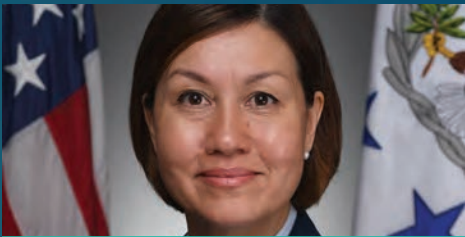
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- Novartis
- Schneider Electric
- Sherwin-Williams
- Textron Aviation
- United Health Group
- Zermount

### Snapshot of Schedule

DAY 1 (12pm – 6pm)

Women Veterans Lunch,  
Company Presentations,  
Welcome Reception w/  
Recruiters; Interviews

DAY 2 (10am – 1pm)

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presentations at work, participate in community events or join a local Toastmasters club. The key is to practice regularly and gradually build confidence.

## 2. Know Your Audience

Tailoring your message to your audience is crucial. Understand their needs, interests and challenges. This will help you craft a message that resonates and engages them.

## 3. Master the Art of Storytelling

Stories are a powerful way to connect with and inspire an audience. Incorporate personal anecdotes, case studies or historical examples to illustrate your points and make your message more relatable and memorable.

## 4. Focus on Clarity and Simplicity

Avoid jargon and complex language. Aim for clarity and simplicity in your speech. Clear, concise messages are more likely to be understood and remembered.

## 5. Work on Your Delivery

Effective public speaking is not just about what you say, but how you say it. Pay particular attention to your vocal tone, cadence and body language. Practice speaking with a smile in your voice, enthusiasm and confidence, and use gestures to emphasize key points.

## 6. Seek Feedback and Reflect

After each speaking engagement, seek feedback from trusted colleagues or mentors. Reflect on what

went well and identify areas for improvement. Continuous feedback is essential for growth.

## 7. Invest in Training

Consider taking public speaking courses or workshops. Professional training can provide valuable techniques and insights that accelerate your development as a speaker.

## Conclusion

As veterans transition to civilian careers, developing public speaking skills can significantly enhance professional growth and opportunities. Whether leading teams, selling products, launching businesses or seeking promotions, the ability to communicate effectively and inspire others is a powerful

tool for success.

Embrace the journey of becoming an effective public speaker. Practice regularly, seek continuous improvement and remember that every great speaker starts with the first step. Your experiences, stories and insights as a veteran are valuable assets that can resonate with and inspire others. Use your voice to lead, motivate and create positive change in your professional life and beyond.

*Larry Broughton is an award-winning entrepreneur, best-selling author, leadership mentor and former U.S. Army Green Beret. CBS News has called him "the nation's foremost expert on leadership and entrepreneurship." Broughton has been named among the Top 10 Speakers in North America by LA Weekly. For more information, visit [LarryBroughton.com](http://LarryBroughton.com).*



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# Werner Enterprises: A Leader in Veteran Recruitment and Inclusion

Alec Mizner, the manager of military recruiting at trucking company, Werner Enterprises, embodies the company's commitment to veteran employment. With six years at the company, Mizner has risen from the Operations Department to his current role, driven by a deep passion for supporting veterans in their transition to civilian careers.

## From Marine Corps to Military Recruitment

Mizner's journey began in the Marine Corps, serving at the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. He was part of the Silent Drill Platoon, a 24-man rifle platoon that performed in front of hundreds of thousands of spectators around the world. After his military service, Mizner sought to continue serving veterans, finding his place at Werner. Initially working in operations, he supported new professional drivers, helping them acclimate to the industry. This experience, coupled with his own military background, inspired him to apply for a military field recruiting position, leading to his current role managing Werner's military recruiting program.

## A Top Veteran-Friendly Company

Werner stands out as a top veteran-friendly company, not just in words but in actions. Mizner highlights the company's commitment from top leadership down to every associate. Veterans are embedded in all leadership levels at Werner, ensuring a deep understanding of the sacrifices made by military



COURTESY OF ALEC MIZNER

Alec Mizner

personnel and their families. This dedication is reflected in Werner's mission to recruit veterans and their spouses, providing them with meaningful career opportunities.

## Achieving a Veteran Workforce

Approximately 20% of Werner's workforce is made up of veterans, a significant achievement attributed to several key initiatives. Werner started the industry's first truck driver apprentice program in 2006 and has since expanded to multiple apprentice programs. These

programs not only train veterans but also allow them to use their VA educational benefits, with certification upon completion. Werner's Employer-Sponsored Training programs are akin to the Army's Career Skills Program or the Department of Defense's SkillBridge Program, offering active-duty service members CDL training and guaranteed jobs post-military service.

The military skills test waiver is another innovative approach used by Werner. This waiver allows service members with relevant driving experience to obtain their CDL faster, bypassing traditional

schooling. By collaborating with more than 60 installations and National Guard units nationwide, Werner ensures military members and veterans are aware of the opportunities available. Working with organizations like Hiring Our Heroes and the Military Spouse Employment Partnership enhances their recruitment efforts through awareness and action.

## Supporting Female Associates

Werner has made significant strides in attracting and retaining female associates—both driver and non-driver. The transportation industry has seen the number of female drivers increase, with Werner's fleet nearly double the national average at 16%. Werner goes above and beyond when fostering a safe and inclusive environment for all its professional drivers. One key aspect of this commitment is the company's gender-neutral leadership opportunities. With more than 65 active female leaders and 200 active leaders training both men and women, Werner ensures all its professional drivers have an equal chance to grow and lead within the organization.

Recognized by the Women in Trucking Association as a Top Company for Women six years in a row, Werner offers competitive pay plus a flexible work-life balance and actively supports the diverse voices of its associates. 'Women in Trucking Wednesdays' on social media, the Women's Leadership Alliance group and various mentorship opportunities are key initiatives empowering

female associates. With more than half of Werner's board of directors being women, this reflects a top-down commitment to inclusivity.

### Best Practices for a Veteran-Inclusive Workplace

Building a veteran-inclusive workplace requires dedicated effort. Mizner emphasizes the importance of having a dedicated military talent recruiter, as the competition for military talent is fierce. Werner's veteran associate resource group, led by veterans and open to all associates, plays a crucial role in this effort. The group organizes quarterly podcasts with veteran-related content and events like Memorial Day parades, Fourth of July barbecues and Veterans Day ceremonies to foster a

supportive community. Werner's commitment extends to working with local

“Building a veteran-inclusive workplace requires dedicated effort.”

nonprofits to support veteran communities. Initiatives include working with the

50-Mile March Foundation, Wreaths Across America and Operation Freedom Fleet. These relationships provide avenues for veterans to give back, reinforcing a sense of community and purpose.

### Continuing the Mission

Werner's Chairman and CEO, Derek Leathers, has set an ambitious goal of increasing the veteran workforce to 25%. This goal, coupled with the support from leadership, ensures Werner continues to prioritize veteran employment. Werner's active presence on social media and participation in hiring events nationwide highlights their dedication to connecting with veterans and showcases opportunities in the transportation industry.

For veterans seeking a post-military service career,

Werner offers a supportive and inclusive environment. With comprehensive programs and a genuine commitment to veteran success, Werner Keeps America Moving and ensures veterans find meaningful and fulfilling careers. You can learn more at [wernerhiringheroes.com](http://wernerhiringheroes.com).

Mizner's parting advice is to seek out companies like Werner, connect through social media or hiring events and leverage the vast network of available opportunities. At Werner, the focus is clear: to help veterans succeed, whether within their company or beyond, ensuring a smooth and successful transition from military to civilian life.

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# Launching a Career After Service: An Interview with Navy Federal Credit Union's CJ Kane

Transitioning from military service to a civilian career can be a challenging journey. Christopher "CJ" Kane, a veteran and current talent scout supervisor at Navy Federal Credit Union, offers a compelling narrative on how he completed the transition and is now helping others do the same. In an in-depth conversation, Kane shares insights into his position at the credit union, the importance of veteran support in the workforce and Navy Federal's commitment to military communities.

## From Military Service to Talent Acquisition

Kane's journey is marked by a blend of military discipline and a passion for human resources. An Air Force veteran who currently resides in New York, Kane has now been a talent scout manager at Navy Federal for a year and a half. The path that led him here, however, was unique. Kane initially intended to pursue a career in advertising, but found his calling in the Air Force as an intelligence analyst from 2011 to 2015, an experience which provided invaluable mission planning and threat analysis skills. This role, Kane says, reshaped his professional ambitions and led him to his current role in talent acquisition.

## Finding Fulfillment

Kane finds particular gratification in developing new pathways to engage with potential candidates, especially within the military community. "One of the



COURTESY OF C.J. KANE

CJ Kane

things I find most rewarding is developing new avenues to reach candidates," he said. His team focuses on sourcing jobseekers and enhancing candidate engagement, helping military personnel understand and leverage available opportunities along the way. Kane's dedication is evident as he works tirelessly to provide resources and support to those transitioning from military to civilian life.

## Transitioning to Civilian Life

For Kane, this process of transition was far from straightforward. "When I transitioned out, I didn't know what I wanted to do," he reflected. "Luckily, I had some really good mentors." These advisors helped Kane fine-tune his career path, leading him to roles in higher education, with nonprofit agencies and, eventually, into corporate

recruiting at Navy Federal. His experience underscores the importance of mentorship and the need for better resources for veterans during their transition.

## The Impact of Military Experience

Kane's military background significantly shapes his role at Navy Federal. "Understanding the culture that veterans experience,



and being a member of the credit union myself, has really helped me to understand the importance of customer service,” he added. Alongside his firsthand experience with veterans’ challenges, Kane has enhanced his ability to connect with military candidates and support their career transitions. Today, Kane and his team actively engage veteran communities, providing resources and assistance to help them find professional success, however that might look.

### Initiatives for Veterans at Navy Federal

Navy Federal Credit Union is recognized as one of *U.S. Veterans Magazine’s* Top Veteran-Friendly Employers for 2024, a testament to its commitment to hiring former military personnel and assisting in a transition

“Kane’s experience underscores the importance of mentorship and the need for better resources for veterans during their transition.”

that is often filled with numerous unique challenges and complications. “One of the things specifically within talent acquisition that my team does is partner closely with external organizations to help bring awareness to our hiring process,” Kane noted. Through relationships with Hiring Our Heroes, Wounded Warrior Project and the Honor Foundation, among others, Kane’s team is able to help enhance Navy Federal’s

support of military members and their families.

Navy Federal also leverages resources from the SkillBridge Program, the Military Spouse Employment Partnership Program and the Military Spouse Career Continuity Program to provide additional assistance to current credit union employees. These initiatives aim to provide career continuity for military spouses and ensure smooth transitions for service members from military into civilian roles.

### Future Goals and Community Engagement

Looking ahead, Navy Federal aims to increase military hiring and employer brand awareness, with Kane specifically noting his team’s plans to attend the Military Influencer Conference and the Service Academy Career Conference later in 2024. Navy Federal is also focusing on expanding its SkillBridge Program and exploring new partnerships with like-minded nonprofit and veteran organizations.

Kane emphasized the importance of preparation for those attending career fairs and conferences. “Do your homework and research who is attending and who you might want to connect with,” he said. A clear understanding of potential employers and a prepared elevator pitch can significantly impact networking success, Kane added.

Kane’s journey from military service to talent acquisition at Navy Federal highlights the importance of support and resources for veterans transitioning to civilian careers. His passion for helping others is evident, and his insights offer valuable guidance for both veterans and employers looking to enhance their veteran hiring initiatives. As Kane and his team continue to develop and expand their programs, Navy Federal Credit Union remains a leading example of dedication to military service members and their successful integration into the civilian workforce.



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# 5 Tips That Employers Can Use to Find Veteran Talent

Is your organization looking to hire veteran talent? There's more than one place to start. Here are five quick tips to help you attract veteran talent for your organization utilizing the Department of Labor's resources:

## Veteran Employment Coordinator

The Department of Labor has six regional veteran employment coordinators who work with employers nationwide to facilitate veteran hiring. They meet with employers to identify their needs, help them develop an action plan and connect them with federal, state and local resources.

## VETS State Director

In every state, the department has a VETS state director and staff members who work to promote relationships within the local community and can provide information on job fairs, hiring events, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act and more.

## Veterans' Employment Rep

The Department of Labor has more than 2,400 American Job Centers nationwide. Many of them have staff who specialize in veterans' employment. Local veterans'

employment representatives can help you match the skills you're looking for with veterans' resumes, post jobs and even personally refer qualified veterans.

## Apprenticeship Program

Employers who want to recruit veterans can use a registered apprenticeship program as a talent development model to attract, train and diversify their workforce. These programs help recruit a diverse and skilled workforce, reduce turnover and improve productivity. Registered apprenticeship programs can be linked to DoD's SkillBridge

program, which enables employers to connect with separating service members, all at no cost.

## Medallion Award

Each year, the Secretary of Labor recognizes employers' investments in recruiting, employing and retaining veterans through the HIRE Vets Medallion Award. It's the only federal-level veterans' employment award. Receiving the award demonstrates that your organization is committed to veteran hiring, retention and professional development. Visit [hirevets.gov](http://hirevets.gov) to learn more.

Source: Department of Labor



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# From Military Service to Corporate Mission: Bob Whittle's Journey with USAA

Bob Whittle's story is one of dedication, both to his country and to the community of service members he continues to support. After graduating from West Point, Whittle dedicated 33 years to the military. Growing up on a small family farm in Mystic, Connecticut, instilled in him values of hard work and resilience that carried through his military career and beyond.

Transitioning from military life, Whittle sought a role that would allow him to continue supporting service members and their families, which led him to USAA. He has been with USAA for a year and a half, bringing his wealth of experience and passion to the organization.

## Veterans Enhancing USAA's Mission

USAA's history is deeply intertwined with the military. Founded in 1922 by 25 Army officers who faced challenges securing insurance due to the perceived risks of military life, they banded together to create the United States Army Automobile Association. This initiative soon expanded to include Naval officers and beyond and evolved into the United Services Automobile Association (USAA). The company's mission remains steadfast: to support service members, veterans and their families.

The core of USAA's strength lies in its ability to understand and meet the unique needs of its members, many of whom are veterans. This deep connection to the military community is integral to USAA's business strategy and culture. Whittle emphasizes that this alignment with veterans' values and experiences fosters a culture of discipline, resilience

and calm under pressure, traits that are vital in both military and corporate environments.

## The Unique Qualities Veterans Bring to USAA

Veterans at USAA bring invaluable qualities that have been developed through their military service. These include resilience, the ability to remain calm under pressure and exceptional organizational skills. Military life challenges individuals to discover their true capabilities, and this experience translates well into the corporate world. Veterans are accustomed to high-stakes situations and complex bureaucratic environments, making them well-suited for roles that require strategic thinking and disciplined execution.

## Supporting Military Spouses at USAA

Military spouses face significant challenges in the job market due to the

“Veterans are accustomed to high-stakes situations and complex bureaucratic environments, making them well-suited for roles that require strategic thinking and disciplined execution.”

frequent relocations inherent in military life. Whittle notes that military spouses have an unemployment rate of about 21%, a statistic that USAA is



COURTESY OF USAA

Bob Whittle

actively working to address, both at USAA and beyond. USAA provides substantial support to its own military spouse employees, recognizing the unique difficulties they face. For instance, the company offers up to 40 hours of paid leave to assist with relocation during permanent changes of station. Additionally, USAA works to accommodate remote work for spouses who must move away from company offices due to a spouse's military service, ensuring continuity in their careers.

USAA's commitment extends beyond employment policies. The company has an employee resource group called VetNet, which supports veterans, military spouses and their supporters. This network helps with the transition from military to civilian life and fosters a supportive community within the company.

## Impactful Projects and Collaborations

One of the significant initiatives Whittle highlights is the partnership with Hiring Our Heroes, which facilitates the transition of service members into civilian roles.

Through this program, fellows work at USAA for several months, gaining experience and building networks that can lead to full-time employment.

## Recognition and Personal Reflections

Being recognized as a Top Veteran-Friendly Employer by *U.S. Veterans Magazine* is a significant validation for USAA. It reflects the company's ongoing commitment to supporting veterans and their families, continuing the legacy of its founding members. Whittle finds this recognition particularly meaningful as it underscores USAA's dedication to doing the right thing for those who have served.

Whittle's transition to USAA has been seamless, thanks to the company's supportive culture and mission-driven environment. His enthusiasm for his role is palpable, and he speaks highly of his colleagues and their shared commitment to helping veterans. As someone who has been a member of USAA for over 30 years, Whittle's journey from military service to corporate leadership exemplifies the organization's values and its dedication to serving those who have served.

In conclusion, USAA's commitment to veterans and military families is not just a business strategy; it is the heart of the organization. Through thoughtful policies, supportive networks and impactful collaborations, USAA continues to honor its mission of serving those who serve. Whittle's journey is a testament to the enduring connection between military service and the values that drive USAA forward.

# Recruiting Veterans: The Best Thing You Could Do for Your Business

You may have heard that veterans can be valuable assets to the workplace, but what does that mean, and what are recruiters actually looking for when hiring veterans? *U.S. Veterans Magazine* had a conversation with a veteran-specific recruiter, Brian Wieters, with Neighborly to discuss the value of veteran employees, what they bring to the table and how other companies can be veteran-friendly.

## You work extensively in hiring veterans. Why is this important to you?

Hiring veterans is important to me because I deeply respect the skills, dedication and resilience they bring from their military service. Veterans have made significant sacrifices for our country, and I believe it is our duty to support their transition to civilian life. By providing them with meaningful employment and ownership opportunities, we not only honor their service but also benefit from their unique experiences and perspectives.

## In your experience, what valuable assets do veterans bring to the workplace?

Veterans bring a wealth of valuable assets to the workplace, including:

**Leadership Skills:** Veterans are trained to lead and manage teams, often in high-pressure environments. Their ability to inspire and guide others is unparalleled.

**Discipline and Work Ethic:** Military training instills a strong sense of discipline and a commitment to excellence, ensuring that veterans are reliable and dedicated employees.

**Teamwork and Collaboration:** Veterans are accustomed to working in diverse teams and understand the importance of cooperation and mutual support to achieve common goals.

**Problem-Solving Abilities:** The military environment requires quick thinking and effective problem-solving skills that are directly transferable to the business world.

**Adaptability and Resilience:** Veterans are trained to adapt and overcome. This is a unique skill set among potential employees that is not easily trained, and veterans already have it from their time on active duty.

## Why should businesses of all sizes hire veterans?

Businesses of all sizes should hire veterans because they bring unique strengths that can enhance any organization. Veterans are:

**Highly Trained and Skilled:** They possess a wide range of technical and soft skills that are applicable across various industries.

**Reliable and Punctual:** Veterans have a strong sense of responsibility and are known for their punctuality and reliability.

**Diverse Thinkers:** With experiences from diverse and often global environments, veterans can offer fresh perspectives and innovative solutions.

**Natural Leaders:** Their leadership training ensures they can take on management roles and mentor other employees, fostering a positive and productive workplace culture.

**Committed and Loyal:** Veterans often exhibit strong loyalty to their



COURTESY OF BRIAN WIETERS

Brian Wieters

employers, leading to lower turnover rates and a more stable workforce.

Hiring veterans also demonstrates a company's commitment to social responsibility and community support, enhancing its reputation and potentially attracting customers who value corporate citizenship.

## What can recruiters/hiring managers do to attract veteran talent?

To attract veteran franchise owners at Neighborly, we focus on the following:

**Understanding Military Skills:** Familiarize yourself with military roles and the skills they entail and translate these into civilian job requirements.

**A Veteran-Friendly Recruitment Process:** Developing a recruitment process that recognizes and values military experience, including using veteran-specific job boards and networking groups, is essential.

**Training and Development Programs:** Provide training programs that help veterans

transition their military skills to civilian roles, like franchise business ownership, and offer continuous professional development opportunities.

**Highlight Veteran Success Stories:** Showcase success stories of veterans within the company and community to illustrate the potential career paths and growth opportunities.

**A Supportive Environment:** Create a welcoming and supportive workplace culture with mentorship programs and veteran resource groups to help veterans integrate and thrive.

