

## FEATURED SPEAKERS & PRESENTERS

### 2024 NASWA VETERANS CONFERENCE



#### **Lori Adams**

*Opening Ceremonies; One Tool, Many Applications: How the NLx Makes a Difference in Veterans Employment*

**Lori Adams** is a Senior Policy Director at NASWA. Her duties include coordinating activities of the NASWA Veterans Affairs Committee, working with state veteran representatives as well as US Department of Labor Veterans Employment & Training Service (USDOL VETS), planning the agency's annual Veterans' conference, promoting awareness of the National Labor Exchange, and managing NASWA's partnership with Hilton Honors. She also staffs NASWA's Equal Opportunity Committee, working closely with the US Department of Labor's Civil Rights Center, and is the Senior Advisor for the National Labor Exchange. Lori is a member of the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee for Veteran Employment, Training and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO), and is a Trusted Advisor for PsychArmor. She joined NASWA in 2015 after 26 years with Iowa Workforce Development, where she was a case manager, Regional Manager, Field Operations Bureau Chief and Division Administrator/Workforce Services. As Division Administrator, she was responsible for program and service oversight at all the state's American Job Centers and satellite offices. Lori has a bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communication from Iowa State University and is a Certified Public Manager.



#### **Brian Alvarado**

*Entrepreneurship: How to Get Started*

**Brian L. Alvarado** is a military community advocate by day, and a military spouse, gadget geek, and amateur kitchen genius by night. He is the Director of Military Spouse Programs at Hiring our Heroes, an initiative of the United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation. This program is designed to measurably impact military spouse unemployment and underemployment through the overarching strategies of grassroots engagement and public/private partnerships. In this role, Brian directs a team of dedicated professionals across several programs, events and initiatives that drive the attainability of economic stability through sustainable employment opportunities for the military community. He is responsible for key partnership management to include senior military, government, and business leader stakeholders. Brian is a graduate of the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy Nonprofit Executive Management Program. As a military spouse, Brian has served as Naval Command Ombudsman at Fleet Anti-Submarine Warfare Training Center aboard Naval Base Point Loma as well as various Family Readiness Group board positions in support of the sailors and families of commands his service member spouse has served with. He is the 2018 United States Navy Spouse of the Year® and has been recognized by the American Military Partner Association with their National Community Service Award as well as the recipient of the 2016 Vanguard Equality Award from Equality California. He and his spouse, Matthew Alvarado, US Navy (Ret.), reside in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.



**Dakota Andrew\***

*Promising Practices – Iowa: Why and How to Advocate for Veteran Resource Rooms*

**Dakota Andrew** grew up in the small town of Vinton Iowa, where he graduated from Vinton-Shellsburg High School. He attended one year of college and joined the US Navy where he primarily worked as a Hospital Corpsman. During his time in the Navy, he worked in processing for Recruit Training Command, Medical Research, Oral Maxillofacial surgery, and General Dentistry. Dakota was stationed in places like Naval Air Station Pensacola Florida, Ft. Sam Houston San Antonio Texas, and Naval Station Great Lakes Illinois. Outside of Naval work, Dakota enjoyed coaching youth football for Mundelein Illinois in the TCYFL. After his enlistment he returned to his hometown and studied at Kirkwood Community College, finishing general studies and French while working at the campus bookstore. In 2016 he spent 4 months in Quebec, CA studying French and culture. That Fall he attended the University of Minnesota and completed his bachelors in Cultural Anthropology. In Minnesota he harnessed a passion for fishing, boating, lakes, natural spaces, and disc golf. Dakota Worked for the State of Minnesota in human resources and admin roles. In 2022 Dakota returned to Iowa and started working in Veteran Employment Services where he exercises his passion. In his free time, you might find Dakota studying and speaking other languages with friends around the world, or out on the disc golf course training for the next tournament.