**Partner with Veteran Organizations:** Collaborate with veteran service organizations, like VetFran, to connect with potential candidates and gain insights on best practices for hiring veterans.

By implementing these strategies, recruiters and hiring managers can effectively attract and retain talented veterans, enriching their workforce and contributing to a more diverse and capable team.

# Mission Transition: Lessons from a Veteran Who Has Been There

By Kate Sullivan

“What do you want to do with the rest of your life?” That’s the question Army veteran Muhammad Ali asked himself as he considered his post-military life. While he had planned for his retirement, what he hadn’t planned for was the psychological impact of his transition after 22 years of military service. The day after leaving the Army, he fell into a deep depression. One morning he sat on the couch as his daughter left for school. When she returned that afternoon, he was still sitting in the same spot. He realized he needed a change.

“I felt isolated—my battle buddies weren’t around, but I was able to connect with some other veterans,” says Ali. “We started sharing information, sharing resources, sharing how we were going about doing things. I realized then that my calling was to work with other veterans. I wanted to help them avoid the same pitfalls I experienced when I retired.”

Ali went on to get his master’s in psychology. Today, he is a certified Behavioral Health Case Manager with The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at



“I think it’s important for veterans and military families to understand that the transition is not confined to a set period of time. Life after the military is an ever-evolving process. One that can come with challenges, but also boundless opportunities,” says Ali.

Ali shares practical tips for veterans, service members and their families in

## Make Transition Meetings Count

Transition briefings provide good information, but sometimes it’s a lot to process. Ali says to take advantage of the meetings to their fullest, “Attend more than one briefing. Often, you pick up things that you may have missed in the first one.” He adds, “If you’re married, bring your spouse to your exit meetings. Four ears are better than two. Plus, a lot of questions and concerns that spouses have can be addressed in those meetings as well.”

## Access Available Resources

“It can be hard to get veterans and service members to realize they need help, it can be even harder to get them to accept help,” says Ali. “Leveraging the wide range of available resources can significantly ease the transition to civilian life, but you need to take steps towards accessing them.”

## Connect with Family & Friends

“When you serve in the military, you miss birthdays, graduations and other important events,” says Ali. “When you retire, make a point to spend that quality time with your family that you may not have had an opportunity to do while you were serving. This can help to strengthen family bonds, increase connection and improve the overall well-being of the family.”

**“I think it’s important for veterans and military families to understand that the transition is not confined to a set period of time. Life after the military is an ever-evolving process.”**

**-Army veteran Muhammad Ali**

Red Rock in Lawton, Oklahoma. The clinic, which serves the entire state, is part of Cohen Veterans Network, a national not for profit network of mental health clinics for post-9/11 veterans, service members and their families. In addition to therapy, the clinics provide comprehensive case management services to help clients with employment, education, finances, housing and more. In his role, Ali connects veterans directly with critical resources during their transition out of the military and at all stages of their journey.

support of a smoother transition:

## Plan from A to Z

Apply what you have learned in the military to civilian life when it comes to planning, making sure it’s comprehensive. “When I retired, I had a plan, A, B, C and D, but turns out I needed to plan A through Z,” he says. “Consider planning for the near term (1 to 6 weeks), short term (up to 6 months) and long term (up to a year). Repeating the process as time goes on. It can help you focus and take practical steps forward.”

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# From Battlefield to Business: How a Leukemia Survivor Became a Molly Maid Franchise Owner



Cynthia Williams

COURTESY OF CYNTHIA WILLIAMS

**T**ransitioning always comes with its own unique set of challenges, but that doesn't mean the career switch is impossible. After 10 years of service with the Marine Corps and a battle with leukemia, Cynthia Williams found herself with a clean slate and a choice to make. When she ultimately thrived in Molly Maid franchise

ownership, her success brought hope to veterans and cancer survivors everywhere.

*U.S. Veterans Magazine* sat down with Williams to talk about her journey and how her experiences as a Marine and a business owner have aided each other.

**What ultimately led you to enter the Marine Corps?**

While attending the University of South Carolina, I joined the USNR to help with my college costs. While in college, I met the executive officer of the NROTC unit, who was a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps. He talked to me and told me that he believed that I could be a Marine. Prior to that I had not thought about being a Marine, but I was impressed by his professionalism and the Marine Corps. After that I began to investigate the requirements and decided to apply for an NROTC scholarship and start my journey to becoming a Marine Corps officer.

**What was your biggest takeaway from serving and how has it helped you as a woman business owner?**

My biggest takeaway from my time of service was learning resilience, leadership and overcoming adversity when facing obstacles. I learned that when facing obstacles you can't give up, you must find a way to keep going. You may have to take a step back and develop a new plan, but you must make up your mind that you will overcome whatever the obstacle is. I also learned that planning is important. You need a clear plan; with a clear and defined plan you can leave the emotion out of things and reach your objective.

**What inspires and motivates you each day?**

I'm inspired by seeing others do well in their professions. I just get the feeling that if they could do it then I can as well. At our Molly Maid conventions, I'm always amazed at all the owners



COURTESY OF CYNTHIA WILLIAMS

who are succeeding and hitting milestones. It inspires me as a Molly Maid owner because it is something that I can aspire to. I'm motivated to see results and then try to improve and exceed those expectations. Owning a business is a challenge, and you must be motivated daily to be the best and to improve in any way you can.

**What was it about owning your own business that appealed to you?**

One of my long-term goals was to be a business owner. I think it appealed to me because I felt that the skills I acquired from my time in the United States Marine Corps and the management experience I had after that, had prepared me to take on the responsibilities of a business owner. Taking a business from the beginning and growing it and hopefully having a lot of success was what I was hoping to accomplish. I also wanted





## Fire Department Coffee

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2023 Golden Ticket Winner

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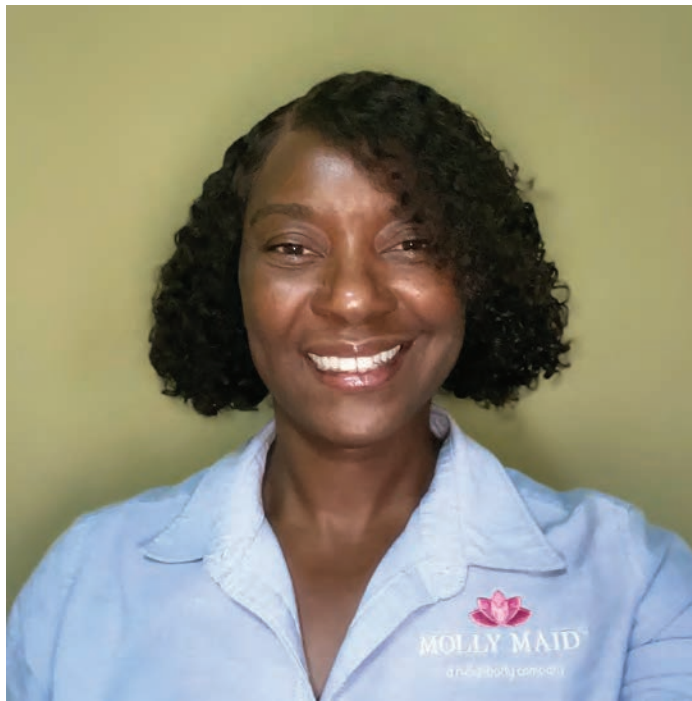
The veteran entrepreneurs we do business with make Walmart a stronger company. Veteran suppliers are an important part of our mission to deliver the products and services our customers want and need. Walmart spent \$1.2 billion with veteran-owned suppliers in FY23.

Walmart 

more opportunities to help others and to contribute to the community. I want to be the type of person and business owner who motivates and inspires others.

**Why Molly Maid and why a franchise?**

I decided to pursue a franchise because I felt that I would have support and could get started with a system in place that would help me get a better start in my business pursuit. When I began my business journey, I researched several franchises and although they were all great opportunities, I ultimately decided on Molly Maid. Molly Maid became my choice because of the business model, training and the support system. As I spoke to Molly Maid owners, I became confident that it was a good company and that I could be successful as a Molly Maid owner.



COURTESY OF CYNTHIA WILLIAMS

**What's the number one piece of advice you'd give to a female veteran who wants to follow your path?**

The advice I'd give would be

first and foremost to do a lot of research before making the plunge into entrepreneurship. After that I would suggest:

1. Have a plan—you will need a

plan for financing your business and make sure you understand how much you will be obligated to the franchisor. You need a business plan so you can understand where you want your business to grow and how you want to develop. Do an assessment of yourself and if you lack knowledge in an area, address it by taking classes or getting help.

2. Be a student—continue to be open to learning. Strive to be a better leader and a better business owner. You can take classes, network and join business groups.
3. Accept that you will make mistakes and that you can learn from them.
4. Have a plan for your work/life balance. Starting a business is hard work and requires a lot of time but you can't let it be all-consuming. You need to make sure you take time for you, your interests and your family.



# Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution is the largest museum, education, and research complex in the world. We are a community of 21 museums, the National Zoo and an extensive network of support units. Our mission is to shape the future by preserving heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world.

## We Need Your Help

The Supplier Diversity Program at the Smithsonian is dedicated to providing procurement opportunities to Veteran-Owned and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB). The Smithsonian needs your help to achieve and exceed its SDVOSB small business goals. Through outreach initiatives like our Small Business Showcases, Vendor Information Sessions and One-on-One Capability Meetings, we assist Veterans on how to do business with the Smithsonian. If you are interested in learning more about procurement opportunities at the Smithsonian please send your capabilities statement to [sdphelp@si.edu](mailto:sdphelp@si.edu)

Office of Equal Employment and Supplier Diversity  
 P.O. Box 30712 | MRC 521 Washington, DC 20013  
 Phone: 202-633-6410 Email: [sdphelp@si.edu](mailto:sdphelp@si.edu)



For more information contact the Smithsonian Supplier Diversity Program or visit [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)



# Smithsonian Institution

## Small Business Diversity at Work

The Smithsonian is the largest museum and research center in the world.

To fulfill our “Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge” mission, we conduct research in history, culture, and science that provides educational insights on diverse issues around the globe.

To meet this mission, we procure a wide variety of goods and services ranging from facilities maintenance, and information technology, to professional and administrative services.

We look forward to working with the Veteran-Owned, and Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business community.

Call or email the Smithsonian Supplier Diversity Program to make an appointment and review your company’s capabilities and how you can support our mission.



### Office of Equal Employment and Supplier Diversity

P.O. Box 30712 | MRC 521  
Washington, DC 20013-7012

Phone: 202-633-6410

Email: [sdphelp@si.edu](mailto:sdphelp@si.edu)

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**At the Smithsonian...Small Business is Good Business for Everyone!**

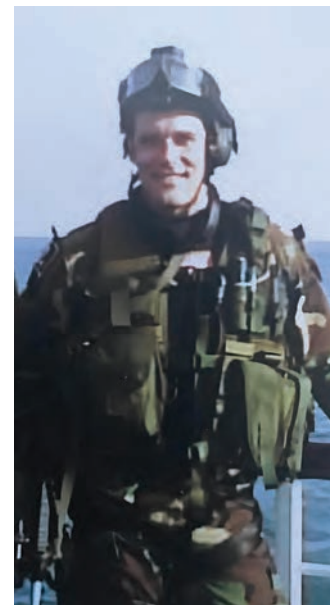
# A Navy SEAL's Guide for Transitioning into Franchising

About 14% of all franchises are owned by military veterans—serving as a fantastic career opportunity that puts your skill sets to work.

[International Franchise Association]



Randy Hetrick



COURTESY OF RANDY HETRICK

harness, originally dubbed “The Gizmo” by my squadron mates, ultimately transformed into today’s TRX Suspension Trainer.

## How has your military service influenced your civilian career?

My time in the SEAL Teams colors virtually every portion of my life. All of the best leadership principles that I know came straight from the Teams, learned in the field. I had some of the best leadership mentors on Earth, both enlisted and commissioned, and I learned a ton about how to organize ordinary people into phenomenal teams who, together, can achieve the impossible. It also gave me thick skin, a hard head and a high pain threshold, which—it turns out—are incredibly valuable assets in entrepreneurship.

## Tell us more about OutFit Training—what inspired you to mobilize TRX?

After 16 years of building

Are you looking to transition but don't want to work for someone else? Many veterans agree, which is why small business opportunities are so popular within the community, especially in the world of franchising. According to the International Franchise Association, about 14% of all franchises are owned by military veterans—serving as a fantastic career opportunity that puts your skill sets to work. *U.S. Veterans Magazine* sat down with Navy SEAL and founder of TRX Training and OutFit Training, Randy Hetrick, to talk about franchising, business ownership and

its impact on the veteran community.

## What made you decide to join the Navy SEAL Teams?

During my junior year in college, the Reagan Revolution was in full swing, and the concept of service to the country became cool again. I got the itch to prove myself and to see what I was really made of. The Navy SEAL Teams—with its notorious 85% attrition rate during the selection process known as BUD/S—represented the ideal intersection of each of these notions.

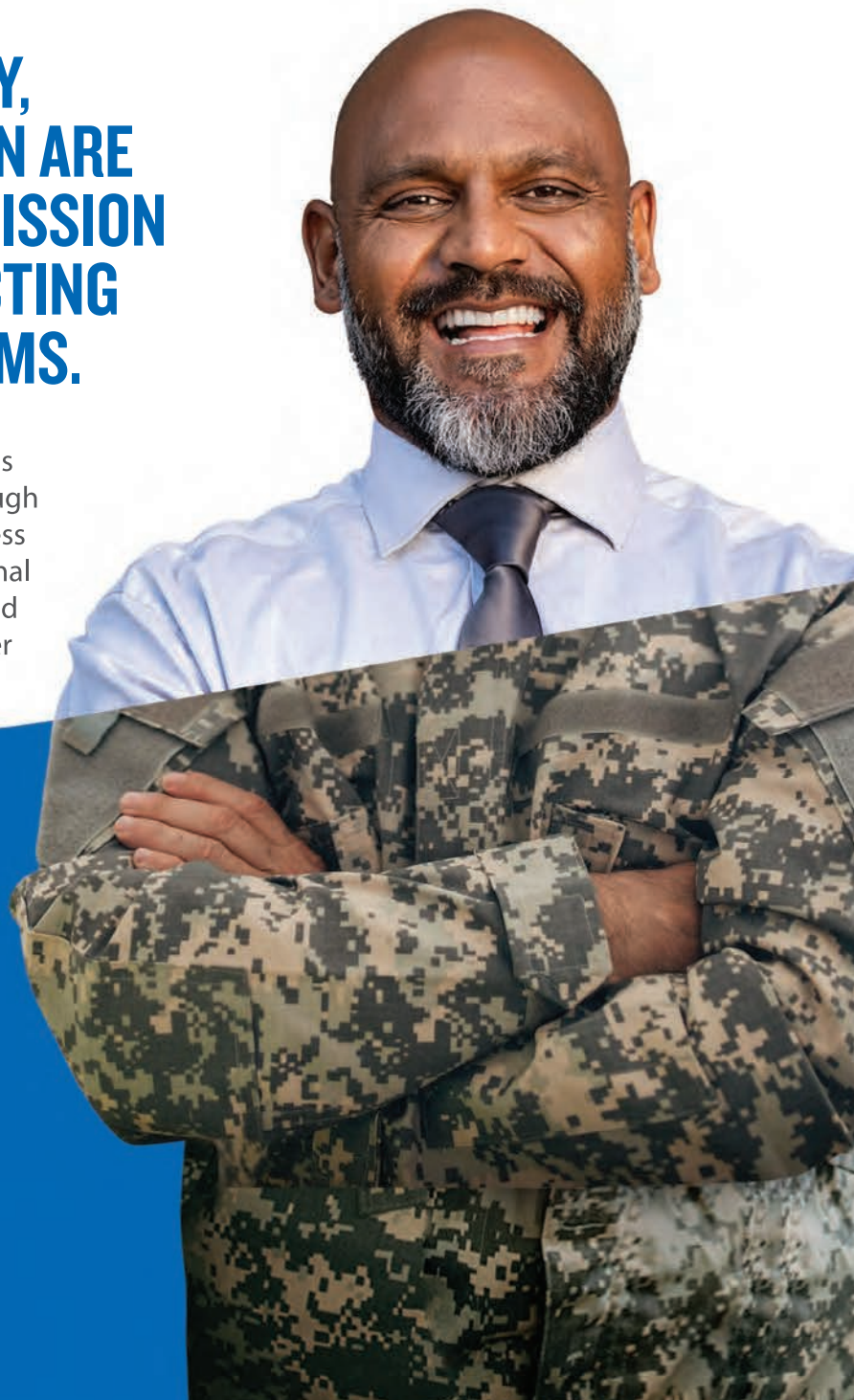
## How did you first create the TRX Training System?

Around 1997, while I was serving as a Troop Commander at the SEAL Special Missions unit, I was on a deployment to Southeast Asia. We were preparing for a counter-piracy operation, deployed to a warehouse where there was no real way to train the muscles necessary to climb up the side of a freighter. I got the idea to stitch together some nylon webbing with my jiu-jitsu belt to create a simple harness that leveraged my body weight, working against gravity to create a functional strength training tool. That

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It's why we believe in empowering veterans with tools and resources to succeed - through our employee Veterans and Military Business Resource Group, membership in the National Veteran Business Development Council, and within American Family's very own Supplier Diversity Program.

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TRX, I became excited about the “blue ocean” idea of bottling up everything we do indoors for gyms and taking it into the great outdoors. I also became passionate about the notion of creating a business with a low buy-in and low monthly expense structure that could give trainers and military veterans (two groups of people who are near and dear to my heart) a realistic opportunity to build their own businesses and create real net worth for themselves and their families. Mix that together with a great team, a heap of new-fangled technology and two decades of fitness business experience, and voilà! OutFit Training was born.

**What makes an OutFit Training franchise ideal for veterans?**

Veterans grow up doing outdoor PT with their buddies. It’s generally a part of military culture that we all enjoy. After service, many vets want to move in an entrepreneurial direction rather than joining another giant bureaucracy. They want to be their own boss. However, certain challenges make that transition difficult: 1) Most vets lack formal business experience; 2) Vets often lack the start-up capital needed to buy an existing business or to fund a start-up because most options require a big pile of investment capital; 3) They’re generally uncertain and unfamiliar with the business opportunities that may be placed in front of them.

OutFit solves all three of these problems. First, as a franchise structure, it comes with complete operating

instructions and full support from OutFit HQ—essentially business in a box. Second, it has the lowest start-up costs of any fitness business I know. And third, most vets love to workout outdoors with their buddies. OutFit gives you the opportunity to do that for a living!

**Anything else you would like to add or share with us?**

Having made the transition from a military career to entrepreneur, I’d encourage vets who are thinking of starting businesses to do at least two things. First, investigate franchise opportunities because choosing the right one can reduce your risk significantly versus going it alone and “free-styling” a start-up business from scratch.

COURTESY OF RANDY HETRICK



Second, and most importantly, be sure to choose a second career in an area that you are passionate about. Business is a different form of battlefield and can be pretty grueling if you don’t love what you’re doing. Conversely, as the old saying goes, “If you really love what you do for a living, you’ll never work a day in your life!”

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# Certification Changes the Game for Veteran Businesses

If you're a veteran business owner, the support given from nonprofits, certification and corporations alike can help you to receive the funding you need to thrive. Thanks to a partnership between FedEx Founder's Fund, part of the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, and Hiring Our Heroes, veteran business owners Greg Hatcher and John Stigerwalt received a \$10,000 grant to further White Knight Labs (WKL)—their cybersecurity company. We sat down with Hatcher to discuss his entrepreneurial career; the influence veteran service organizations can have on the community and the importance of business certification.

## What inspired you to join the military and what branch did you serve in?

My parents raised me with a mindset for serving others. Growing up we were always volunteering at our church and helping the less fortunate. I served in the U.S. Army's 5th Special Forces Group.

## What prompted you to create White Knight Labs?

John and I started WKL because we were tired of seeing companies being taken advantage of by 'fly-by-night' penetration companies that were simply running a vulnerability scanner and passing that off as a penetration test. WKL as a company is a proof of concept for what can happen if you take only senior and principal level engineers that have decades of combined experience and give them loose left and right limits on their methods for completing objectives on engagements. We hire smart

people so they can provide guidance to us and our clients, not the other way around.

## How has your military service influenced your career?

My military service has influenced my career by instilling an extreme level of persistence. Being the senior communications sergeant on a

amount of grit and persistence.

## How has earning a Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) certification helped your business?

Being a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) and also a federal contractor has helped the business because it gives us

interns and also supporting veterans by giving away several seats in every virtual training that we teach. For instance, when WKL taught two courses at Hack Space Con recently, we gave away a total of 20 seats: 10 seats for WKL's Offensive Development course and 10 seats for WKL's Advanced Red Team Operations course. Without grants like the HOH



Greg Hatcher and John Stigerwalt at their booth at Hack Space Con.

Special Forces ODA forced me to learn to be self-sufficient. There were several occasions during combat deployments where a new piece of technology would be sent to me without a manual and my leadership just expected me to figure it out. Flash-forward to my current career in offensive cybersecurity, oftentimes there is no formal guidance on how to learn something or even how to complete certain objectives on a red team engagement. This environment demands creativity and an unlimited

access to a contract that the USG sets aside for SDVOSBs specifically, which means that we have the ability to bid contracts with limited competition.

## You were recently chosen to receive the Hiring Our Heroes (HOH) Small Business Grant. How do funds like this help your business?

Funds like the HOH Small Business Grant help our business by allowing us to expend resources on hiring

grant, these initiatives would be impossible.

## Why should other veterans certify their business?

Like I mentioned above, I recommend that veterans certify their business as either a VOSB or SDVOSB because it gives them the ability to bid on contracts that are 'set aside' by the USG and they're competing against far fewer companies than in the private sector.

# News Briefs

Here is the latest news highlighting the achievements, policies and advocates of the veteran and military communities:



U.S. NAVY/RUSSELL STEWART

## Improved Household Goods Shipment Program May End Stressful Moves

Stressful station-to-station moves may soon be a thing of the past. This summer, the U.S. Transportation Command began utilizing its new Global Household Goods Contract (GHC), which aims to make the movement of household goods a better experience for service members and their families. While several changes have been implemented, GHC's updates include improved communication between service members and moving contractors, providing online mobile tools and establishing a trusted network of subcontract movers. The first families to utilize the program will be notified of their contract before moving and will be filling out surveys to suggest improvements as the program becomes more permanent.



U.S. ARMY/CHRISTOPHER KAUFMANN

## Melissa G. Dalton is the Next Under Secretary of the Air Force

The United States Senate confirmed Melissa G. Dalton to be Under Secretary of the Air Force, clearing the way for her to become the Department's second-highest-ranking civilian leader. Before entering her new position, Dalton was the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs and the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans and Capabilities. She has an extensive background in public service, including several deployments to Afghanistan, and she holds expertise in foreign affairs and defense strategy. In her new role, Dalton will assist the Secretary of the Air Force in managing the Department of the Air Force and organizing, training and equipping the Air Force and Space Force.





U.S. COAST GUARD/DAN HENRY

## Captain Zeita Merchant is the Coast Guard's First Black Admiral

For the first time in the Coast Guard's 233-year history, a Black woman has been promoted to admiral. In an April 2024 ceremony, the former Commander of Sector New York, Captain Zeita Merchant, was promoted to admiral—the highest rank in the Coast Guard. Merchant has served in the Guard for 26 years throughout numerous locations and positions but primarily served in New York as the Captain of the Port and the Commander of Sector New York, the largest operational field command on the East Coast. Merchant also became the first Black woman at Sector New York to oversee the unit during her service. She yielded a 30% increase in recruiting for the Guard and advanced the service's diversity and inclusion efforts.



EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES

## Idris Elba Explores the Lost Stories of World War II Service Members

Even in a war as well documented as World War II, hundreds of stories of valor go unheard or are forgotten altogether. This can be especially true for Black, Hispanic, Asian and other veterans of color. Inspired by the stories of his World War II veteran grandfather, Idris Elba's newest show strives to save these stories from extinction. Teaming up with *National Geographic*, Elba has created *Erased: World War 2's Heroes of Color* to tell the stories of diverse veterans throughout history. "I think what we're going to see is really moving, incredible accounts of some of the most incredible battles we've known and seen," Elba told ABC 7, "but we just haven't seen it from this perspective." The show, which premiered on June 3rd, consists of numerous episodes and is available to stream on Hulu.



HUN CHUSTINE MINODA

## New Army Policy Expands Reimbursements for Working Milspouses

The U.S. Army is expanding its financial support for military spouses through its reimbursement program for business costs and relicensing fees. Under these changes, spouses can now be reimbursed up to \$1,000 for business-related expenses, plus the already authorized \$1,000 for relicensing fees resulting from a relocation. The new policy was additionally modified to include spouses of those moving from active duty to the reserve, those placed on the temporary disability retired list and those given a final move. “Army spouses face unique challenges, especially during a relocation,” said Lt. Gen. Kevin Vereen, Deputy Chief of Staff for G-9. “We owe it to them to provide any opportunity to not just have a job but build a fulfilling career.”



U.S. MARINE CORPS/CPA JENNIFER E. DOUDS

## Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Wins its 10th Environmental Restoration Award

Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Environmental Management Division (EMD) was recently awarded the 2024 Secretary of the Navy Environmental Award for Environmental Restoration Installation. As a 10-time winner of this award, EMD is responsible for managing an ecologically diverse installation that boasts 72,000 acres of upland forests, 49,000 acres of wetlands, 26,000 acres of water and 7,500 acres of developed land. During the past year, EMD has eliminated over 2,000 gallons of liquid sampling waste, treated 100,000 gallons of groundwater using solar power and recycled nearly 6,800 pounds of metallic debris recovered during munitions clearance. They’ve also curated plans for evaluating toxic chemicals on numerous sites. They run the Restoration Advisory Board, engage in environmental investigation and remediation programs, and have won the EPA’s National Notable Achievement Award for Federal Facilities Excellence in Partnering Team of the Year.



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# Montel Williams' *Military Makeover* Transforms the Lives of Veterans & Their Families

**U.S.** *Veterans Magazine* highlights the profound work veterans do within their communities to impact those currently serving our country. A veteran of both the Marine Corps and the Navy, Montel Williams inspires us with his work in recognizing the sacrifices made by our service members.

Williams' show on Lifetime TV, *Military Makeover with Montel*, is captivating audiences with heartfelt stories of a team of talented home improvement professionals working with Williams at the helm to pay tribute to the strength of military families by "transforming the homes and lives of military families across the county." Williams shares insights about the show, the origin story and why it means so much to him.

**1. You served in the Marine Corps and Navy and are a stalwart advocate of service members and their families. Can you tell us about *Military Makeover with Montel*?**

Our military servicemen and women have a proud history and an unwavering dedication to serve. They are sworn to uphold the Constitution that guarantees our freedom, often making the ultimate sacrifice when we need them most. But what happens when they return home? Who serves them when they need our help?

*Military Makeover with Montel* is a heartfelt initiative that offers hope and a helping hand to our heroic military members and their families. This special series is something I'm incredibly proud to lead. It's a way for us to give back to those who've given so much.

In each episode, we enlist the help of conscientious designers, contractors, landscapers and other home improvement professionals to transform the homes and lives of military families across the country. These transformations are not just about bricks and mortar; they're about restoring dignity, comfort and a sense of normalcy to the lives of those who've served.

Having served in both the Marine Corps and the Navy, I



STEPHEN GRANT PHOTOGRAPHY, MILITARY MAKEOVER WITH MONTEL

know firsthand the challenges our veterans face. My commitment to advocating for veteran health and well-being runs deep. *Military Makeover with Montel* is more than a show; it's a mission to honor and uplift those who have sacrificed for our freedom.

Through this series, we aim to shine a spotlight on the incredible resilience and strength of our military families while also galvanizing communities to come together in support. It's a powerful reminder that while our service members protect our nation, it's up to us to ensure they have the support and resources they need when they come home.

I encourage everyone to watch *Military Makeover with Montel* and join us in this mission. Whether through volunteering, donating or simply spreading the word, there are many ways to get involved and make a difference in the lives of our veterans and their families.

**2. How did the *Military Makeover with Montel* team come together, and what inspired each person to get involved?**

We recognized a significant need within our military community, especially among those of us with family members who have served.



STEPHEN GRANT PHOTOGRAPHY, MILITARY MAKEOVER WITH MONTEL

The cast of *Military Makeover*, (L-R) Art Edmonds, Jennifer Bertrand and Montel Williams, eagerly awaits the Carmody family's return to their renovated home.



Our goal was to create a show that gives back to veterans and their families. Brandstar developed the concept, and the series quickly gained momentum as many companies and individuals were eager to support our veterans. This fall, we will be completing our 40th family makeover.

### 3. What is the process for selecting families for a *Military Makeover with Montel*?

Our selection process begins with an online application. Our team then conducts thorough research and interviews with the families. There are numerous criteria we consider;



The Carmody family is welcomed back to their beautifully renovated home in Lynn, Massachusetts, during the 35th season of *Military Makeover*. (top, left) The Carmody family's home in Lynn, Massachusetts, undergoing a stunning transformation on the 35th season of *Military Makeover*. (above)

STEPHEN GRANT PHOTOGRAPHY, MILITARY MAKEOVER WITH MONTEL



MILITARY MAKEOVER WITH MONTEL

The Clarke family of Riverview, Florida was happily reunited with their renovated home in *Military Makeover's* 29th season.

focusing on the specific needs of the family and their home.

**4. Are there some specific makeover stories you can share with us?**

Every story and makeover we feature is unique and available on our website. Each episode showcases the distinct challenges and triumphs of different families.

**5. How do companies like Pennzoil help you fulfill the mission of making homes for veterans?**

While we do not build new homes, we focus on making over existing ones to improve the lives of veterans and their families. By collaborating with companies like Pennzoil, we can provide products and services that significantly enhance their daily lives. For instance, Pennzoil helped us focus on essential maintenance for Jared Bowman's car, whereas other projects might target kitchen remodels or home renovations.

**6. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

For more information, please visit our website at [militarymakeover.tv](http://militarymakeover.tv).

# Pennzoil Supports Veterans



COURTESY OF PENNZOIL

*U.S. Veterans Magazine* asked Pennzoil's Brand Manager, Amanda Luce, about the company's featured segment on *Military Makeover with Montel* that honored veteran Jared Bowman from North Carolina and how Pennzoil supports drivers on all journeys.

our veterans. By providing Jared and his family with a Pennzoil Platinum Full Synthetic oil change and a gift to support future car maintenance, we aimed to offer a small token of our appreciation for his service and the sacrifices he has made.

Motor Oil service and the Firestone Complete Auto Care gift card are more than just gifts; they're practical forms of support intended to ease day-to-day worries for the Bowmans. We hope initiatives like this contribute to their well-being and peace of mind on the road.

**1. Can you share with us the inspiration behind Pennzoil's involvement with *Military Makeover* and the decision to honor veteran Jared Bowman?**

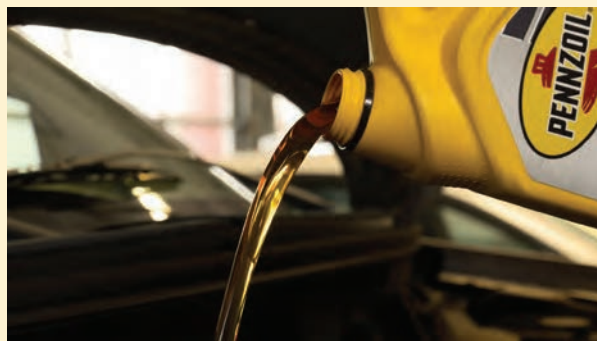
Pennzoil's involvement with *Military Makeover with Montel* was inspired by tremendous respect and gratitude for the courage and resilience of

**2. How does Pennzoil believe initiatives like the surprise motor oil change and gift card for automotive maintenance contribute to supporting military families like the Bowmans?**

We believe that small gestures can have a profound impact. The surprise Pennzoil Platinum Full Synthetic

**3. How does Pennzoil ensure that its products not only meet industry standards but also exceed expectations in terms of performance and reliability?**

At Pennzoil, performance and reliability are at the core of our mission. We are relentless in our pursuit of excellence, constantly engaging in advanced research and development efforts. Our dedication to automotive lubrication quality drives us to innovate, always focusing on helping to meet and exceed the evolving needs of our customers and their vehicles.



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**We invite Veterans who seek to make a difference to apply at PENN.**

Join us in our mission to foster a culture of inclusivity and respect, where the extraordinary contributions of Veterans are welcomed and seen as influential to our success.



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# PepsiCo Puts Military Families First Through Community & Opportunity

By Jim Farrell



PepsiCo's Rolling Remembrance truck.

COURTESY OF PEPSICO

When companies prioritize veterans as valuable resources, they have an innate ability to make the employees around them better. Veterans bring unique perspectives and skills to the workforce, and the military prepares people to be problem solvers while instilling discipline, loyalty and drive, all skills that make great service members and great employees.

When companies hire veterans, they get people who are extremely well-prepared and know how to succeed in the face of challenge and adversity. The value and appreciation for veterans at PepsiCo is what drew me to the organization. I began my career here at a Pepsi beverage manufacturing plant 26 years ago, and I now lead transportation field execution in North America.

Throughout my career at PepsiCo, the organization has demonstrated its commitment to veteran employees and veterans in the community, creating opportunities for its

people to make a meaningful difference. One example is the Rolling Remembrance program, which provides scholarship funding for Gold Star children through a partnership with Children of Fallen Patriots. The program just celebrated its 9th annual relay initiative, where 55 PepsiCo drivers, who are military veterans, set off on a more than 14,000-mile journey, making 61 stops passing through different regions of the country honoring military heroes.

I served five years in the U.S. Army, achieving the rank of Captain. As an American and an Army veteran, I'm passionate about supporting service members and their families. These combined interests intersected in 2012 when my team coordinated a care package drive for an Army unit serving in Afghanistan who shared their appreciation by sending a flag they had carried into battle to the PepsiCo headquarters. Rolling Remembrance grew as we



Jim Farrell, senior vice president of supply chain for PepsiCo Beverages North America (PBNA).

COURTESY OF PEPSICO

realized the potential to show support and raise awareness and appreciation for the men and women who fight for our freedom. In our first year, we raised \$25,000; after this year, the total is well over \$2 million.

PepsiCo aims for our workforce to mirror the communities where we operate. This is part of what drives our commitment to providing opportunities for military hires. It isn't just in

the name of service, but it's because veterans contribute to the success of our business. Each year, approximately 200,000 service members transition to civilian life. Through PepsiCo VALOR Military Veteran Employee Resource Group, we're committed to supporting a successful transition from military to civilian life.

While the event is sponsored by the PepsiCo VALOR Military Veteran Employee Resource Group, it's hugely supported by our veteran and non-veteran employees who participate and rally together along the way. From drivers and planners to managers and sales representatives, veterans from all levels feel seen and supported through this program, and it's gratifying to share our passion with coworkers and the broader communities where we live and work.

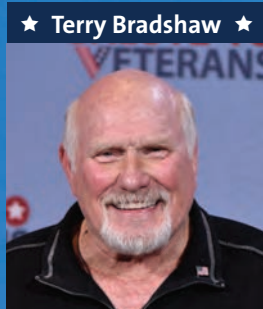


# SALUTE TO VETERANS



★ Rocky Bleier ★

U.S. Army Veteran,  
4-time Champion,  
Pittsburgh



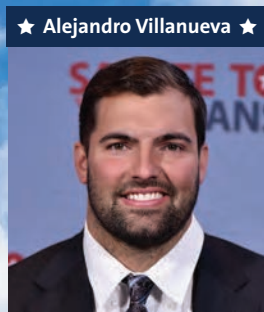
★ Terry Bradshaw ★

TV Host & Hall of Famer,  
4-time Champion,  
Pittsburgh



★ Greg Gadson ★

U.S. Army Veteran,  
Honorary Captain,  
2-time Champion with New York



★ Alejandro Villanueva ★

U.S. Army Veteran,  
2-time Pro Bowler,  
Baltimore



★ Joe Cardona ★

U.S. Navy Veteran,  
2-time Champion,  
New England



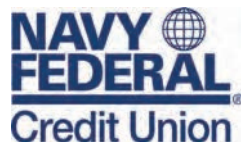
Salute to Veterans is a national television series that honors and pays tribute to our nation's veterans, active duty service members, military families and patriotic supporters. The inspirational and educational program offers insightful discussion, resources and solutions for the ongoing issues our veterans face daily. The series shares the stories of distinguished veterans who have served their country, overcame personal challenges in their lives and made a difference in their communities, while inspiring others to do the same.

# SALUTE TO VETERANS

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Presented by



# The Price of Freedom: Insights from Master Sergeant Danielle Hopkins

In 1917, Loretta Perfectus Walsh became the first woman to enlist in the military when she joined the Navy. As of 2022, women constituted an average of 17.5% of all active-duty military personnel, totaling nearly 229,000 members. For context, women were first granted the ability to serve as permanent members of the armed services under the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, signed into law on June 12, 1948. One of these esteemed women is U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant Danielle Hopkins. Hopkins is an Intelligence Analyst with the 118th Operational Support Squadron, 118th Wing at Berry Field Air National Guard Base in Nashville, Tennessee.

Inspired by her father, who served in the Navy, Hopkins was set to enlist in the military. She wanted to follow in her father's footsteps; however, her mother wanted her to go to college. Her mother's concern outweighed Hopkins' calling to serve at that time and caused her to delay her enlistment.



U.S. Air National Guard Master Sgt. Hopkins, an all-source intelligence analyst with the 118th Operations Group, Tennessee Air National Guard, poses for a photo on June 25, 2024 at Berry Field Air National Guard Base, Nashville, Tennessee.

## Off to boot camp

The events of 9/11 ignited Hopkins' passion for service and led her to the Army recruiter's office. She wanted to be an Army journalist; however, the Army offered her a heavy equipment operator position, which she declined. It was not until 2004, at the age of 29, that she finally realized her calling. She joined the Navy Reserves and headed off to boot camp!

Very early in her military career, Hopkins learned that she had to study hard and know how to do her job better than everyone else. The biggest challenge for her as a woman in the military was that she had to learn to be assertive. She had to learn to use her voice.

"Honestly, I was too nice. I'm from the South and was raised to respect everyone, and sometimes that challenged me. It sounds weird, but people used my instant friendliness against me. I had to learn my job and be the best at it. I had to learn how to assert myself as a nice person, but also as someone who would hold others accountable and do the mission to the best of our collective abilities," Hopkins said.

## Closer to home

After her years in the Navy Reserves, which required world travel away from her family, Hopkins found that the Tennessee Air National Guard had missions closer to home. She would not have to travel around the globe to continue to serve her country. The Guard has federal and state missions, and she was excited to learn about those opportunities to serve her community and nation stateside. Hopkins left the Navy and joined the Air National Guard.

## Challenges for women

There have always been challenges for women in the military. When discussing those challenges, Hopkins shared, "With the rising cost of child care and the rising cost of homes and services, I see that women's opportunities are challenging,



U.S. Air National Guard Master Sgt. Hopkins, an all-source intelligence analyst with the 118th Operations Group, Tennessee Air National Guard, working at her computer. Hopkins was highlighted by *U.S. Veterans Magazine* for her career accomplishments in the military.



U.S. Air National Guard Master Sgt. Hopkins stands in front of the Berry Field Air National Guard Base sign in Nashville, Tennessee.

even in serving our nation. While the insurance is very helpful, child care is extremely expensive, and families need to keep all the income they can. Not everyone has the opportunity to serve full-time or even part-time due to the need for a solid two-person income to raise a family. I think the Guard and active duty need to find a way to provide more child care and incentives to working mothers to also keep the best women in our ranks.