**Rajeev Ramchand**

*Recent Research on Servicemembers’ Military Transitions and Civilian Jobs*

**Rajeev Ramchand** (he/him) is codirector of the RAND Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute, a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, and a professor of policy analysis at Pardee RAND Graduate School. He studies the prevalence, prevention, and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders in adolescents, service members and veterans, and minority populations. He has conducted research on suicide and suicide prevention including environmental scans of suicide prevention programs, epidemiologic studies on risk factors for suicide, qualitative research with suicide loss survivors, systematic reviews of the role of firearm availability, storage, and policies on suicide, and evaluations of suicide prevention programs. He has also developed freely available tools to help organizations to evaluate their own suicide prevention programs. In 2022, he was appointed by the Secretary of Defense to serve as a member of the Department of Defense Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee. He currently serves on the Executive Committee of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee. He has testified on suicide prevention before the United States Senate and House of Representatives. In addition to his research on suicide, Ramchand studies military and veteran caregivers; the changing legal and policy environment for psychedelic substances; the impact of disasters on community health; and public health approaches to combatting violent extremism. He holds a Ph.D. in psychiatric epidemiology from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a B.A. in economics from the University of Chicago.



**Rob Arndt\***

*From Street Kid to CEO - A Veteran's Non-Traditional Journey into Entrepreneurship*

BufferSprings Founder and CEO, **Rob Arndt** is a 14-year Veteran of the United States Marine Corps, with 8 of those years focused on armed forces Recruitment & Retention. Since transitioning from military service, Rob has spent the past decade partnering with some of the smartest organizations in the world. Ranging from innovative start-ups to Fortune 500 companies, federal contractors, government agencies, and educational institutions to build effective military veteran and diversity recruitment and compliance initiatives. Rob and the BufferSprings team leverage a vast array of insider connections, cutting-edge HR technology, and expansive online communities to build talent acquisition solutions that provide immediate and ongoing results for smart companies.



**Gerard Ball\***

*Promising Practices – North Carolina: Promising Practices for Serving the Native American Veteran Population*

**Gerard Ball** serves as the Consolidated JVSG for Haywood, Jackson, and Swain Counties and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians in Western North Carolina for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions. He is an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians and served in the United States Army from 1996-2004 with stops at Fort Sill, Camp Casey, and Fort Bragg with the 82nd Airborne. Gerard is a graduate of the University of Tennessee with his Masters in Leadership Education and Communication and has a second Master's Degree from the University of Memphis in Leadership and Communication and a Bachelor's Degree from Western Carolina University in Criminal Justice



**Sarah Bierman\***

*VPL 05-24: A Discussion of JVSG Staff Roles and Responsibilities*

**Sarah Bierman** is the Deputy Director for Grants and Training in the Office of National Programs (ONP) with the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service's (VETS) and has been with the USDOL-VETS since July 2006. In her current role, she provides national leadership and oversight, establishes national policy, and is responsible for the development and oversight of grant programs. Sarah served as a State Director with VETS prior to her role in ONP. She served as a federal investigator where she managed grant programs within South Dakota, provided outreach and training, and investigated violations of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and Veterans' Preference (VP)/Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA). Sarah received a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Northern State University and a master's degree in social work from the University of North Dakota.



**David Burke**

*Life Beyond Addiction for our Veterans: How to talk to a veteran in crisis and early intervention to provide access to treatment.*

**David Burke**, LAADC-CA/ICADC, is a dedicated advocate for substance abuse awareness and treatment. He founded New Start Recovery Solutions in 2007. In 2019, David partnered with Sierra Health + Wellness. He came on board as the Chief Marketing Officer during the acquisition of New Start Recovery Solutions. With over 20 years' experience in the addiction recovery field, throughout California and nationally, he helps facilitate return-to-work orders with employee assistance programs, the department of transportation, and most all major unions. He is also proudly serving the military communities through our Wellness for Warriors program at Sierra Health + Wellness. David is passionate about helping people, building recovery resources, and working in communities throughout California and nationally. David has the highest level of CCAPP drug counseling certification: LAADC, 'Licensed Advanced Alcohol Drug Counselor' and ICADC, 'Internationally Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor', and holds a Criminal Justice Degree in addiction studies. Heartfelt compassion guides his work with families and individuals in interventions, addiction awareness, and addiction recovery. He guides families and their loved ones suffering from addiction, depression, and other behavioral issues into recovery. He walks individuals and families through the steps to get started in the recovery process—and the steps needed to create guidance to wellness and healing he believes everyone deserves to have a better quality of life and access into recovery with the highest quality of care available.