"I will say I never once have been told I can't succeed because I'm a woman. I feel blessed that between serving in two services and three different careers, I've never felt like the opportunities weren't available for me. I was older and didn't have child care to think about. While that makes a difference in some of my choices, I know the opportunities were there if I could afford to work for them."

#### Rewards of service

My discussion continued with Hopkins, and I asked her what has been most rewarding for her during her 20-year

military career. She shared, "To see and experience things with my own eyes. I've worked and been involved in service that, hopefully, my family would be proud of. We all have a price to pay for our



I will say I never once have been told I can't succeed because I'm a woman. I feel blessed that between serving in two services and three different careers, I've never felt like the opportunities weren't available for me."

freedoms, and I'm proud to have had the opportunity to pay for that price while wearing the nation's cloth. It has also been rewarding to serve with my brothers and sisters. The bond you have with the other

service members is amazing and one you can't replicate in the corporate world. To serve for the Constitution and what our forefathers fought so hard to preserve is an absolute honor.

"If I could encourage young women today to enlist, I would absolutely do so. The military isn't a dictatorship, although there are parts of your individual self that you lose to serve as a group that is working together to protect our homeland. I've been so fulfilled in life; I've learned what honor and sacrifice is.

"I've worked alongside true American heroes who would do anything to preserve freedom and honor for our nation. That is priceless. That is a feeling that may be hard to achieve in the civilian world. I get to train our young service members now with the knowledge that I've been able to acquire and help them be the leaders of tomorrow. That is the greatest gift that has been given back to me—the honor to lead others and take care of them. Beside my brothers and my sisters, I'll proudly take a stand."

# The Yellow Ribbon Program Explained

By Dr. LeNaya Hezel

The Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers many benefits for veterans and their families to pursue their personal and professional goals, including subsidizing the cost of higher education.

If you're planning to attend college or are already enrolled, there's a good chance you've tapped into your Post-9/11 GI Bill, a VA education benefit you've earned.

Nestled under the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit is the Yellow Ribbon Program, an additional tuition assistance program that helps eligible service members, veterans and military families pay for out-of-state or private degree program tuition and fees the GI Bill doesn't cover. More than 500 colleges and universities have participated in the Yellow Ribbon Program since its inception.

We sat down with Dr. LeNaya Hezel, chief programs officer at Warrior-Scholar Project (WSP), to learn more about the Yellow Ribbon Program, its benefits and other campus resources available to military-connected students. WSP partners with leading universities nationwide to host academic boot camps that prepare veterans for college, including navigating the college application and financial aid process complexities.

## In plain terms, what is the Yellow Ribbon Program?

The Yellow Ribbon Program is a supplemental funding benefit for students eligible to receive 100% of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, which is calculated by days of accumulated active-duty service and determined by the VA based on official

service records. The program helps Post-9/11 GI Bill users with tuition, fees and other expenses required for a degree program that exceeds what the Post-9/11 GI Bill would cover. The GI Bill only pays up to a certain amount annually, \$28,937.09 during the 2024-2025 school year. What makes the Yellow Ribbon Program unique is that schools opt into the program and agree to support a specified number of students up to a designated financial amount. The VA then matches what the school will provide, which is in addition to the annual tuition and fees base pay benefit that the GI Bill covers.

For example, a student plans to attend a private institution, and the tuition is \$60,000 annually. The student will receive their GI Bill base pay of \$28,937.09. However, their college is also a Yellow Ribbon School and provides up to an additional \$20,000 in assistance to participants. The VA would match up to \$20,000, bringing the Yellow Ribbon Program benefit for the student up to \$40,000. So, \$28,937.09 (GI Bill tuition base pay), which leaves \$31,062.91 remaining, falling below the \$40,000 Yellow Ribbon Program maximum, meaning there would be no out-of-pocket cost to the student for tuition

and fees at what might be an otherwise inaccessible school for the student.

## How many students can enroll in the Yellow Ribbon Program, and is the benefit the same across institutions?

Each college or university determines its own availability and funding level. Some have unlimited slots as long as the applicant is eligible for GI Bill benefits; other schools cap how many people can participate, and it's first come, first served. Schools also have to set up rules for what first come, first served looks like—that can be a separate application or



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Dr. LeNaya Hezel at the Warrior-Scholar Project Alumni Conference.

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form on certifying documents, for example. In a first come scenario, slots wouldn't open until students graduate, exhaust benefits or withdraw. Because of that, the number of students who can enroll in the Yellow Ribbon Program can vary from year to year at a school that caps the number of participants.

The best way to find out for sure is to ask questions during the application process. For example, are you a Yellow Ribbon School? How much do you contribute, and will that amount, coupled with the GI Bill tuition maximum, cover the entire cost of tuition and

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## The program helps Post-9/11 GI Bill users with tuition, fees and other expenses required for a degree program that exceeds what the Post-9/11 GI Bill would cover.

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fees? Is there a cap on how many students can enroll in the Yellow Ribbon Program, or is there a waitlist?

The GI Bill Comparison Tool is a great starting point for giving students a reference on the entire cost of tuition, fees, housing allowance rates and book stipends. Students should contact the centralized point of contact listed for the college to get more information. That person may refer inquiries to someone else, but they can at least point students in the right direction. When using the Comparison Tool or speaking with admissions, keep in mind that the rate can change from year to year, so students should



Dr. LeNaya Hezel

COURTESY OF WARRIOR-SCHOLAR PROJECT

also ask what the benefits will be when they start school.

### **In general, what support resources are available for veterans on campus?**

Some of the common ones I'm seeing are dedicated websites outlining the GI Bill certification process, which is required by law for universities to receive VA funding. The universities that go beyond have a dedicated point of contact to answer and assist veterans and military-connected students. Some schools have a veteran-specific orientation or welcome event at the start of the semester, which is an excellent way to meet other students in the community and learn who on

campus is supporting them. There might also be a dedicated school certifying official or someone in a similar role who assists with transition resources and coordinates other programs for students throughout the year.

Beyond an office, some schools have a physical space for veterans, commonly called the Veterans Resource Center. Student veterans can use this space for events or even a dedicated study room. The resource center is often the hub for events and programming, from community building to health and wellness, career development, financial literacy and academic skills—all tailored to the student veteran population.

Not all students will use a Veterans Resource Center or attend events, but some need military-specific services and connections with other veterans. At the end of the day, it comes down to the student's needs. The support available from a military identity perspective should vary depending on where the student is in their transition, and students should ask themselves what type of college experience and support system they need to succeed and find alignment.

*Dr. LeNaya Hezel is the chief programs officer at Warrior-Scholar Project, a nonprofit whose mission is to ensure that every degree-seeking enlisted veteran succeeds in their pursuit of higher education.*



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# Enhancing Success for Military & Veteran Students: Courtney Swoboda's Journey at the University of Central Missouri

Courtney Swoboda has dedicated the past six years to the University of Central Missouri (UCM), where she serves as the Director of Military and Veteran Services. Swoboda's journey began as the coordinator of certifications within the Military and Veteran Success Center, a role in which she excelled before rising to her current position as director. Not only is she a committed

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**“Being able to pivot and help students, identify their needs and see them be successful is just so fulfilling.”**

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professional at UCM, but she is also actively serving in the Air Force Reserves, marking her 11th year of service. Her dual experience in academia and the military uniquely positions her to support and advocate for UCM's veteran and military-affiliated students.

Swoboda finds the most fulfillment in serving her fellow veterans and service members, driven by a passion that stems from her own unconventional educational journey. She is deeply committed to helping

others navigate their unique paths, recognizing that each veteran and service member brings a different story and set of needs. “Being able to pivot and help those students, identify their needs and see them be successful is just so fulfilling,” she shared, highlighting the personalized approach she takes in her role.

Her military background plays a crucial role in her effectiveness at UCM. She understands the challenges veterans face when transitioning to higher education. “For veterans, higher education can be a little scary to approach,” she explained. The familiarity and understanding she brings make the transition smoother for veterans. Additionally, the Military and Veteran Success Center team, including an active-duty military spouse and mother, offers comprehensive support. This dynamic fosters an environment where veterans feel comfortable and understood, which is pivotal in helping them share their needs and access appropriate resources.

One of the core strengths of UCM's veteran program is its responsiveness to student feedback. Swoboda emphasizes the importance of listening to students to ensure the program meets their evolving needs. Engaging with students and training internal campus partners about the center's mission and services are integral parts of their strategy. “If a veteran feels more comfortable with a different person on campus, at least that campus partner knows

what our mission is and what services we offer,” she said. This collaborative approach across departments ensures a cohesive support system for veteran students.

Swoboda shared a particularly inspiring success story of a Marine Corps veteran who initially felt out of place on campus. After finding camaraderie within the center, he flourished, becoming the Student Veterans Organization (SVO) president and actively participating in center activities. His transformation from feeling lost to finding a passion for helping others is a testament to the impact of the supportive environment at UCM. Stories like these are common, with many students finding academic success, personal connections and even future spouses through the center.

To those supporting or working within UCM's veteran program, Swoboda offers invaluable advice. She stresses the magnitude of not assuming all students fit a specific mold. Being open to their needs and actively listening are crucial for success. “Learn about the programs in the military for all the branches,” she advised. Building partnerships and advocating for students, often at no extra cost, can significantly enhance their experience. Taking pride in the program and being present for the students is paramount.

For veterans seeking more information, Swoboda encourages them to visit the UCM website at [ucmo.edu](http://ucmo.edu). The center's doors are always open, and they offer online programming for



COURTESY OF COURTNEY SWOBODA

Courtney Swoboda

those not located in Missouri. Additionally, Swoboda has collaborated with peers at other universities to form an organization called MOVES or the Missouri Organization of Veteran Education Specialists, which facilitates communication and support among institutions. This network ensures that veterans transferring to other schools in Missouri receive consistent and informed support.

The breadth of resources and benefits available to UCM's veteran students is extensive, and Swoboda takes extra steps to vet programs before recommending them. She urges prospective students to look up the school and contact her for assistance by calling the center at 660-543-8776. Her dedication and the comprehensive support system at UCM make it an ideal choice for military and veteran students seeking to further their education and transition successfully into civilian life.



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# The University of South Carolina: Leading the Charge in Veteran Support

Candace Terry, a dedicated advocate for veterans and a driving force behind the University of South Carolina's (USC) veteran services, shared her inspiring journey and the impactful initiatives that have earned USC recognition as a Top Veteran-Friendly School.

## A Journey from Navy to Advocacy

Terry's story is one of resilience and dedication. She served eight years in the Navy as a Russian and Persian Farsi crypto analyst and developed a unique skill set that later facilitated her transition into civilian life. After her military service, she pursued an undergraduate degree in Russian studies at the University of Kentucky, where she joined the Student Veterans Association and discovered her passion for veteran advocacy. This passion eventually led her to the University of South Carolina, where she completed her master's in social work.

At USC, Terry was part of a group of veterans who were instrumental in developing services for veterans, culminating in the creation of her current position. Her role involves working closely with the university administration, faculty, staff and community partners to ensure veterans receive the support and resources needed to succeed.

## Bridging Military Skills to Civilian Success

Terry attributes her relatively smooth transition from military to civilian life to the applicability of her military skills in the Department of Defense (DoD) contracting sector. Her focus was clear: obtain the necessary degree and transition into DoD contracting. This goal-

oriented approach highlights the importance of leveraging military experience to meet civilian career requirements.

## Recognized Excellence in Veteran Services

USC's recognition as a Top Veteran-Friendly School is a testament to its commitment to its veteran population. Terry emphasizes that this achievement is rooted in the strength and activism of the student veteran community. The administration's support has been crucial, enabling the establishment of centralized services on campus, such as a one-stop-shop for veteran benefits and community resource outreach.

In 2022, USC was voted the Number One Best School for Veterans and continues to rank in the top 10. The newly-created South Carolina Department of Veterans Affairs has rated USC as a gold-standard university, further cementing its reputation. Terry credits the grassroots efforts of student veterans for these milestones, underscoring the importance of building support from the ground up.

## Visibility & Outreach

Finding the veteran services center at USC is relatively straightforward. Located in a prominent building near the scenic Horseshoe area, the center is easily accessible. USC also maintains a robust social media presence and conducts extensive outreach on campus, including involvement in new student orientations, to guide students to important resources.

## Promoting a Veteran-Inclusive Culture

USC's commitment to a veteran-inclusive culture is

evident in its array of events and programs. The Veterans Day breakfast, along with the Veterans Day 5K and a week of events, celebrates and honors veterans' service. The Military Appreciation Game is a significant highlight, where student veterans run the team onto the field, carrying service flags.

Terry's background in social work informs her efforts to educate the university community about veteran culture and attitudes. Comprehensive Green Zone training is offered to all USC campuses, ensuring that faculty, staff and students understand and support their veteran peers.

## Building a Strong Community

The Student Veterans Association at USC, established in 2014, plays a vital role in fostering a sense of community among veteran students. Despite the challenges veterans face in higher education, such as balancing school with mortgages and families, veterans at USC outperform their peers in GPA, graduation and retention.

## Continuous Improvement & Future Initiatives

USC continuously strives to enhance its veteran services. One innovative program is the future partnership with the SC Department of Veterans Affairs to bring their Palmetto Pathfinder Program to campus. This peer mentorship program pairs experienced veterans with transitioning veterans to provide guidance and support.

Looking ahead, USC plans to establish a standalone center to host community partners, providing a comprehensive support network for veterans.



COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Candace Terry

This initiative aligns with the university's mission to offer holistic, wraparound services based on the social determinants of health.

## A Team Dedicated to Excellence

In her short tenure at USC, Terry has been impressed by the passion and dedication of her team. She is enthusiastic about the future and confident that USC will maintain its top rankings in veteran support. Through Terry's leadership and the collective efforts of the USC community, the university continues to set the standard in veteran support and advocacy, ensuring that those who have served their country receive the recognition, resources and respect they deserve.

For prospective veteran students and their families, learning about USC's resources is as simple as a quick online search for "University of South Carolina veteran and military services," which leads to a wealth of information and contacts.

## WHO WE ARE



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**South Carolina**

The Veterans and Military Center of Excellence represents a commitment by the University of South Carolina to initiate and lead innovative academic, government, and community collaborations positioned to empower those who have served in defense of the nation. The center functions as a bridge to assist in forming public-private partnerships to benefit our military community, as well as serve as a collaborative space to nurture academic achievement, produce scholarly research on veteran's issues and coordinate actionable programming to serve our student veterans, military service members, their families and alumni. It's the epicenter of veteran life on the campus of the University of South Carolina and has fundamentally transformed how we engage and support our military and student veteran community.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Veterans and Military Affairs is dedicated to facilitating academic excellence and professional success for all military-affiliated students and engages with the veteran and military community on behalf of the university.

## VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to establish USC as the premier and preferred university of choice for the veteran and military community in the country.

## VALUES

**STRIVE:** We strive to create and enhance an educational environment that supports those who serve our country.

**INSPIRE:** We form meaningful partnerships to further expand the impact and success of all military-affiliated students.

**EQUIP:** We provide the resources needed for each student to excel in both educational and professional endeavors.

*We ensure that the veteran and military community is aware that we honor and value their service, and we stand by our commitment of "Serving Those Who Serve."*



# Chef Rush

## Facing the Fight

By Brady Rhoades

**W**hat's the most demanding job in the military? It's hard to argue against combat.

The second or, perhaps, third?

"One of the hardest jobs in the military is food services," Andre Rush, veteran, master chef and fitness guru, said in an interview with *U.S. Veterans Magazine*.

The skills he learned in military kitchens translate splendidly to managing the ups and downs of civilian life.

Cooking also helps him cope with PTSD—sustained during the 9/11 attacks and as the result of the loss of his daughter.

"I tell people to this day that cooking saved my life," Rush said. "It's a coping tool. It benefits your mental health."

So does exercise. Rush presses out 2,222 pushups a day to promote the 22 Pushup Challenge, with the goal of raising awareness for veterans who commit suicide or are struggling with suicidal thoughts.

Since 2001, more than 120,000 veterans have died by suicide. The rate of veteran suicides has been as much as 66%—higher than the suicide rate for the general public. And suicide is the second leading cause of death among veterans under age 45, the Department of Veterans Affairs reports.

Rush doesn't recommend that others perform 2,000 pushups a day, however.

"Everybody expects me to do 2,000, but

you don't have to," he said. "You can do two. It's the cause that matters."

Exercising and cooking healthy food are holistic; "not just for your body but for your mind," he added. Generally speaking, both are communal activities. "The most important thing is for people to laugh hard. You never see someone laughing without smiling."

### The Foundation

Rush, 50, grew up in a housing project in Columbus, Mississippi. He played football as a running back at Lee High School. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from Trident University International and an associate degree in hotel restaurant management from Central Texas College.

In 1993, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he became a master sergeant. He has spent time at Fort Stewart in Georgia; 503 Infantry at Camp Casey, South Korea; Fort Campbell in Kentucky; and Fort Bragg in North Carolina. He has been deployed overseas and served in two capacities that seem an unlikely pair: food service and as a trainer in hand-to-hand combat.

In 1997, he started working as a chef at the White House. He has served Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

He's often asked about the Presidents' eating habits. Before going vegan, Clinton loved barbecue, chicken enchiladas and cinnamon rolls. Bush, absolutely

committed to fitness, enjoyed seven-layer chocolate cake on his birthdays. Trump was a steak and fast food man.

What about Obama?

"He was a health guy."

Any cheat days?

"He liked his pizza, Chicago-style. But he mostly ate healthy, and she (First Lady Michelle Obama) made sure of it."

In fact, the First Lady planted a garden on the White House grounds, and Rush used her fresh vegetables for presidential dishes.

Rush worked at the White House part-time while working at the Pentagon. He was in the gym of the Pentagon when it was hit during the 9/11 attacks, and he volunteered for military service afterward. Rush, who served in several countries, was a member of the U.S. Army Culinary Arts Team.

In 2018, a photo of Rush cooking on the White House lawn—with his 24-inch arms popping out of his shirt—went viral on social media. To put it in perspective, when Arnold "The Terminator" Schwarzenegger was Mr. Olympia back in the 1970s, his arms measured 20 inches.

After his viral moment, Rush signed a deal for a television show titled *Chef in the City*.

In 2023, he starred in *Kitchen Commando*, a show about helping struggling restaurants. It was produced by world-renowned celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay and premiered on Tubi. Rush has



COURTESY OF CHEF RUSH

also authored a book titled, *Call Me Chef, Dammit!* (learn more about it at [chefrush.com](http://chefrush.com)) and gives motivational speeches.

His speaking style could be described as upbeat and good-humored, though he tackles serious topics.

“My thing is, I’d rather make people laugh than make them cry because everyone laughs together,” he said.

Rush gave a recent speech at a conference hosted by FARMCON. This organization promotes creative ideas in the agriculture business, and Rush commanded the audience’s attention when he walked on stage. He was not wearing a farmer’s outfit or a suit.

“This shirt,” he said, tugging on a snug, green top, “is from the Army. My Bronze Star is from the Army. My arms are from the Marines. These sweatpants are from the Navy. My boots: Air Force. They are comfortable. The Air Force knows what I’m talking about. And the hardest one of all, the Coast Guard, well, it’s my underwear.”

He then talked about the importance of hard work, loyalty and family. He told a story about farming with his father in the South. A true military man and a believer in unity, he ended by inviting members of the crowd to join him onstage to do one pushup.

“Everything is about us together. We do it together. We’re in it together, no matter who you are, where you’re from or what you’re doing,” he told them.

### A New Perspective

He’s had his peaks, and his valleys have been heartbreaking.

In 2023, his 11-year-old daughter was shot and killed—along with two other children—by her stepfather, a veteran with PTSD. He committed suicide.

Rush was angry, of course, and torn up by grief, but his supporters—like the foundation of a house—made sure he didn’t collapse. In time, he emerged from the tragedy with a new perspective and renewed motivation.

“I didn’t want to demonize him,” Rush said. “I’m human, and I asked the question: ‘What could I have done?’ It made me more diligent about who I am and what I want to do.”

It was not his first experience with suicide. While serving, a member of his team—who was “always smiling,” Rush said—killed himself. He had contacted Rush before going through with it.

And so, Rush became a prominent member of Face the Fight Against Veteran Suicide. The organization’s mission



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U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SFC. COURTNEY LINDSAY

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statement is: "The realities of veteran suicide are shocking. Through Face the Fight, we're working to break the stigma surrounding suicide in the military community by raising awareness and fostering real, open conversations around support and hope."

The group is seeking to cut suicides by veterans in half by 2030. To join the fight, visit [wefacethefight.org](http://wefacethefight.org).

Rush is a big proponent of "buddy checks." That's when veterans check in on each other—for no particular reason and with no agenda.

But you don't have to be a veteran to do a buddy check, he said. You can be a neighbor, a friend, a family member. It doesn't take much to call or visit a veteran and ask how his or her day is going. And, if and when trust has been established, to sit and listen.

Rush likes to do checks while he's in the kitchen, cooking chicken habanero or some other out-of-this-world meal. The process feels like a win-win: healing for him, healthy for his comrades.

"You'll be surprised how many lives you can save."



U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SFC. COURTNEY LINDSAY

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1: Sgt. 1st Class Andre Rush of the U.S. Army Military Academy of West Point, New York, cooks a sauce for salmon in front of an audience at the 36th Culinary Arts Competition held at Fort Lee, Virginia, in 2011.

2: Joseph Carr and Andre Rush as Josh Cellars unveils the first Military Salute Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon in partnership with Operation Gratitude and Chef Andre Rush on May 21, 2019 in New York City.

3: Arnold Schwarzenegger and Chef Andre Rush on Nov. 26, 2019 in Los Angeles.

4: (L-R) Actor Vincent Rodriguez III, Bruce Cardenas of Quest Nutrition, Mike Kroeger of Nickelback and White House Chef Andre Rush hand out donated meals to local medical staff at the LA Downtown Medical Center on April 25, 2020 in Los Angeles.

5: Army Master Sgt. Andre Rush saws into an ice block for the ice carving competition in Fort Lee, Virginia, March 3, 2012. Members of each branch of the military competed in various culinary categories during the 37th Annual Military Culinary Competition.

6: Gordon Ramsay with Andre Rush in the "Military Relations/Tag Team" episodes of *MASTERCHEF* on FOX.

7: Andre Rush in the "Military Relations/Tag Team" episodes of *MASTERCHEF* on FOX.



FOX VIA GETTY IMAGES

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# Buying a Home from a Distance

By Lizann Lightfoot



When military families get PCS orders, one of the first questions usually is, “Where will we live?” If you don’t want to live on a base (or base housing isn’t available), you may need to shop for a home before moving.

Sometimes, service members can get a few days of house-hunting leave to visit the new area, tour houses and make an offer in person. However, a house-hunting trip before a PCS move isn’t typically possible for families stationed overseas or without child care arrangements. That means your entire home-buying experience must be completed from a distance.

Buying a house from a distance is challenging but not impossible. You will need a real estate agent willing to work with your unique situation and, ideally, a local family member or friend you can use as a legal proxy. Keep reading to learn tips for communicating with real estate agents from a distance and options for touring a home and completing paperwork, even when you’re in a different time zone!

## One Family’s Experience

Like many military families, mine has jumped through hoops to find somewhere to live after a PCS move. Our first home-buying experience was

mostly traditional: we got orders, drove to visit the new base for a weekend, visited some homes and made an offer. As mortgage payments began a month later, I moved into our home with our toddler while my husband finished his remaining weeks at the previous base.

The next time we bought a house (years later, after selling the first one), the situation was much more complicated. My husband was approaching his 20-year retirement date, and we started to discuss our plans for where to live after leaving the military. We wanted to buy a home in Pennsylvania and rent it out for a few years until

he retired.

There was one major problem: neither one of us lived on the East Coast. I was living at his current duty station in California, and he was deployed to Japan! It was far too expensive to fly to Pennsylvania for a house-hunting weekend, so everything had to be done virtually.

Amazingly, we made it work! We found a home we loved online, did virtual tours with the real estate agent and even managed to have the paperwork signed and keys exchanged from a distance.

If your family is in a similar situation and needs to buy a home remotely, here are some things to consider:

## Remote Home Buying

### 1. Find a military-friendly agent

Military families face unique situations like PCS orders, moving timelines and VA loans, so you want to work with an agent with experience in those matters. When looking for an agent, ask if they have handled remote sales before and how the process will look, especially if you live in another state. The more you know in advance, the smoother your home-buying process will be.

### 2. Maximize virtual visits

Virtual video tours are helpful to get a quick sense of a house, but they don't always tell the whole story. If the service member and spouse can't be on the call together, you will probably have different questions or reactions. Our agent uploaded tour videos to a private YouTube channel so my husband could watch them

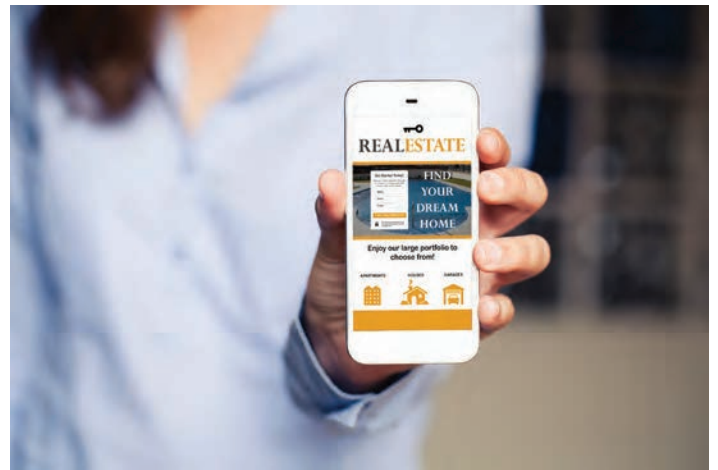
in Japan. Try to get video tours moving from one room to the next so you see how everything connects. Ask the agent to open the closets and turn around for a slow pan of each room so you don't miss any unusual features.

### 3. Enlist a friend

The best way to get a feel for a home is to be there in person. When buying a house from a distance, invite someone you trust to do it for you. If you don't have a local family member, ask the base's military spouse group if someone will go and do a walk-through with the agent, take pictures and give you their honest feedback. Ask about smells, the view from the windows, neighbors' houses or yards and other details you wouldn't pick up from photos and videos.

### 4. Prepare proxy paperwork

There will be lots of



paperwork to sign to finalize your home sale. While some documents can be signed virtually through email, others must be signed in person in the county where the sale occurs. Discuss your options with the real estate agent. Be prepared to get a Power of Attorney for a local friend or family member to sign for you. If that isn't an option, it's good to know ahead

of time whether you will need to fly in to close the sale and get the keys.

Buying a home from out-of-state can be challenging during a PCS move, but if you find the right real estate agent and ask detailed questions, you will be fully informed and ready to face this challenge. Happy house hunting!

Source: Blog Brigade

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# Healing Veterans with Horseback Psychotherapy

By Dr. Katie Holtcamp

His heart races as Jason (name changed for anonymity) puts his foot in the stirrup and swings his leg over the saddle. He's never ridden a horse before, but that's not the issue. Extreme anxiety has become a normal part of everyday life ever since he returned from deployment. He's constantly on edge, can't sleep and his mind races. The only thing that seems to help is alcohol, but that's become habitual and unsustainable.

Today, he's looking for a fresh start. As part of his addiction treatment, Jason is participating in a special program that combines therapist-led psychotherapy with horseback riding to help veterans like him break through the emotional trauma fueling his substance use disorder.

This new treatment approach, clinically known as psychotherapy incorporating equine (PIE), has already demonstrated dramatic results, helping veterans unlock repressed thoughts and feelings that have, to this point, hindered their recovery.

## PIE vs. Equine Therapy

Traditional equine assisted therapy involves individuals working with horses—typically grooming, feeding or simply being in the presence of these gentle giants—as a way to calm anxiety or soothe depression. There's even scientific evidence to support these therapies: a horse's heart beats much slower than a human's and when we're in proximity, our heart rates synchronize—a phenomenon known as heart coupling.



Dr. Holtcamp with her 28-year-old Quarter Horse, Popeye. Popeye is known as “the horse that started it all” when referring to Dr. Holtcamp's equine therapy career.

As a result, we feel calmer, and our mind slows down. But in most cases, there's no actual therapy or mental health professional involved. It's a feel-good moment, but it ends once the interaction is over.

## Horse-Rider Connection is Key to PIE

In a PIE session, veterans actually ride the horse as it's led by a handler (no previous riding experience is needed), while a licensed mental health therapist walks alongside. The therapist guides the patient through a psychotherapy session in which they directly address trauma and emotional issues and examine the patient's assumptions and beliefs about themselves, their history and their addiction.

While the therapist listens, they're also watching the horse for clues that provide unmistakable insight into the patient's state of mind and stress level, regardless of whether they actually verbalize it—and even if they deny it. The horse can sense and will react to their emotional state.

For example, when someone feels vulnerable recounting a traumatic situation, they will instinctively move toward a fetal position and lean forward to cover and protect their vital organs. On the horse, this forward lean signals the horse to walk faster, which the PIE therapist can observe as a trauma response. Similarly, if the therapist touches on a difficult subject, the person might stiffen their legs, causing



Master of Science Student Emma Farnlacher and Dr. Holtcamp. Farnlacher is currently conducting neurotransmitter research from data collected at Oxford Treatment Center in 2022 to identify what exactly is being signaled in the brain when engaging in PIE sessions. Dr. Holtcamp runs the research program, and Farnlacher analyzes and writes up the data for future publication.

them to sit back in the saddle, which signals the horse to stop.

Sometimes sessions involve moments of tension, resistance or even anger, and the horse also tenses up. But once the individual relaxes, the horse snorts, releasing the pent-up pressure of the interaction. As a patient moves toward acceptance, the horse will begin to lick its lips and chew on nothing—the same way it would signal acceptance when learning a new task or training tactic. If an individual feels emotionally off balance or is struggling to make sense of a situation during therapy, they might lean to one side, causing the horse to bring its hips around to counteract the weight shift and may even walk in a circle.

### A Window into Reality

Veterans often repress their feelings. They're conditioned

that emotions are a sign of weakness, and certainly a liability on the battlefield.

But on the horse, there's no hiding it, which is why PIE is so helpful for veterans. As the therapist asks pointed questions, they get authentic feedback from the horse and can nudge the patient to become more honest and willing to open up. Veterans in the program become more introspective, self-aware and gain a much clearer perspective of their mental health. One gentleman who claimed to have a "wonderful" childhood opened up and began describing how it wasn't so wonderful after all. Despite insisting things were great growing up, he clearly displayed a trauma response when talking about his upbringing, and finally admitted he'd never told anyone about his childhood

experiences. The breakthrough was pivotal in his recovery.

Another veteran had an inflated sense of his own well-being, and often said, "I'm good," when asked how he was doing, claiming that he was getting better every day. But his behavior on the horse told a different story and, through PIE, he was able to realign his view of himself and recognize he still had work to do. That kept him from leaving treatment too early and risking a relapse.

PIE therapy offers veterans a way to break through the trauma and emotional blockades that have kept them mired in PTSD and addiction and prevented them from fully enjoying life after deployment. It facilitates healing, even for those who have felt broken beyond repair, allowing them to move forward with a sober and satisfying civilian life.

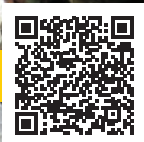


COURTESY OF DR. HOLT CAMP

*Dr. Katie Holtcamp has cultivated a diverse and intentional knowledge base for psychotherapy incorporating equine through academic and professional achievement within the horse and human components equally. Currently, Dr. Holtcamp maintains a robust research program between American Addiction Centers and Mississippi State University's Animal and Dairy Science Department, evaluating physiological interactions between horse and human in the therapeutic environment.*

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# The safest way to heal your brain, naturally!

By Edward F. Fogarty, MD

**A** brief bio for Dr. Fogarty: After graduating from the University of Chicago, Fogarty received his medical degree from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and completed radiology residency at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. As Chair of Radiology at the University of North Dakota, he advanced multiple innovations in clinical imaging and medical education. Fogarty's neuroimaging collaboration with Professor of Emergency Medicine Paul Harch, MD, at Louisiana State University has validated hyperbaric medicine protocols for the reversal of subacute and chronic neurological injury, including dementia, PTSD/TBI in blast-injured veterans and pediatric near-drowning events. In 2020, Dr. Fogarty received a Federal CARES ACT Grant to implement countermeasures against COVID-19 based on the work of Harvard Alumnus Albert Crum, MD, published in the journal, *Antiviral Research*. Search "Hyperbaric Eden" or "Veterans Harch Fogarty" for an eagle-eye view of Fogarty's innovative discernment of how the brain repairs itself faster than the scientific and medical communities have ever understood. Dr. Fogarty is a leading translational medicine specialist taking concepts from various areas of medicine as far apart as the fields of Hyperbarics, Radiology and Psychiatry might be, with paradigm-shifting integration into primarily rural jurisdictions.

**What if I told you our great nation has a simple, all-natural way to improve our mental health and cell health for less than the cost of a daily latte?** Well, it's true—unfortunately, the message keeps getting drowned out by expensive and frequently dangerous interventions. Our federal government has even approved this simple all-natural approach for the war on COVID, which we are all civilian- or service-connected veterans of in the daily fight for our physical, mental and economic health. This simple, all-natural approach to PTSD, TBI, acute concussion, acute COVID or Long COVID has been in the shadows of a small network of academic, frontline and Great Plains physicians for four years now.

**What is this incredible elixir of mental performance enhancement?** It is the trinity of amino acids brought together by one of the most important psychiatrists in the history of American medicine, Albert B. Crum, MD. He has been a medical advisor to world leaders for 60 years, and he's a genius of molecular biology who served our nation and the military ranks as a young physician in the late 1950s. His product is right next to these words, and I happen to be our nation's foremost innovator in the use of this powerful message to our cells that translates into ourselves, achieving peak molecular healing performance.

Check out [TheBestImmuneSupport.com](http://TheBestImmuneSupport.com) for all the science behind this molecular miracle, which I like to call "vitamin G." For over 100 years, the medical and scientific communities have missed this "vitamin play of all time" in the lineup of all we know about our body's fastest self-repair mechanisms.

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Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) in our service personnel. From my clinical and research career perspective, we have lost a generation, now maybe two, of brave Americans being given the wrong therapies for service-connected injuries and disability. The most effective therapeutics on a dollar cost average are in every jar of Dr. Crum's molecular recipe for stress relief combined with Hyperbaric therapy of any level. My virtual fellowship with the great academic physicians Dr. Harch and Dr. Crum is the "think tank" where I developed the recipe for the most powerful agency of neurological healing developed thus far. Copious use of ProImmune Immune Formulation 200 can literally save our nation billions of dollars, and we can no longer afford to ignore this message in a bottle, accelerating our God-given, self-healing mechanisms. Life as we know it is actually a glutathione depleting exercise, and the enemy weapons of our internal war theater environment are viruses, trauma and metals from burn pits. Time to recover with [TheBestImmuneSupport.com](http://TheBestImmuneSupport.com).

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# Grey Team Champions Soldier Suicide Prevention, Health & Wellness

By Kellie Speed



U.S. Army veteran Cary Reichbach training U.S. Air Force veteran Tyler Wells.

According to a recent study conducted by Duke University and the Department of Defense, over 44 veterans lose their lives to suicide each day. The impact of a veteran's sudden suicide lingers, and U.S. Army veteran Cary Reichbach knows firsthand just how difficult it can be to attend another fellow Soldier's funeral year after year.

As a result, Reichbach has dedicated his life to helping other veterans ease the burden of PTSD by founding the nonprofit, Grey Team.

Reichbach comes from a long line of service members who served in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. Following in his father's footsteps, Reichbach joined the military right after high school while trying to figure out what he wanted to do with his life.

"I knew I wasn't ready for college," he said. "At the time, the Army was running those 'Be All You Can Be' ads, and it appealed to me as a chance to see the world. I think that resonates with a lot of other service members, wanting to break free and go out on their own."

When Reichbach returned home after long combat tours overseas and made the transition from the military to civilian life, he encountered several unforeseen challenges.

"Everything is done for you in the military," he said. "You leave your parents' house and go to Uncle Sam's house. You don't really grow up, and when you finally leave the military, you're still basically that high school kid. You turn into a trained warrior, but you've never had to worry about a roof

over your head, medical bills or anything like that. It's a very difficult transition."

Reichbach noted another difficulty was having to give up the daily interaction with close friends who became his military family.

"That all disappears when you become a civilian and the transition is anything but easy," he said. "In the civilian world, you have to take care of yourself and it's daunting. So many veterans turn to drugs, alcohol or even suicide. I went through the same things, looking for the same adrenaline highs that wartime training and war provides."

Reichbach continues, "One day, I had a friend refer a fellow warrior to me who was about to jump off a six-story garage. I spoke to him and managed to convince him to step down from the ledge.

"Afterwards, I spent time talking to him and learned he was a Marine Corps veteran who had recently returned from Afghanistan, where he served as a machine gunner for his squad. During his deployment, he sustained a cumulative traumatic brain injury that forever changed his life for the worse. He couldn't concentrate, had constant headaches and could not pass his college classes. The VA wanted to treat him with pharmaceuticals," he said.

"Together, we resolved to



A U.S. Army Soldier utilizing PureWave's portable Electromagnetic Induction bed.



pursue two objectives: first, to seek alternative healing methods rather than merely masking symptoms with pharmacological drugs, which our VA providers continuously recommended but have mostly proved ineffective; and second, to create a pathway for other veterans to follow. This was the impetus for founding Grey Team,” Reichbach concludes.

Grey Team’s headquarters and one-of-a-kind wellness facility is located in Boca Raton, Florida, where they offer active duty, Reserve, National Guard and prior service members free wellness solutions. These solutions include one-on-one personal training, infrared detoxification therapy, low-level laser therapy, hyperbaric oxygen therapy and much more, all at no cost to the service member or veteran.

“Since our founding, Grey Team has become a leader in holistic health and wellness, including space-age wellness technology commonly known as biohacking,” Reichbach said. “We are recognized by the State of Florida as one of the top military suicide prevention charities, with a 100% success rate. We have served over 820 current and prior service members from all over the United States and have never lost a veteran to suicide.”

He continues, “Due to our overwhelming success, the Department of Defense, Florida Army National Guard and several universities consult with us for best wellness practices [as well as] research and development strategies.”

Grey Team is the only privately-funded program proven to bring warriors back emotionally, mentally and physically from battle, according to Reichbach. Through the generous donations of private citizens, corporations, foundations and grants, Grey Team can continue to offer these therapeutic services to veterans and active-duty service members at no cost.



U.S. Air Force veteran Maddy Mollach at the Veterans Day parade in West Palm Beach, Florida.



U.S. Army veteran and Grey Team Founder Cary Reichbach.



Lt. Col. Allen West speaking at the Grey Team’s 3rd annual ‘They Are Not Bulletproof’ Gala.

“Because we are not government-supported, we host two of America’s most popular galas to generate the revenue needed for our life-saving mission,” Reichbach said. “Our next event, the America First Gala, will be held on Dec. 12, 2024, at Mar-a-Lago, followed by our signature event, the ‘They Are Not Bulletproof’ Gala, on April

5, 2025.

“These events are a labor of love and they always sell out quickly, with only 350 tickets available. They are very patriotic occasions, featuring active-duty Soldiers, Generals and a prestigious guest list, including VIPs like Lt. Col. Allen West, Major General Malcolm B. Frost, K. T. McFarland and many others.”

You can support Grey Team by visiting their website at [greyteam.org](http://greyteam.org) and donating or by purchasing tickets and/or sponsoring their galas: America First Gala at [americafirstgala.com](http://americafirstgala.com) and ‘They Are Not Bulletproof’ Gala at [theyarenobulletproof.com](http://theyarenobulletproof.com).