**Awilda Carozza\***

*Empowering Veteran Transitions: Unveiling the Student Veterans of America (SVA) Career Center*

**Awilda Carozza** is a passionate Employment Veteran Advocate currently serving as the Employer Relations Coordinator at SVA Career Center. Leveraging her comprehensive background as a Women Veteran Transition Specialist at Hire Heroes USA, Awilda seamlessly transitioned into her current role, where she actively engages with employers to facilitate meaningful employment opportunities for veterans. Armed with a Master of Science in Employment Law & Employee Relations from Nova Southeastern University and a Bachelor of Business Administration & Human Resources Management from Florida International University, Awilda possesses a robust foundation of knowledge and expertise. In her previous capacities, Awilda played pivotal roles in workforce development and economic empowerment for veterans. As the Regional Veterans' Program Coordinator at the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), she spearheaded comprehensive training initiatives for the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program, empowering personnel across 24 Local Workforce Development Boards with the necessary skills to connect veterans with employment opportunities. Before that, she served as a Veteran Career Coach and Employer Outreach Engagement Coordinator under the JVSG grant, providing vital employment readiness coaching and advocating for increased employment prospects for veterans through business outreach and recruitment events. Committed to the cause of empowering veterans, Awilda actively participates in various professional affiliations and memberships. She is a member of the Women Veterans Committee at Mission United Broward County, a Veteran Volunteer at The Mission Continues Broward & Miami Platoon, a member of Broward Vetworking, and a Volunteer Career Readiness Coach for FourBlock's Minneapolis Cohort.



**Edward Carr\***

*Thank You, Next! The Private Sector's Role in Veteran Employment in an Age of Negative Unemployment*

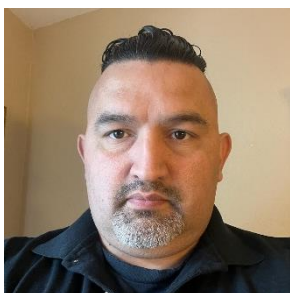
**Ed Carr** is the Senior Director, Military and Veteran Affairs at Comcast NBCUniversal. In his role, Ed serves as a consultant to various business unit and talent acquisition teams within the corporation, as part of Comcast NBCUniversal's outreach in support of the military community. Ed's work at Comcast NBCUniversal has been instrumental in the company being recognized as a private sector leader in military hiring and community outreach. Ed's military career spanned 23 years of Active Duty as a Combat Medic, and he retired in 2016.



**Barbara E. Carson\***

*Entrepreneurship: How to Get Started*

**Barbara E. Carson** brings more than 25 years of experience, military service, and proven leadership in successfully building and delivering programs across government and military sectors. Carson is responsible for the day-to-day management and oversight of the Institute's national programs and services, which focus on entrepreneurship, career training, and community services. Barbara retired as a Colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve (USAFR), her last assignment was to the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of Public Affairs. Prior to joining the IVMF, Carson spent nearly a decade in leadership at the U.S. Small Business Administration, (SBA) most recently serving as the Deputy Associate Administrator for the Office of Disaster Assistance. There, she was responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating the SBA's disaster loan program throughout the nation. Also at the SBA, Barbara served as Deputy Associate Administrator for Government Contracting and Business Development where she advocated to increase small business contracting opportunities in federal agencies and led SBA federal procurement programs. She has also served as the SBA's Associate Administrator for the Office of Veterans Business Development, where her military background was an asset to the program.



**John Cruz\***

*Partnering with the Department of Corrections to Assist Re-Entry Veterans*

**John Cruz (Cruz)** is from the Austin area of Texas. After graduating high school, Cruz joined the Marines where he served from 1998-2009. He met his wife, Michelle, while he was in the service, and they moved to Washington state upon his discharge. Cruz started his civilian career as a Work Study through the VA which is how he found his way working to the Employment Security Department and has been a Disabled Veterans Case Manager since 2015.



**Tiffany Daugherty\***

*A Fireside Chat. Embracing the Challenge: Where the Beauty Lies?*

**Tiffany Daugherty** is the Head of Military & Veterans Affairs and Specialty Strategies for Johnson & Johnson. In this role, she leads the ongoing development, enhancements, and alignment to the cross-functional, Company-wide military-connected strategy and programming. Prior to joining J&J, Tiffany was the U.S. Head of Military & Veterans Outreach for Barclays where she was charged with creating and implementing a strategy for veteran and military spouse hiring, retention, internal mobility and community engagement. She previously led military employment, retention and entrepreneurship efforts at First Data. During that time, the team won several national awards based on innovative programming and outcomes including being ranked #1 on Military Times' "Best for Vets: Employers" list in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Tiffany currently serves on the Board of Directors for Wounded Warrior Project and as Co-Chair of the Hiring Our Heroes – US Chamber of Commerce Veteran Employment Advisory Council. Tiffany began her career as a U.S. Army Air Traffic Controller, serving in the U.S. and Republic of Korea. After service, she spent 10 years in the career counseling field, serving diverse student populations in technical colleges and traditional universities, including Vanderbilt University. She spent four years at Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP), leading a team of regional specialists in providing direct employment services to veterans with disabilities and their spouses.