# Spotlight on Student Service: Veterans Legal Institute Trains Law Students to Serve Veterans

By Katie Binkley, Esq. | Deputy Executive Director, Veterans Legal Institute

For soon-to-be attorneys, internships are a must for gaining real-world experience. Throughout the three years of law school, students cut their teeth at law firms, learning how to translate what they learn in the classroom into legal skills. At Veterans Legal Institute (VLI)—a nonprofit law firm exclusively serving disabled, homeless and elderly veterans—law clerk support is key to meeting the legal needs of the veteran community.

This year, nine law students from law schools across California and beyond joined the VLI team full-time for eight weeks. It speaks to the character of each of these students that they chose to dedicate their summers to the service of Southern California veterans.

“As a child of a veteran who served in the United States Air Force for nearly 25 years, I was eager to jump at the opportunity to give back to those who have sacrificed so much for their country, as my father did. I felt I could offer a unique perspective to the Veterans Legal Institute due to the experiences my family and I had while my father served our country for so many years. I have a deep understanding and appreciation for the U.S. military and feel honored to assist the veteran community with their legal needs,” said Erica Sorenson, rising 2L at Western State College of Law.

VLI provides pro bono legal services to veterans in the areas of family law, eviction defense, discharge upgrades, estate planning and veterans’ benefits, amongst others. The dedicated team of attorneys works tirelessly to provide veterans access to the justice they fought for. In



American Legion Post 291 in Newport Beach teaching “Military 101” to VLI volunteers.

PHOTO BY FRANCES BUSHNELL

2023 alone, VLI secured over \$2.9 million in compensation for disabled veterans. As a nonprofit organization, no veteran ever received a bill for the services they received. Many at VLI are affiliated with the military in some way, whether they served personally or are a military family member.

“My time in the military instilled in me the power and value of teamwork and volunteering at VLI allows me to continue collaborating with like-minded individuals dedicated to the common cause of helping veterans land on their feet. Together, we form a cohesive team committed to advocating for the rights and well-being of my fellow veterans and by pooling our skills and resources, we can make a meaningful difference in their lives. Separating from the military was one of the most isolating and challenging experiences of my life, and anything I can do to aid other

service members in that transition feels like something I need to be a part of,” said Jonathan Barone, rising 3L at Chapman University, Fowler School of Law.

Student law clerks work directly with veteran clients to help provide access to the justice system. “The legal system is not easy to understand and oftentimes intentionally difficult to access. I wanted to help people in my community who do not have access to legal aid. Veterans often face enormous difficulties with little support after service and being able to offer help in any way is an important accomplishment to do this summer,” said June Yoo, rising 2L at Chapman University, Fowler School of Law.

For students Jennifer Fazio of Western College of Law and Jack Noguera of Cornell Law School, joining the fight at VLI was about honoring those who served. “Veterans sacrifice in many ways to secure American

freedom. I chose to work at VLI this summer to give back to those who gave so much for me and my freedom,” said Fazio.

“I want to give back to those who have served our country, ensuring they receive the support and justice they deserve and yet often do not receive. Through VLI, I can make a tangible difference in their lives and honor their sacrifices,” said Noguera.

VLI also hosts internships for non-legal students, including high school, undergraduate and paralegal students. Attorneys can take on a case for a veteran pro bono or volunteer at a legal clinic at the Long Beach VA Hospital. Volunteers can also help plan and support the annual Lawyers for Warriors fundraiser, which is celebrating VLI’s tenth anniversary this year.

If you want to join the fight for justice for veterans, visit [VetsLegal.org](http://VetsLegal.org) to learn more about getting involved.

# LAWYERS FOR WARRIORS THE DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY

An evening of dinner and dancing



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LAW FIRM OF THE YEAR  
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VETERAN ADVOCATES OF THE YEAR  
SAHAR HANNA  
SILVANA SARKIS  
HEIDI PLUMMER  
VIVIEN HYMAN

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TOM BOSCAMPT

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# African Lion 2024: Uniting Countries for a Better Tomorrow

By Capt. Eric Streeter and Philip Regina

Each year, U.S. Army Soldiers and U.S. Marines team up with military allies in other countries for the African Lion (AL24) exercise, a two-week-long event that brings training and humanitarian efforts to Morocco, Ghana, Senegal and Tunisia.

Consisting of 8,100 participants from over 27 nations and contingents from NATO, the 20th annual event held a multitude of activities during the two-week exercise, including combined infantry tactics led by the Maryland Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 175th Infantry Regiment, a comprehensive staff exercise orchestrated by the U.S. Army's 2nd Security Force Assistance Brigade, and a medical exchange led by U.S. Marine Forces



SGT. RICKY GAVILAN

Military and civilian leadership from the Netherlands, Senegal and the U.S. pose for a photo with African Lion 2024 participants from six nations during a distinguished visitors day in Dodji, Senegal.

Reserve. The exercise also provided an opportunity for local communities to engage with the visiting forces to

help strengthen civil-military relations.

"African Lion 2024 offers an excellent training

opportunity due to its diverse terrain, challenging climate and continued potential for international collaboration," noted Capt. Luc Laudy, commander, Delta Company, 44th Armored Infantry Battalion, RLNA. "The lessons learned and relationships forged here will undoubtedly contribute to regional stability and strengthen our preparedness for future challenges."

In addition to the tactical and strategic benefits, AL24 fostered a spirit of camaraderie, mutual respect and understanding amongst the troops through the combined training sessions, cultural exchanges, shared experiences and participation in humanitarian efforts.

In one of these events, a civil affairs team from the U.S. Southern European Task Force, Africa, joined civil affairs personnel from the 4th Civil Affairs Group, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, in partnership with the Ghana Armed Forces



ARMY RESERVE/SGT. 1ST CLASS NICHOLAS J. DE LA PEÑA

Armed Forces of Senegal physicians suture a simulated deep laceration with Army Reserve Lt. Col. Dawn Coleman, general surgeon, 933rd Forward Resuscitative Surgical Detachment, during a medical training exercise in Dodji, Senegal.

for a medical civil action program in the remote town of Damongo, Ghana.

The medical civil action program (MEDCAP) is part of AL24, marking the 20th anniversary of U.S. Africa Command's largest, annual, combined military exercise focused on enhancing readiness with African partner nations. With over 8,100 participants from 27 countries, the massive exercise integrates contingency operations and humanitarian assistance.

Leading the effort was U.S. Army Maj. Jennifer Stachura, civil affairs team leader, 437th Civil Affairs Battalion, 354th Civil Affairs Brigade, 352nd Civil Affairs Command. Stachura's team partnered with Ghana's military to deliver desperately needed health care. At Saint Anne's Hospital, the local clinic in Damongo, Ghana, the joint team provided consultations, screenings, treatments and education on hygiene and healthy practices.

"Our mission strengthened the well-being of an underserved community," Stachura said. "Combining our expertise with Ghana's forces allowed us to make a lasting impact...a privilege to use my nursing training for this humanitarian service."

"Working alongside the



SGT. RICKY GAVILAN

Army Sgt. Michel Kamadajeu, 300th Military Intelligence, Utah National Guard, hands out water to Senegalese children and families following an African Lion 2024 culminating event with the Armed Forces of Senegal and the Royal Netherlands Army in Dodji, Senegal.

Ghana Armed Forces and our Army counterparts has been an incredible experience," U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Michael Aniton, detachment commander, 4th Civil Affairs Group, additionally added. "The cooperation and shared commitment to improving lives have been truly inspiring."

As AL24 concluded, the participants looked ahead with

a renewed sense of purpose and strengthened resolve. The bonds formed, and the skills honed during this exercise will continue to influence operations and partnerships in the future. The success of AL24 is a testament to the enduring cooperation and shared vision of the participating nations, paving the way for continued collaboration, security and

peace in the region.

"The exercise was a resounding success," said Armed Forces of Senegal Col. Theodore Adrien SARR, battalion commander, 3rd Infantry Battalion. "We've enhanced interoperability and cemented our role as leaders of strategic importance in the region."

Source: U.S. Army



U.S. ARMY RESERVE/SGT. CAITLINN BELCHER

Army Maj. Elizabeth Contreras, physician assistant, 352nd Civil Affairs Command, consults with a translator from the Ghana Navy and a patient during the MEDCAP event as part of African Lion 2024 in Damongo, Ghana.



U.S. ARMY RESERVE/SGT. CAITLINN BELCHER

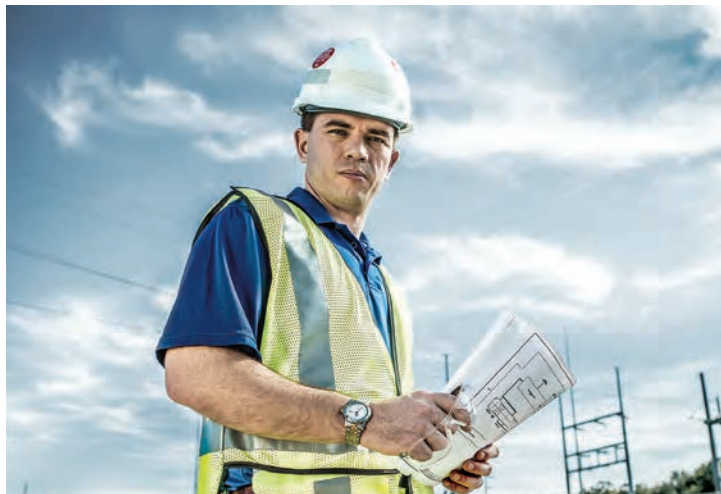
Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. John Hirnyk, civil affairs team chief, 4th Civil Affairs Group, Force Headquarters Group, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Reserve, high-fives elementary students before they receive public health supplies during a MEDCAP event held as part of African Lion 2024.

# A DECADE OF GROWTH

**A Marine veteran launched his civilian career through one of DAV's first job fairs. Now he's his own boss.**

Elizabeth DePompei

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*Marine Corps veteran Sam Johnson said a DAV job fair 10 years ago helped launch his civilian career and ultimately led to his success as an entrepreneur.*

Marine veteran Sam Johnson was commissioned as a second lieutenant in field artillery a month before 9/11, deploying to Iraq, Kuwait and North Africa. Over the course of a decade on active duty, he lost six Marines, one soldier and, among other physical sacrifices, he experienced permanent hearing loss.

Approaching his 10-year mark, Johnson also had a young family to consider. For the majority of his two sons' lives, he had been away from home.

"And then, unfortunately, my dad was also diagnosed with terminal cancer, and I knew I didn't have a lot of time left with him," Johnson said.

It was time to transition. Knowing he wanted to make North Carolina their new home, the next step for Johnson was finding a job that would support the family during such a pivotal time.

So, in 2014, Johnson entered the civilian job market. After researching opportunities, he learned about a DAV job fair in Charlotte and signed up. It was the same year DAV launched its National Employment Program.

As a result of that job fair, Johnson accepted a project management position with Duke Energy. It was a role Johnson could be challenged by and proud of.

Johnson was soon asked to lead Duke's employee resource group for veterans, an opportunity that allowed him to serve other veterans.

"I would do anything for my fellow veterans, anything to make sure that they receive what they needed to receive," he said.

Through the employee resource group, Johnson learned more about organizations serving veterans.

"And during that time [I] got to see DAV in just another light of what they do at the national level, with especially their lobbying on Capitol Hill," he said. "And [to] see the impact that DAV had on things like the burn pit registry, Caregiver Act, you know, so many things at that level."

Johnson spent more than three fulfilling years at Duke Energy before moving on to the next opportunity, ultimately leading him to where he is today.

Johnson now owns and runs a construction business focused primarily on residential construction and remodeling.

Johnson's decision to leave active duty—he remains in the reserves—is validated every time he gets to sit down and have dinner with his family. His father died about a year after he left active duty. That's precious time Johnson never would have been able to get back.

As Johnson's post-service career grew, so too did the DAV National Employment Program. Since 2014, the program has held over 1,000 job fairs resulting in more than 180,000 job offers. DAV also launched its Patriot Employer Program to recognize those employers dedicated to hiring, retaining and supporting veterans in the workplace. And most recently, DAV introduced Patriot Boot Camp, an entrepreneurship program for founders in the veteran and military community.

"Helping veterans and their families find their next career remains a top priority, and our organization only continues to build upon that mission," said National Employment Director Ryan Burgos. "By offering comprehensive support and opportunities, DAV is able to set veterans up for success for many years to come."

"I had a pretty interesting track from my first corporate job to where I'm at now," Johnson said, "but it wouldn't have been possible without the support that I received from DAV."

**To get help or learn more about how DAV helps veterans, visit [DAV.org](http://DAV.org).**



A man with a beard and a blue polo shirt is winking and smiling in a school hallway. He has his arms crossed. The background is a blurred school hallway with other people.

I AM A VETERAN.

# MY VICTORY IS BEING THERE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

After being hit by sniper fire while serving in Afghanistan, Adam Alexander was given a five percent chance to live. Today, he visits classrooms and talks to kids about dealing with life's struggles. He's also a proud new dad! DAV helps veterans like Adam live their best lives, find victories, and get the benefits they've earned. DAV helps more than a million veterans each year in life-changing ways. **Support more Victories for Veterans®** [GO TO DAV.ORG.](https://www.dav.org)

**DAV**<sup>®</sup>  
KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO  
AMERICA'S VETERANS

# Veteran Triumph: Finding Hope and Healing at the Wheelchair Games

By Mike Richman

Roy Wilkins was a football and basketball star at his North Carolina high school. He competed in the same two sports at Clemson University, a big-time Division I program in South Carolina. Playing defensive back, he contributed to Clemson's 1981 football team that finished 12-0 and won the national championship.

Then, in an instant, Wilkins lost his athletic superiority—or so he thought. Serving as a command sergeant major in the Army's special forces, Wilkins was riding in an armored vehicle that went over a roadside bomb in Afghanistan in November 2004.

Two months later, he emerged from a coma with his right leg amputated above the knee.

"The first thought that went through my mind is that I'm half a person and that all of my skills are gone," Wilkins said. "You feel like you've left society. You can't go out and do what you used to do with your spouse and family. Your self-esteem goes down."

## Finding meaning

"A whole lot of vets, when something like that happens to them, they want to give up," Wilkins added. "But I had to fight because God gives you a way of accomplishing things and keeps you pushing. God shows you how to overcome your fears because he puts [everything] right in front of you. That's why these games mean so much to me because I know how to keep pushing."



Wilkins has competed at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games over 13 times and won medals in weightlifting, bench pressing, basketball and more.

## Vietnam

Wilkins is not only a post-9/11 veteran. Drafted into the

Army at age 17, he went to Vietnam toward the end of the war in 1973 and performed what he called "cleanup duty" in Saigon.

Following the war, he remained in the Army Reserve. In 2003, he was stationed at Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Atlanta when word came that

special forces needed to report to Fort Bragg in North Carolina and prepare for deployment. He took part in combat operations in Iraq before transitioning to the Afghan city of Kandahar.

After being seriously wounded, Wilkins was treated at Ramstein Air Base in Germany and Walter Reed





National Military Medical Center in Maryland before making his way to the VA medical center in Salisbury, North Carolina. There, staff members learned of his athletic interests and told him about a wheelchair basketball team in nearby Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

### Practice makes perfect

"I went up there and practiced," Wilkins said of his basketball start. "I got in the chair. The first time I touched the ball, everything went haywire. I didn't know how to roll the chair or maneuver around the rim or anything like that. Then I got good at it. It took me about a year."

"I got in the chair. The first time I touched the ball, everything went haywire... Then I got good at it."

Through the Salisbury VA, Wilkins also learned of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. He enjoys the sense of friendship and fellowship with other disabled veterans that the games foster. He also participates in PGA Hope (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere), which introduces golf to veterans with disabilities to enhance their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being.

At age 66, Wilkins currently lives in Clemmons, North Carolina.

"Everything is good," he said. "I'm proud of what I accomplished this year at the wheelchair games."

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

# Paralympic Paradox: Superstar Play, Unequal Playing Field

By John Register

It's that time again. Yes, and I can't believe four years have passed. Just a few weeks after the Olympics, 4,200 athletes from 182 nations will walk and roll down the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe for their opening ceremony.

It has been said if the Olympic Games are where heroes are made, it is the Paralympic Games where heroes come to compete.

## Origin of the Paralympic Games

The Paralympic Games, derived from the Greek root “para,” meaning “parallel” or “next to,” are parallel games to the Olympics. They are primarily for athletes living with a physical disability or visual impairment, though there are a few events for intellectual disability.

The first Games in 1960 were held in Rome. They grew out of wheelchair basketball for British World War II veterans who had injured spinal cords. Sir Ludwig Guttmann, in Great Britain, is credited as the first person to organize sporting competitions to rehabilitate people with disabilities back into life. His work is legendary, and I used his philosophy to begin the Paralympic Military Sport Program for the United States Olympic Committee in 2004.

## My Paralympic Experience

I fell into this amazing Paralympic world by injury. While training for the Olympic Games in the 400m hurdles, I attacked a hurdle but landed awkwardly. The landing hyperextended my left leg and blocked the popliteal artery behind my kneecap. Seven days later, I decided to amputate my leg. Seven years later, I made two Paralympic teams, one in swimming in 1996 (Atlanta, Georgia) and the other in track and field in 2000 (Sydney, Australia). I won the Paralympic Games silver medal in Sydney, Australia.

Though I had a wonderful time, I did not know how much inequity was involved in the sport nor how much unrealized potential the Paralympic Games have—even now.

## Human Right to Sport

Article 30 of the United Nations



Competing in the long jump in Sydney, Australia, 2000.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) covers the right of people with disabilities to participate in sports, recreation, leisure and cultural life with equal access, both as participants and spectators. Athletes competing in the Paralympic Games set before the world a challenge to the stereotypes and labels that have been associated with people with disability.

Despite the way their body may function, athletes compete with skill, tactics and poise. The mindset to find a competitive advantage pushes athletes to imagine better equipment to assist them in competition. We saw Monster Mike Schultz build an artificial “moto knee” to help him snowboard as an above-knee amputee. He now sells them to his competitors. We even saw BMW design a racing chair made of carbon fiber for U.S. athletes. Yet, despite all



John Register with his silver medal at the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

## JR's Picks for Paris, 2024

Here are three athletes I have my eye on for Paris:

### Ezra Frech (USA)

From the United States comes the phenomenal Ezra Frech. Frech has made a seamless transition to senior competition, setting a new men's high jump T63 world record of 1.95m on his way to winning gold at the Paris 2023 World Championships.

### Fleur Jong (Netherlands)

Fleur Jong is a medal favorite in both track and field. She set world records in the women's 100m T62 and long jump T62 in 2023. She returns to Paris for the Games as the reigning Paralympic champion in the women's long jump T64.

### Patrúcio Ferreira (Brazil)

Patrúcio Ferreira is the reigning 100m dash champ for T47 at 10.37. And, if there is one thing you never do, it's discount the reigning champion.

these advances, the human perception of inspiration continues to drag the sport from prominence.

## Inspiration and Superhuman

Many people who watch the Paralympic Games believe the athletes to be inspirational or superhuman. There is nothing superhuman about the athletes. Each one has put in the work to represent their country. Their success is a testament to that training, just as a LeBron James dunk isn't so much about inspiration as perspiration.

We must expand our expectations for what is possible when we are confronted with what we don't believe we could achieve if we were in their situation. Exposure to the Games should expand our expectations of what else is possible. However, despite the remarkable

advancements in accessibility, the job market remains eerily closed to this group of high performers.

The Americans with Disabilities Act saw the advancement of accessible physical structures and technology. However, though the employment numbers for people with disabilities saw record gains post-pandemic, disabled workers still experience an unemployment rate twice as high as that of workers without a disability. It has now been proven by Accenture's 2018 report entitled, *The Disability Advantage*, companies who hire, retain and promote people with disabilities outperform their competitors 2-1 for shareholder returns.

## Marketing Athletes Beyond Inspiration

Seven years ago, France won the bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games; yet, only 100 days before the Paralympic Games, only 300,000 public tickets have been sold. A new ad campaign featuring prominent athletes is trying to boost interest, but this campaign should have begun seven years ago. To be fair, in 2012, London sold about 40% of its tickets after the Olympic Games Closing Ceremony.