**Margarita Devlin**

*DOL VETS Listening Session; Conference Welcome*

**Margarita Devlin, MA, CRC**, a member of the Senior Executive Service, is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations and Management at the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). Prior to coming to VETS in July 2021, Ms. Devlin served with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for over 25 years in various positions of increasing responsibility. Ms. Devlin began her VA career as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and progressed through leadership positions within VBA, VHA, and at the VA Department level. Ms. Devlin most recently served as the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Chief Learning Officer (CLO). In her prior role as CLO, she was the principal advisor to the Under Secretary for Health for the analysis, development, delivery, implementation, and evaluation of education and training programs, products, and services that support workforce development and continuing education for the VHA's staff. Before serving as VHA's Chief Learning Officer, Ms. Devlin served as Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits in Washington, DC. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a Master of Arts degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of South Florida, Tampa FL.



**Chantal Dewall\*^**

*Workforce Outcomes for Military-Affiliated Job Seekers via EASY, CASUAL, VIRTUAL Collaboration with Strong Employers*

**Chantal Dewall** is the operations manager and strategic advisor for 50strong. Chantal is a United States Coast Guard veteran and active-duty military spouse with 6+ years of experience in veteran employment including leading student veteran and military talent acquisition programs in higher-ed and corporate.

After leaving the service in 2013 as a junior enlisted mechanic, she pursued her degree in Human Resources and eventually became the Assistant Director for the University of Hawaii at West Oahu Veterans Empowered through STEM program, where she created internship programs across the 10 school systems to identify and employ the untapped talent pool of student veterans. Prior to coming to 50strong she helped create and lead the first student veterans’ talent acquisition program at Amazon Web Services, also acting as the first dedicated student veteran military recruiter within the industry. 50strong is an industry-led collaborative effort in support of at-scale veteran employment initiatives founded in 2020 by Kandi and Kevin Tillman. 50strong works to enable employers in their efforts and then to provide a virtual platform for direction connections with military-affiliated jobseekers & students. 50strong is made possible by Lowe's, Johnson & Johnson, Wells Fargo, Verizon, Cushman & Wakefield, Amazon, HCA Healthcare, TEKsystems, John Deere, and includes participation by hundreds of other military-ready employers & Higher Education outreach partners. Chantal is a graduate of the University of Southern California, and lives in Wilmington, NC with her husband.



**Edward DuPass\***

*Promising Practices – Virginia: Expanding the Transition Window (Soldier Recovery Unit/Wounded Warrior Regiment and TAP)*

**Edward DuPass** is a Retired Army Career Counselor with 20 years active service. Upon retirement in 2008 he served as a Program Manager for an Information Technology Firm. When the organization downsized, he found himself applying for work as a LVER, where since 2015, he has found a way to assist innumerable veterans in his community. He is regarded as one of the most energetic advocates for veteran employment in Northern Virginia. Serving as a featured speaker regarding veteran employment to organizations which included DoD Military-Civilian Transition Office, National Veteran Training Institute (NVTI), US Army MEDCOM, and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families – IVMF. Edward holds a MS in Communications and Digital Marketing



**Timothy Elliott\***

*Resources to Increase Employment and Financial Stability for Veterans with Disabilities*

**Timothy Elliott** graduated from Aviation Electronic Technician School. He was eager to serve his country when he transitioned from a reservist to full time military service. He was only a year into his naval career before he became paralyzed from the shoulders down by what the doctors determined to be either Transverse Myelitis or Spinal Meningitis. Whichever one, his life was changed forever. Besides the

physical and mental struggles of living with a disability, another obstacle is living with financial instability. Timothy has 20 years of experience advocating for and mentoring individuals with disabilities. As a part of his advocacy, Timothy promotes and raises awareness about the power of ABLE accounts and the use of financial tools and resources that can improve financial wellness for Veterans and other people with disabilities.