This is such a missed opportunity because fans can interact with para-athletes on a level that transcends sports. It is not uncommon to see a person with a disability in the stands ask a Paralympic athlete how they navigate the world with a disability that is like their own.

Corporations also have a greater ability to market the Paralympic athlete with major companies like Toyota, Deloitte, Coca-Cola, Visa, Bridgestone, Accor and Panasonic looking to see how they can cash in on increasing brand relevance.

But it is not the inspiration that is selling; it is the perceived overcoming of adversity and succeeding despite the obstacles. However, I have long stated that Paralympians and people with disabilities have not overcome anything except the limitations placed on the community by others outside the community. What we overcome is the negative mindset of others who believe we are less than capable. If the Organizing Committee markets the Paralympic Games effectively, they stand poised to make double what it made with the Olympic Games.

## Accessibility

Paris is a beautiful city with so much rich history and nostalgia. However, having visited the city at least seven times—the last being July of 2023—it is also very

inaccessible, especially for people using wheelchairs for mobility.

I hope the Paris Organizing Committee for the Paralympic Games did not miss a great opportunity to illuminate the City of Light by demonstrating they can be a city for all.

## Conclusion

As athletes from around the world gather in Paris at the Paralympic Games, they not only showcase their incredible skills but also challenge and transform global perceptions of disability. This event is an opportunity for host cities like Paris to demonstrate a real commitment to inclusivity, accessibility and equality, which can drive broader social and economic benefits.



COURTESY OF JOHN REGISTER

*John Register is a two-time two-sport Paralympian and silver medalist. As a professional speaker, he works with Fortune 500 companies to help them overcome adversity by amputating fear and making courageous commitments to win medals in their lives.*

## Understanding Classification: Track and Jump (prefix T for track)

Discipline: Running and Jumping (20 classes)

### Sport Classes (impairment types):

- T11-13 (Vision impairment)
- T20 (Intellectual impairment)
- T35-38 (Coordination impairments: hypertononia, ataxia and athetosis)
- T40-41 (Short stature)
- T42-44 (Lower limb competing without prosthesis affected by limb deficiency, leg length difference, impaired muscle power or impaired passive range of movement)
- T45-47 (Upper limb/s affected by limb deficiency, impaired muscle power or impaired passive range of movement)
- T61-64 (Lower limb/s competing with prosthesis affected by limb deficiency and leg length difference)

For more information, visit [paralympic.org/athletics/classification](http://paralympic.org/athletics/classification).

# Meet the Air Force's Athletes of the Year

Each year, two athletes are chosen as the Department of the Air Force's (DAF's) Athletes of the Year to support veterans in work outside their service, foster camaraderie and promote health and wellness. One male and one female athlete are chosen and honored for the previous year. This year, the 2023 Athlete of the Year award was bestowed upon Space Systems Command handball player Capt. Andrew Donlin and Air Mobility Command triathlete 1st Lt. Rose Smith.

"It was extremely difficult choosing our DAF-level winners," Maj. Tiffany Lewis, DAF Fitness and Sports Division Chief at the Air Force Services Center, said in a news release. "But I'm confident we got it right with Capt. Donlin and Lt. Smith. Although all of the packages we received were incredibly strong, their accomplishments represented the athletic community and DAF in a way few others can."

## Capt. Andrew Donlin

Donlin has always had two passions: the Air Force and sports. After attending the United States Air Force Academy and receiving his assignment with the Space and Missile Systems Center, Donlin was simultaneously rising in the ranks of professional handball. Though he's been playing at a high level since his early college days, 2023 proved to be Donlin's most successful year yet.

During the award period, Donlin led the Men's USA National Handball Team to their first and second wins in the



HANDBALL TODAY/ U.S. SPACE FORCE

Capt. Andrew Donlin competes in an exhibition handball match in Trondheim, Sweden, in January 2023.

International Handball Federation Men's World Championships. He also led his club team, the Cal Heat, to a gold medal in the California Cup and was selected as the tournament's most valuable player.

Additionally, the captain led Team USA in the Pan American Games Qualifier in Colorado Springs, Colorado, helping the team earn a spot in the 2023 Pan American Games, a primary qualifying competition

for the Summer Olympics. He was also the leading scorer in both the qualifier and games, with a total of 21 goals.

With eight goals, Donlin continued as the primary scorer at the National

Championship game, leading his Cal Heat team to first place out of 20 teams at the 2023 USA Handball National Championship. Because of the win, his team represented the U.S. at the North American and Caribbean Club Championships, where they earned gold, and he was selected for the All-Tournament Team.

Not only was Donlin honored as the 2023 Male Athlete of the Year, but he earned a spot as one of the two male athletes to be recognized in the International Handball Federation's Beach Handball Showcase at the Paris Olympic Games.

"I'm thankful for everyone who has supported me," Donlin stated of his success, "and feel extremely blessed to get to wear the two best uniforms in the world and represent our great country and what it stands for on and off the court."

## 1st Lt. Rose Smith

Smith, who joined the Air Force Reserve in 2015 as an enlisted Airman, said she always wanted to be an officer. After learning about health care administration officers, she started her bachelor's degree program. Smith began triathlon training two years before her first race in 2021. But when she joined the service, she found another passion: triathlete racing.

2023 proved to be a year of many successes for Smith, who frequently competes in some of the most prestigious triathlete competitions. She finished first in her age group and 93rd overall at the Rock Hall Triathlon in Maryland, earning her a spot in the 2023/2024 USA Triathlon National Championships. Over the summer, she was rated 165th among 4,532 female triathletes. She earned Bronze All-World Athlete status in her age group after finishing



U.S. AIR FORCE/MAURICIO CAMPINO

35 out of 56 in the Ironman 70.3 Musselman. She became a qualifier a few months later for the 2024 Ironman World Championships.

She rounded out the award period with October's Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., where she finished 5,348 in a field of more than 230,000. Her success led Smith to have the pick of the litter, receiving

five different triathlon club offers after her performance at the Waterman's Triathlon Festival Relay. She ultimately decided to join Team Zoot, the largest triathlon organization in the United States.

"Waiting for what you want is worth it, but also don't wait for one dream to finish to start a new one," Smith said in a Space Force news release.

"I wouldn't be where I am without the encouragement from many people in my life, but I also remember there were times [when] people doubted my path because their perception of what was possible was limited. The human body is capable of so many incredible things if given the opportunity."

Source: Debbie Aragon, U.S. Space Force

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SPORTS THERAPY PROGRAMS

MORALE AND WELFARE PROGRAMS

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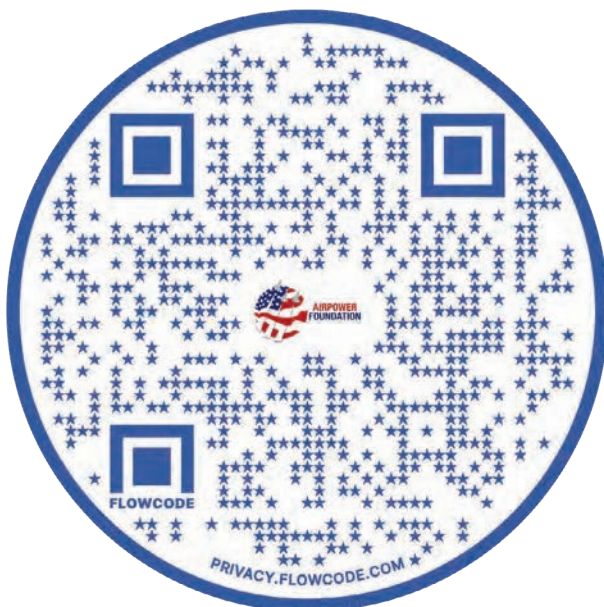
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“We had a request to help a Navy Reservist, she was getting evicted from her apartment because she was behind on her rent due to both of her accounts being hacked in May. She needed immediate help or be kicked out of her apartment. I contacted the Airpower Foundation and explained what was happening, submitted an emergency grant request and the board approved a grant. Without the Airpower Foundation this Navy Reservist might have been out on the streets.”



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# The VA Launches the Equity Action Plan

In an effort to bring a better health care system to all, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched the Equity Action Plan to mark its commitment and promise to support all veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors—regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or geographic location, as they continue to provide world-class care and benefits.

As part of this initiative, the VA will ensure that all 19 million veterans they serve, including veterans from underserved communities, have improved service delivery and customized services at each phase of their journey. The goal is to meet every veteran where they are. It also includes creating opportunities to enhance access, outcomes and experiences while eliminating barriers to care and benefits.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough said of the new plan:

“It’s our job to provide every veteran with the world-class care and benefits they deserve, no matter who they are, what they look like, who they love, where they are from or how they identify.”

To best execute this, the VA will be taking the fiscal year 2024 to make progress through five strategies that will address systemic barriers experienced when applying for disability compensation, address difficulties in achieving equitable health care outcomes, and provide equitable access to VA care and benefits. In other words, the VA will be focusing on these five pillars to ensure

accessible and equitable health care:

## 1. BENEFITS

Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors from historically underserved demographic groups are most likely to experience systemic barriers that negatively impact them in benefit outcomes and access to VA services. Under this section, the VA strives to improve benefit outcomes for all veterans by removing barriers that underserved eligible veterans experience when seeking disability compensation.

This area will also focus on fixing the lack of authoritative information sources and aggregate data pertaining to VBA benefit utilization by socio-demographic groups, the lack of objectivity in potential areas of high risk in conjunction with disability compensation benefits and the lack of outreach, education and awareness related to disability compensation.

## 2. HEALTH

Veterans from historically underserved groups often experience difficulties receiving high-quality care and achieving optimal health outcomes. To counteract this, the VA will advance health equity by

reducing health disparities, ensuring access to high-quality care for every eligible veteran, and using equity-informed approaches to better reach underserved veterans.

To do so, the VA is committing to finding ways to increase and standardize the collection and use of equity data, improve technical assistance and resources on veterans’ social needs and expand the use of equity to guide quality improvement in all aspects at the VA.

## 3. ACCESS

Many veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors with disabilities have limited English proficiency or are in rural areas with limited access to resources and VA facilities. This pillar of the Equity Action Plan will focus on streamlining processes and increasing the availability of tools, resources and facilities.

## 4. ECONOMIC SECURITY

The VA operates a large and complex acquisition program. This inherently favors firms who already understand the program or have the resources necessary to learn it. The perceived difficulty of learning the system may be a barrier to new entrants and disadvantaged businesses with limited resources.

To achieve equity, the VA

plans to advance economic security by ensuring procurement practices reach underserved communities via increasing opportunities for Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDBs), Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSBs) and Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones). These businesses will be reached through improved outreach programs and by working directly with companies to provide opportunities for collaboration with the department.

## 5. DATA

The fifth and final pillar strives to increase evidence-based decision-making by improving the collection, quality and accessibility of demographic and related data to ensure equity in the delivery of care.

To improve data collection and ensure the VA’s process and actions are data-informed, the VA will start by tasking the Data Governance Council with more inclusive forms of surveying, implementing improved data collection methods across the administration and collaborating with stakeholders across the VA, establishing a collective veteran authoritative dataset (CVAD)—a single, validated source of shared veteran data (including demographic data) to be leveraged for analytics enterprise-wide.

For updates on the program and more policy information, visit [VA.gov/Equity](http://VA.gov/Equity).

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

“It’s our job to provide every veteran with the world-class care and benefits they deserve, no matter who they are, what they look like, who they love, where they are from or how they identify.”  
-VA Secretary Denis McDonough



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# Engineering a Difference: Student Engineers Supporting Injured Veterans

By Mark Robbins

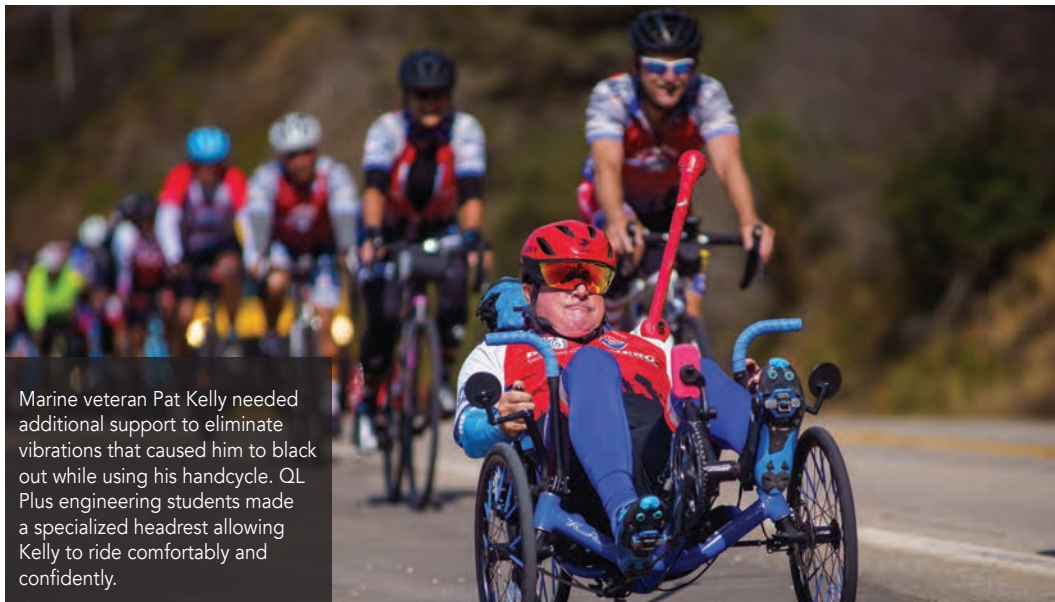
A Marine lost both hands and still wanted to ride a bicycle, but his prosthetic hands made it difficult for him to shift gears. He later received a new device that allowed him to give a command to a microphone that he was wearing, and the gears shifted up or down as needed.

A Soldier was blinded while on patrol and wanted to continue skiing after leaving the military. Instead of being tethered to a rope or having a guide yell instructions on a noisy ski slope, a special vest was made with vibrating discs controlled by a guide to let the skier know to turn, slow or stop.

A veteran who lost her leg wanted more flexibility when using her wheelchair. She asked if it could be modified to turn into a walker. Now, she has a wheelchair/walker that can be easily converted in seconds.

Each of these projects—and hundreds more—have been designed and built by college engineering students through a collaboration with the Quality of Life Plus (QL Plus) Program. QL Plus is a nonprofit organization that seeks out veterans and first responders with disabilities who want to partner with student engineers to build devices that cannot be found through the VA or from other sources.

These one-of-a-kind devices promote active lifestyles and help veterans and first responders to navigate their new everyday lives. It creates a connection to their community as an active participant.



Marine veteran Pat Kelly needed additional support to eliminate vibrations that caused him to black out while using his handcycle. QL Plus engineering students made a specialized headrest allowing Kelly to ride comfortably and confidently.

JASON WHITMAN/QL PLUS

Founded in 2009, QL Plus now works with engineering schools at 25 universities across the country. QL Plus harnesses STEM student innovation to improve the lives of injured American veterans and first responders. Bringing together the bravest and brightest helps to identify important challenges and discover new, innovative technology solutions.

Each university is assigned one or more projects, which then gets turned over to a team of 2-8 STEM students. The Challenger, which is what QL Plus calls the veteran/first responder, then meets with the students to discuss the idea, provide feedback on the design, and adjust the final product to build a truly customized one-of-a-kind, life-changing assistive device.

All of this is done at no cost to the Challenger. Meetings

are held by video calls, but if a Challenger needs to go to the campus for measurements, fittings, etc., QL Plus covers those costs.

For the university students, these projects are part of their Senior Capstone Project, which is required for graduation. They work with their faculty advisors and outside mentors to design and build a device that best fits the needs of the Challenger. But beyond their coursework fulfillment, these students are fulfilled personally by being able to work on something that genuinely makes a difference to those who have served our nation.

There were more than 60 projects that QL Plus student teams worked on during this past academic year. In addition, the first National Design Competition was hosted by QL Plus, and eight student teams participated. Their goal was

to create a cooling socket that would be more comfortable for those with prosthetic legs. The top three schools in the competition were George Mason University (first place), University of Dayton (second place) and University of South Florida (third place).

More information on QL Plus can be found at [qlplus.org](http://qlplus.org). Click on Get Involved if you would like to apply to be a Challenger or Mentor. You can reach out to QL Plus at [info@qlplus.org](mailto:info@qlplus.org).



COURTESY OF QL PLUS

Mark Robbins is the executive director of the Quality of Life Plus Program. He has worked with veteran-supporting organizations since 2008.



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# Military Made: Three Veteran Astronauts Going to Space

After learning Russian and Robotics, plus training in jets and spacesuits over the past two years, NASA's newest astronauts are ready to take a giant leap forward in space exploration.

Chosen from a pool of more than 12,000 applicants, eight of the 10 Americans from NASA's Class of 2024 happen to be current or former service members. Among those who successfully made it through the program are Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jessica Wittner, retired Marine Corps Maj. Luke Delaney and Coast Guard Cmdr. Andre Douglas.

## Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jessica Wittner

Wittner is no stranger to reaching heights that no one has ever been before. With two aerospace engineering degrees under her belt, she has spent over 10 years as a fighter pilot for the Navy. Wittner was commissioned as a naval officer through an enlisted-to-officer commissioning program and has served operationally flying F/A-18s with VFA-34 in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and VFA-151 in Lemoore, California.

NASA selected her to join the 2021 Astronaut Candidate Class, which reported for duty in 2022. Wittner credited the military for helping her get through astronaut training, citing:

"[Fighter pilot training] really teaches you to problem solve time-critical issues and then apply those in real-time. That training that I got through the Navy has really helped me here...being able to think critically through the problem and then make a time-critical



KIM SHIFFLETT, NASA

Astronauts and astronaut candidates from NASA and the Canadian Space Agency in front of NASA's Artemis I Space Launch System and Orion spacecraft at the Kennedy Space Center, Florida, Aug. 28, 2022.

decision on what you should do."

While waiting for her big assignment, Wittner is working on rotation on one of the many technological projects at NASA.

"We're in the development and design phases of a lot of different things," Wittner remarked of her current role. "There's so much going on in the space industry and NASA right now—all the Artemis developments, getting equipment and development programs set up for equipment going to the moon and a bunch of commercial entities coming online that we're working with. There's endless opportunities."

## Retired Marine Corps Maj. Luke Delaney

Delaney served with the Marine Corps from 1998 to 2020. He predominately served as a test pilot—earning his wings as a KC-130 Navigator pilot in 2008—and would go on to serve two tours in Afghanistan, executed over 400 combat sorties accruing more than 550 combat flight hours and earned degrees in mechanical and aerospace engineering.

Upon retiring in 2020, Delaney transitioned to NASA Langley as a research pilot and aerospace engineer, managing several airborne science missions. He is currently

supporting day-to-day operations for Expedition 71, which he says is very similar to his time in the Navy:

"It truly is an ultimate team sport. It's very similar to how we operate in the military—we just want to make sure that everything is aligned and synchronized appropriately for effective execution onboard."

## Coast Guard Cmdr. Andre Douglas

The youngest of the three astronauts, Douglas has earned five degrees while serving with the U.S. Coast Guard: a bachelor's in mechanical engineering, a master's in mechanical engineering,

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another master's in naval architecture and marine engineering, an additional master's degree in electrical and computer engineering and a doctorate in systems engineering. He served as a naval architect, salvage engineer, damage control assistant and officer of the deck with the Guard until he took on a position as a senior professional with the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab (APL).

As an engineer at APL, Douglas supported the fault management team during the development of the DART planetary defense mission for NASA. He also supported the systems engineering team on MEGANE, a sophisticated gamma-ray and neutron spectrometer instrument developed to support the Martian Moons eXploration (MMX) spacecraft and participated in the Lunar Surface Innovation Consortium.

Douglas is switching gears to the more team-oriented work that comes with being an astronaut:

"I'm working the pressurized rover, the lunar terrain vehicle, the new space station called Gateway and also supporting a lot of the new suit design," he said. "When we're at the lab, we're building spacecraft to do very complex missions. You're an engineer either handling software, testing, designing or building hardware. As an astronaut, we're learning how to operate vehicles. We're learning how to work together as a team, and that's a whole different mindset."