**Jody Ellis**

*Resources to Increase Employment and Financial Stability for Veterans with Disabilities*

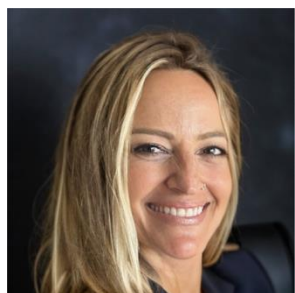
**Jody Ellis** has 30 years of leadership experience in the nonprofit industry as a service provider for people with disabilities, with a focus in behavior analysis, transition, post-secondary education, and workforce services. In her role at NDI's ABLE National Resource Center, she advances the mission to educate, promote, and support the positive impact ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) accounts can make in the lives of individuals with disabilities. She is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and a Certified Work Incentives Practitioner (CWIP) with a master's degree in social work.



**Jo Ann Enwall**<sup>^</sup>

*Promising Practices – Washington: Operation Military Culture: Serving Those Who Served through Empathy & Understanding*

**Jo Ann Enwall** started with WorkSource Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), in Lakewood Washington, in June 2018 as a Career Specialist. She has since worked her way up serving as the Team Lead and has recently taken on the role of Supervisor, overseeing operations and staff. Prior to her roles with WorkSource, Jo Ann served as a Transition Counselor for the JBLM Transition Assistance Program from 2016 through 2018. Jo Ann is also the spouse of Jarett, a Marine Corps Veteran. During her husband's 8-year enlistment they were stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Jo Ann is a graduate of the University of North Carolina Wilmington earning her bachelor's degree in social work. She later received her master's degree in social work from the University of Southern California with special concentrations in Military Social Work and Mental Health.



**Prairie Francia**

*Life Beyond Addiction for our Veterans: How to talk to a veteran in crisis and early intervention to provide access to treatment.*

**Prairie** is the Community Care Liaison at the Elijah house Foundation, whose mission is to offer whole-person recovery to those in need. They seek to provide holistic and life-changing recovery programs for individuals and families seeking freedom from addiction. Prairie Yana is a Registered Alcohol and Drug Technician and a Certified Usui Reiki Master-Teacher and Energy Healer. She is a Certified Health & Wellness Coach, accredited through the Drug-less Practitioners Association and is a Career & Life Planning Facilitator. The most valuable gift she received was learning the power of perception shifting and that we all have the choice to heal. This profound concept is the gift that she brings, along



with many others (chakra analysis and balancing, reiki energy and Aligned Living Mentorship), to her clients to assist them with their healing process, and their journey into remembrance and wholeness. Listening to her clients with a compassionate and empathetic ear, like a ninja, Prairie intuitively knows exactly which tools to call upon in the moment to help her clients work through their most troubling issues— coming out on the other side feeling whole and complete. Through working with individuals and their loved ones teaching relapse prevention, identifying high risk situations and avoiding strategies Prairie meets people where they're at to guide individuals and loved ones to a better quality of life in recovery. Elijah House Foundation is a proud sponsor of our Work Crew Program. We offer residential therapeutic living, outpatient counseling, and a safe and caring environment. We provide transitional employment through litter abatement services in partnership with several County and State agencies. We serve several areas throughout Northern California, including Butte, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Humboldt, Mendocino, Monterey, and Shasta counties.



**Tim French\***

*One Tool, Many Applications: How the NLx Makes a Difference in Veterans Employment*

**Tim French** retired after serving 22 years in the U.S. Army. He started his career at Ft. Bragg, NC as a Parachute Rigger and ended as a Battalion Supply Sergeant. Tim has a BS in Management/Human Resources from Park University, MO. He has been with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for 15 years – first as a DVOP for 9 years and 6 as a LVER.



**Bronagh Friel**

*Thank You, Next! The Private Sector's Role in Veteran Employment in an Age of Negative Unemployment*

**Bronagh Friel** leads partnerships for Grow with Google, an initiative dedicated to creating economic opportunities for all Americans. Bronagh and her team collaborate with a diverse range of partners including employers, educational institutions, government organizations, nonprofits, and workforce boards. Their shared mission is to bridge the skills gap and unlock the economic potential of individuals across the United States. Since 2017, Grow with Google has empowered over 11 million Americans to develop new skills, advance their careers, and grow their businesses. A cornerstone of this effort is the Google Career Certificates program. This initiative has enabled over half a million people globally, regardless of their educational background, to transition from low-wage jobs to well-paying careers