### Advice for the Next Class

While only three veterans have become astronauts in this graduating class, they will be far from the last. In a news story with the Department of Defense, the three offered their advice for going from military service member to astronaut:

"Taking that first step out the door again and knowing that



Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jessica Wittner, a NASA astronaut candidate, prepares for T-38 flight training at Ellington Field in Houston, Feb. 6, 2023.

JOSH VALCARCEL, NASA



Retired Marine Corps Maj. Luke Delaney, a NASA astronaut candidate, wears a spacesuit before underwater spacewalk training at NASA Johnson Space Center's Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory, Feb. 13, 2023.

BILL STAFFORD, NASA



NASA astronaut candidate Cmdr. Andre Douglas prepares for underwater spacewalk training at NASA Johnson Space Center's Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory, May 8, 2023.

JAMES BLAIR, NASA

you're going into the unknown can be hard," Wittner stated. "It's been a long road to get here, but I really truly believe that if you can maintain that drive and find those good mentors, that anybody can make it."

"To operate as a team and function in a different environment, you need a variety of skill sets to optimize,"

Delaney advised. "Leverage your life experience—any aptitudes for engineering, mechanical, electrical or something that demonstrates those expeditionary skills and working in austere environments. [Have] good teamwork behaviors and leadership skills."

"Be ready to talk about some of the things that you're really

proud of, because when you're excited in the interview, as you get to that stage, everything that you said and wrote down aligns, and your true character comes out," Douglas added. "You want to try to make sure you're able to grab people's attention right off the bat."

Sources: NASA, Katie Lange at DoD News

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# Your Path to Homeownership: A Veteran's Guide to VA Loan Benefits

VA home loans are designed to help service members and veterans achieve affordable homeownership, turning their aspirations into reality. Here are three key insights to help pave the way for a smooth and successful homebuying experience:

## 1. Know the Benefits of VA Loans

Understanding the benefits of VA loans is key to making informed decisions and maximizing your loan potential. VA loans offer veterans unique advantages such as no down payment requirement on home purchases, competitive interest rates, no monthly mortgage insurance premiums and more flexible credit guidelines. The lifetime entitlement feature further enhances the value, allowing veterans to use this benefit multiple times throughout their lives when purchasing homes.

## 2. How to Navigate the VA Loan Process with Confidence

Navigate the VA loan process with confidence by following these guidelines. You'll want to connect with a loan officer at a reputable mortgage lending company to initiate the process. They will help you with the Certificate of Eligibility (COE) process to confirm your eligibility for a VA loan, which is available to active-duty service members, veterans and their surviving spouses. This crucial document forms the basis of your loan application. You can request your COE online through the eBenefits section of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website or by



completing VA Form 26-1880 and mailing it.

## 3. Understand the Various Offerings and Funding Options

VA loans offer a range of options to suit veterans' diverse needs, including purchase loans, interest rate reduction refinance loans (IRRRL) and cash-out refinance loans. Each option serves a distinct purpose, whether it's buying a new home, refinancing an existing loan for a lower interest rate or accessing cash from home equity.

Familiarizing yourself with these offerings empowers you to make informed decisions

that are aligned with your homeownership goals.

## The Why Behind the Program: Support for Heroes

As a dedicated member of our nation's military, you've committed your life to serving our country with honor and sacrifice. VA home purchase loans and refinancing options stand as vital tools, making homeownership more attainable and affordable for heroes like you. These specialized benefits honor your service and can provide support on your journey to achieving homeownership.



COURTESY OF SCOTT BRIDGES

*Scott Bridges, senior managing director of the Consumer Direct Lending (CDL) division at Pennymac, has over three decades of experience. Bridges is a key driver of growth for Pennymac's loan portfolio, propelling it from \$11 million to an impressive \$30 billion. He has been featured in The Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, Money, SF Gate and various mortgage trade publications.*





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[nca.gov/intern](https://nca.gov/intern)

# VA Benefits for Disabled Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides benefits and services to meet the needs of veterans and service members. While many VA programs are designed to serve veterans, particularly disabled veterans, VA services are not limited to those who have left the military.

If you are an active-duty disabled service member and need help covering the cost of school, securing a home loan or acquiring life insurance, or require medical care for your disability, the VA can help you and your family.

## Medical Care

More than 1,300 medical centers and clinics form the core of the VA's services. In addition, the VA works with TRICARE to provide services for active-duty service members who are disabled:

- **Eligibility**—Determine your eligibility for benefits by visiting VA Health Benefits.
- **Medical Services**—For a complete listing of VA health services, go to VA Health Care.
- **Medical Care**—Contact TRICARE for service-connected injuries or illnesses. Your service branch's primary provider can refer you to the VA for treatment of combat injuries.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Care & Resources

The VA provides a range of services to support service members and veterans with PTSD. To learn more about the programs, support groups and research for helping those with PTSD, visit

the veterans post-traumatic stress disorder page of the VA website.

## Disability Compensation

The VA's tax-free disability compensation pays veterans who have service-related disabilities. The amount is based on the severity of the disability, with additional payments available if the veteran has a spouse or other dependents. You can apply for disability and find more information on your qualifying compensations at [va.gov/disability](http://va.gov/disability).

## Transition & Employment Services

The VA offers briefings on its benefits and services through the Transition Assistance Program. This outreach effort is intensified for service members leaving active duty due to a medical problem. The VA's goal is to make sure all transitioning service members fully understand the benefits and services available to them:

- **Returning Service Member Program**—If you have returned from Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation New Dawn, visit VA's Post-9/11 Transition and Case Management webpage.
- **Disabled Transition Assistance Program**—To find out about the services available to you if you have a medical disability, visit the Disabled Transition Assistance Program's website.
- **Rehabilitation & Employment Services**—To be eligible, you must have a

service-connected disability and require vocational rehabilitation. The program is also available to active-duty service members awaiting discharge because of a disability. For more information, go to the VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment web page.

## Home & Car Adaptation

Veterans and service members with specific service-connected disabilities may be eligible for grants to help them adapt homes or cars to meet their disability requirements.

The VA offers housing grants to veterans who receive compensation for certain permanent and total service-connected disabilities:

- **Specially Adapted Housing Grant**—Used to build a specially adapted home or remodel an existing home for adaptation.
- **Special Home Adaptation Grant**—Used to adapt an existing home owned by the veteran or adapt a home intended for purchase, or help a veteran buy a home already adapted.

Veterans and service members may also be eligible for home improvement and structural alteration grants. To determine what this grant will pay for, visit the Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services page of the VA website.

For veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities, the VA offers a one-time payment of up to \$11,000 toward the purchase of an automobile. The VA may also pay for adaptive equipment, repair, replacement or reinstallation of equipment.

## Life Insurance

The VA's life insurance program offers Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance to veterans with service-connected disabilities. Supplemental coverage is available at an additional cost. Service members remain covered by VA Servicemembers Group Life Insurance until they leave the military. For more information, visit the life insurance page of the VA website.

## Other Benefits

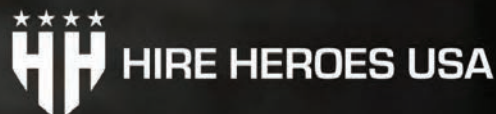
Many VA benefits and services extend to service members and veterans regardless of disability status, including the following education and home loan guaranty benefits:

- **Education**—Montgomery GI Bill, Post-9/11 GI Bill and the GI Bill cover the cost of education and certificate programs.
- **Training Programs**—Many types of training are available through the GI Bill, including undergraduate or graduate degree programs at colleges or universities.
- **Transfer of Benefits**—Under certain circumstances, you may be able to transfer your benefits to an eligible spouse or child.
- **Home Loan Guaranties**—The home loan guaranties help service members get competitive rates on home loans with little or no down payment. Find out more by visiting the home loans page of the VA website.

Source: MilitaryOneSource



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# VIB Network's Express Connect Event Spring Recap 2024

The recent VIB Network's Express Connect event in Boston/Cambridge, Massachusetts was a success, enabling veteran business owners to connect with corporations and government agencies in a fun, supportive and professional environment. The welcoming reception was met with some surprise rain, but provided a memorable experience for those on the private tour of the historic USS Constitution. The next day's event continued the excitement and furthered connections. Our keynote speaker Col. Greg Gadson inspired attendees to stay motivated even when faced with tough times. A big thank you to this year's Express Connect host Takeda Pharmaceuticals and the 'wicked smaht' Boston/Cambridge welcome we received! To watch the event recap, visit [bit.ly/4bn1dtX](https://bit.ly/4bn1dtX).



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# Women Veterans Engage 2024: Equipping, Inspiring and Connecting Women Veterans

The Women Veterans Engage conference was a resounding success, drawing in over 570 registered participants at 12 host locations across the United States and virtually. From Sacramento, California, to Detroit, Anchorage, Alaska, to Arlington, Virginia, women veterans from coast to coast united in a celebration of camaraderie, empowerment and shared experiences.

The mission of Women Veterans Engage is to equip, inspire and connect women veterans, leaving them with the tools, confidence and network to thrive in both their personal and professional lives. That's precisely what happened.

Women Veterans Engage host locations included Center For Land-Based Learning in San Francisco; Enbridge in Nashville, Tennessee; Foundation for Women Warriors in San Diego; Houston Reg Veterans CC/Grace After Fire in Houston; LA Veterans Collaborative in Los Angeles; Military Women's Memorial in Arlington, Virginia; Operation Mary Louise in Anchorage, Alaska; She Served Sheroes in Las Vegas; VA Bedford Healthcare System in Bedford, Massachusetts; Woman Veteran Strong in Detroit; Women Veterans Giving in Sacramento,

California and Women Veterans of San Antonio in San Antonio.

At each location, the atmosphere crackled with energy and enthusiasm as these remarkable individuals came together to connect, exchange stories and forge lasting bonds. Beyond merely an event, the gathering served as a powerful testament to the strength, resilience and unity of women veterans nationwide.

The conference provided a vital platform for these women to share their experiences and learn from distinguished guest speakers. Jenn Donahue, Navy veteran and founder of Dare to Rise, inspired attendees with her insights on "Becoming the Warrior: Strategies for Getting Ahead." Simonia Blassingame, Navy veteran and founder/CEO of SANE Leadership Inc., led a session on "Rediscovering Your Purpose," empowering women to navigate their post-military lives with clarity and purpose. Deborah Howell, Navy veteran and founder/CEO of Victory in Action, emphasized the importance of self-care and energy management, equipping attendees with invaluable tools to prioritize their well-being.

In addition to the enlightening sessions, attendees were treated to a special screening of a dramatic TV series in development, offering a unique perspective on the experiences of a Marine Corps veteran and mother. Presented by Kate Zena, co-creator/co-producer of the series, this exclusive screening provided a glimpse into the untold stories of women in the military, further highlighting the importance of amplifying their voices and experiences.

As the conference drew to a close, anticipation mounted for Women Veterans Engage 2025, promising another

year of empowerment, connection and celebration of the incredible women who have served their country with

distinction. Learn more about this phenomenal event at [WomenVeteransEngage.com](https://www.WomenVeteransEngage.com).



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# Iron Riders: The Ride Continues...2024

## Preserving, Promoting and Perpetuating the History of the Buffalo Soldiers

By Bobby McDonald

On June 14th, 1897, Lt. James Moss and 20 members of the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Regiment Bicycle Corps undertook an experimental endeavor to test the feasibility of using bicycles versus horses as a mode of military transportation. The 25th Infantry Regiment Bicycle Corps, also known as the Iron Riders, was part of the segregated U.S. Army units that came to be known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

This undertaking involved a challenging 41-day, 1,900-mile bicycle ride from Fort Missoula, Montana, to Saint Louis, Missouri.

This little-known story and adventure would later be considered the United States Army's greatest cycling experiment ever undertaken by men in the military—and the Buffalo Soldiers performed that experiment.

### Then and Now

In creating and preparing for the 125th anniversary of the ride, a 2024 documentary was always part of the plan. The new documentary, *Iron Riders: The Ride Continues*, highlights the 125th anniversary of the ride and captures the impact the recent Iron Riders Celebration had on the local communities they encountered in the five states (Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska and Missouri) they passed through on their epic journey.

With the precision of a military operation, the Iron Riders Celebration went off without a glitch. The planning committee, reenactors, supporters and the local communities accomplished their mission of celebrating the



A unit celebrating the Iron Riders, an all-Black U.S. Army bicycle regiment, seen here in 1897, will be riding in the 2024 Rose Parade.



COURTESY OF BOBBY McDONALD

magnificent historic ride.

Testimonials, verbal and written, along with videos and social media, reflected the vibrant expressions of gratitude, inspiration, awareness and community bonding through state parks, libraries and community engagements across the country.

### Historic Opportunities

While the celebration was geared to share historical elements, additional historic opportunities arose, including participating in the inaugural National Holiday Juneteenth observance in Missoula, Montana. The Montana Black Collective-Missoula and local, state and national officials thanked the quasiquintennial

committee for their support in initiating, designing and bringing to fruition the first citywide Juneteenth Celebration in Missoula, Montana.

When the *Smithsonian Magazine* and *Apple One* ran the Iron Rider story, both reported it as one of their top five stories for several days. The American Legion ran feature stories and sent a film crew to cover the events. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) sponsored several events along the route.

The 25th Infantry Tribute Band, which mimicked the size and instrumentation of the original band, played identical arrangements at the opening ceremonies and on Juneteenth. With detailed research and historical adherence, the events were successful beyond expectation.

The Iron Riders reenactors made history as the first bicycle group to participate in the Rose Parade, beginning with the 2023 New Year's Pasadena Rose Parade and continuing with the 2024 Rose Parade.

The reenactors were part of the famous flag-lowering



COURTESY OF BOBBY McDONALD

ceremony at Disneyland.

A permanent Iron Rider Exhibit was established at the Buffalo Soldier National Museum in Houston, Texas.

Because of the tremendous outreach and awareness of the ride, wide-ranging groups, dedicated volunteers and associations across the nation are developing events, programs and recognitions highlighting the Buffalo Soldiers 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps Iron Riders. PBS Reno has placed this documentary on their YouTube channel, which can be viewed at [youtube.com/watch?v=f3jbSIH5amA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=f3jbSIH5amA).

*Bobby McDonald is the president of the Greater Los Angeles Area Chapter 9th and 10th (horse) Cavalry Association.*

# Calendar of Events

## August

**Navy Gold Coast Conference**  
August 19-21  
San Diego, CA  
navygoldcoast.org

**DA4S West Coast Conference**  
August 26-29  
Dana Point, CA  
vibnetwork.org

**City Career Fair Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
citycareerfair.com

**Hire GI**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
hiregi.com

## September

**Commercial UAV Expo**  
September 3-5  
Las Vegas, NV  
expouav.com

**Abilities Expo**  
September 6-8  
Phoenix, AZ  
abilities.com

**PSWMSDC Supplier Diversity Business Summit**  
September 11-12  
San Diego, CA  
pswmsdc.org

**CBCF ALC Conference**  
September 11-15  
Washington, D.C.  
cbcfinc.org

**From Day One Forum**  
September 12  
Washington, D.C.  
fromdayone.co

**L'Attitude**  
September 12-15  
San Diego, CA  
lattitude.net

**Latina Expo**  
September 13-14  
Chicago, IL  
chicagolatinaexpo.com/attend

**AMIE Annual Conference**  
September 15-17  
Greensboro, NC  
amiepartnerships.org

**Utah Stem Fest**  
September 17-18  
Sandy, UT  
utahstemfest.comunidos

**CHCI Leadership Conference**  
September 17-18  
Washington, D.C.  
chci.org

**WBEC West Procurement Conference**  
September 17-19  
Las Vegas, NV  
wbec-west.com

**NBMBAA Conference**  
September 17-20  
Washington, D.C.  
nbmbaa.org

**TAPIA Conference**  
September 18-20  
San Diego, CA  
tapiaconference.cmd-it.org

**CHCI 47th Annual Conference**  
September 19  
Washington, D.C.  
chci.org

**HR Healthcare**  
September 23-24  
Boston, MA  
hrhealthcare.wbresearch.com

**ASALH Annual Conference**  
September 25-29  
Pittsburgh, PA  
asalh.org

**NACAC Conference**  
September 26-28  
Los Angeles, CA  
nacacconference.org

**ROMBA Convention**  
September 26-29  
Los Angeles, CA  
reachingoutmba.org/romba-conference

**MIC – Military Influencer Conference**  
September 29 – October 3  
Atlanta, GA  
militaryinfluencer.com

**City Career Fair Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
citycareerfair.com

**Small Business Expo**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

**From Day One Forum Virtual Event**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
fromdayone.co

**Hire GI**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
hiregi.com

## October

**AISES National Convention**  
October 3-5  
San Antonio, TX  
aises.org

**Women of Color STEM Conference**  
October 3-5  
Detroit, MI  
intouch.ccmag.com

**USHCC National Conference**  
October 6-8  
Kansas, MO  
ushcc.com

**MWC Las Vegas**  
October 8-10  
Las Vegas, NV  
mwclasvegas.com

**Grace Hopper**  
October 8-11  
Virtual & Philadelphia, PA  
ghc.anitab.org

**The Business Show 2024**  
October 9-10  
Los Angeles, CA  
thebusinessshowus.com

**MBA Veterans Career Conference & Expo**  
October 10-11  
Atlanta, GA  
mbaveterans.com

**CSAVR 2024 Fall Conference**  
October 12-18  
Seattle, WA  
csavr.org

**HACR Annual Symposium**  
October 14-16  
New York City, NY  
hacr.org

**AUSA Annual Meeting & Exposition**  
October 14-16  
Washington, D.C.  
ausa.org

**Newport Beach Film Festival**  
October 15-17  
Newport Beach, CA  
newportbeachfilmfest.com

**M Enabling Summit**  
October 15-17  
Washington, D.C.  
m-enabling.com

**Abilities Expo**  
October 18-20  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
abilities.com

**NMSDC Annual Conference & Exchange/MED Week**  
October 20-23  
Atlanta, GA  
nmsdc.org

**WITI Technology Summit Virtual Event**  
October 23-24  
summit.witi.com

**Global ERG Summit**  
October 23-25  
Charlotte, NC  
globalergsummit.com

**2024 AFWA – Women Who Count Conference**  
October 23-26  
Hilton Head Island, SC  
afwa.org

**SWE Conference**  
October 24-26  
Chicago, IL  
swe.org

**Prospanica Conference**  
October 29 – November 1  
Orlando, FL  
prospanicaconference.org

**The ARC Summer Leadership Institute**  
October 30-31  
Columbus, OH  
thearc.org

**SHPE Conference**  
October 30 – November 3  
Anaheim, CA  
shpe.org

**SACNAS Conference**  
October 31 – November 2  
Phoenix, AZ  
sacnas.org

**BBBC Conference**  
October 31 – November 2  
Arlington, VA  
bbbc.uta.edu

**City Career Fair Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
citycareerfair.com

**Small Business Expo**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

**From Day One Forum**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
fromdayone.co

## November

**HACU Annual Conference**  
November 1-3  
Aurora, CA  
hacu.net

**The Arc National Convention**  
November 1-3  
Columbus, OH  
thearc.org

**GMIS Conference**  
November 6-9  
Fort Worth, TX  
gmisconference.org



**SCAN FOR  
CURRENT  
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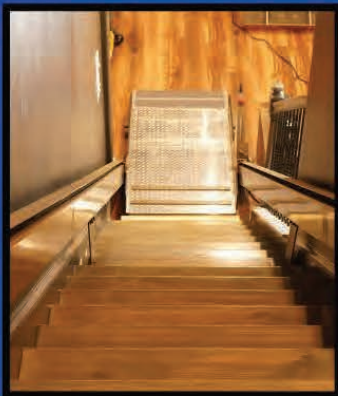
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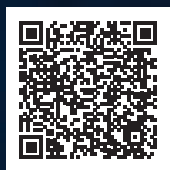
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