**Rebekah “Bek” Haydin\***

*VPL 05-24: A Discussion of JVSG Staff Roles and Responsibilities*

**Rebekah Haydin** is the national Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) Governance Lead for the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS). The JVSG provides funding to states for approximately 1,500 Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP), Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER), and consolidated DVOP/LVER positions across the country. Through these staff, JVSG works with employers on behalf of veterans, networks with local veteran service organizations, and provides individualized career services to over 45,000 veterans per year. Rebekah is a veteran of the U.S. Army and a graduate of the University of Colorado at Denver through the VR&E program. She has been with VETS since 2005.



**Meg Hendricks\*^**

*Entrepreneurship: How to Get Started*

**Meg Hendricks**, is a Vice President and Head of Military and Veteran Affairs at Fiserv, where she has focused on honing her expertise in Diversity & Inclusion, Employee Engagement, Entrepreneurship, and Military Employment. Her leadership of the Fiserv Salutes program has resulted in Fiserv being ranked in the top 10 on the Military Times “Best for Vets Employers” list for the last seven years, being named an SVA partner of the year for 2021 and a Partner in Excellence for 2022, named a “5 Star Employer” by VETS Indexes, and more. In addition to her experience with Fiserv, she served in the United States Army as a human resources officer and had the pleasure of partnering with organizations in the manufacturing and human capital management space in the civilian sector. Meg is passionate about creating and leading employee-centric programs that drive culture and have a positive impact on the community. Meg holds a master’s degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Northcentral University, a bachelor’s degree in Psychology from The Colorado College, and the PHR certification. Meg has a strong commitment to civic duty. As such, she served as the President of the PTA at her daughter’s school for two years and volunteers regularly with various local organizations. Meg is married to a fellow Army Veteran, with whom she has one daughter.



**Christopher Holtkamp\***

*VA Education Benefits 101*

**Christopher Holtkamp** joined VACO Education Service as a Management & Program Analyst in March 2023. He previously served in the Director’s Office at the Boston, Manchester, and White River Junction Regional Offices. Christopher began his VA career with the Boston Healthcare System in 2018 as the Community Employment Coordinator at Boston VAMC. He subsequently served as the VR&E Employment Coordinator in 2021 at the Boston RO. Before joining VA, Christopher spent 5 years with the Massachusetts Department of Career Services from 2013-2018, with a short period teaching a certificate program at Bristol Community College in 2015. He is a Veteran of the US Marine Corps, with deployments to Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, serving as an

Infantry Assaultman and Designated Marksman. Christopher has an MBA and MS from the University of Massachusetts - Lowell.



**Gary Jacobs\***

*Promising Practices – North Carolina: Promising Practices for Serving the Native American Veteran Population*

**Gary Jacobs** is a Consolidated Veterans Career Advisor at the NCWorks Career Center in Lumberton, NC. Even though he is assigned to the Lumberton Career Center, his primary place of duty is at the Lumbee Tribal Administration in Pembroke, NC, where he provides dedicated services to the Veterans of the Lumbee Tribe. He’s a Navy Veteran and served aboard the USS Tarawa in San Diego, 3 years active duty and 3 years as a Reservist. Gary is a member of the Lumbee Warriors Veterans Organization and an Officer with American Legion Post 42. Gary is a graduate of UNC-Pembroke with a double major in Political Science and American Indian Studies.



**Donnell E. Johns Sr.\***

*Veteran Business Owners: Pathway to Success*

**Donnell E. Johns Sr.**, Command Sergeant Major U.S. Army Retired, Founder of Veterans Growing America, Veterans Commissioner for Prince William County, and a passionate advocate for veteran-owned businesses. With his unwavering commitment to supporting military-connected small businesses, he serves as a community builder and connector, bridging the gap between veterans and valuable business, education, and employment resources. Leveraging his extensive 26 years of military service and leadership experience, he ignites the passion, purpose, and prosperity of these businesses, resulting in the success of numerous organizations. As the founder of Veterans Growing America, he successfully supported over 3179 military-connected business owners and hosted over 300 events in our business incubator. Donnell served as the Command Sergeant Major of Recruiting for 2 States, leading them to the top 5 of 54 States and Territories. He also served as the 1st Army National Guard G1 Sergeant Major and was recognized for improving the readiness of the Army National Guard by 30% in less than 6 months. Veterans Growing America provides a forum for veterans and military spouses to showcase and grow their businesses. Partnering with local, state, and federal veteran organizations to increase their brand awareness.



**Robin “Phoenix” Johnson\*^**

*HEAL\*ARIOUS: Using Humor for Improved Physical and Psychological Performance; From Combat to Comedy: Harnessing Strength and Humor in the Face of Adversity*

**Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Robin Johnson** served over 20 years in the U.S. Army before making her transition into the entertainment industry and veteran support space. During her time in service, she deployed five times to Afghanistan and Iraq and earned the Airborne, Air Assault and Pathfinder badges, three Bronze Stars, and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal. Her career highlights include serving as the Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and commanding a battalion in Iraq where she was charged with leading 960 Soldiers, maintaining over \$50M in equipment, and acting in the capacity of a mayor

for a coalition base responsible for a \$300M budget and over \$3B in construction projects and contracts. After retiring from the Army, Robin discovered her new mission was to heal people, organizations and communities with humor. She founded HEAL\*ARIOUS, a non-profit that focuses on incorporating humor to improve psychological performance. She works in collaboration with clinicians to develop customized programming and motivational speaking for veterans, first responders, athletes, and corporate executives. As a Certified Humor Professional through the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor and a Comedy Bootcamp Instructor for Armed Services Arts Partnership. Robin is also a stand-up comedian and motivational speaker with performances at venues such as Carolines on Broadway, Stardome, Atlanta Comedy Theater, Charlotte Comedy Zone, Bricktown Comedy Club, Louisville Comedy Club, and corporate venues all over the country. Voted Charleston's Best Comic 2022 and featured on USA Today, Fox, and ABC, Robin continues to use her voice to advocate for more representation of veterans and military spouses in comedy and the use of humor to complement traditional therapy. Despite having a distinguished military career, her proudest achievement is her family. Robin has been married to retired Army Apache pilot, Cayton, for 20 years and they have two wonderful children that give her an abundance of comedy material!



**Nancy Jones^**

*Serving Your Client Through Understanding: Military Cultural Competency*

**Nancy Jones** serves as a Staff Attorney with the Case Evaluation & Litigation team at The Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program (TVC). Prior to joining TVC, Nancy was the Senior Staff Attorney at Veterans Legal Institute in Orange County, California where she assisted hundreds of low-income veterans with their VA appeals before the Board of Veterans Appeals and the regional office. She also assisted veterans with tax issues before the IRS and the California Franchise Tax Board. She is a VA accredited attorney. Nancy graduated from the University- of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in business. She received her Juris Doctor from the University of San Diego School of Law. She is admitted to practice in the states of California, Virginia, and Michigan. Nancy is a Michigan native and married to a USMC veteran. As a Marine spouse, she has experienced the unique lifestyle of military families, especially during the last twenty years of military conflict. She currently resides in Northern Virginia with her husband, Matt, and their two dogs. They have three grown children scattered about the country.



**John Kaiser\***

*Using SkillSet: No-cost Options to Support Transitioning Service Members and Veterans*

**John Kaiser** is a seasoned business leader in the software and technology services industry and who is also a Veteran. John has worked with an array of emerging technologies and helped create sustainable business models that allow new technologies to flourish. John has spent the past 5 years working to enable the skills-based economy through data analysis and has gained perspective from leaders in corporate HR, the military, government, and higher education. John helped jump start the Skillset initiative and now leads the team bringing new capabilities to market in service of transitioning service members, their families and the companies yearning to hire them.



**Cynthia Kao\***

*Veteran Business Owners: Pathway to Success*

**Cynthia Kao** is the Executive Director of Operation Code, and 2X tech founder and CEO. She was also a documentary filmmaker and a contributing writer at Forbes Magazine. She served in the U.S. Air Force Reserves as a Public Affairs Specialist, deploying twice overseas, and served as an active-duty military spouse for 15 years. Cynthia is also the mother of a service-disabled Veteran son. She spent the first 15 years of her career as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the non-profit sector, specializing in trauma, addiction, and resilience therapy. Cynthia exited her first startup, as an interactive multimedia and innovative digital media founder after 10 years in the Fall of 2022. Today, she runs an early-stage health-tech startup, named Rebirth. Innovation, focused on organizational health, employee assistance programs, preventing burnout and creating thriving work cultures. Originally from Toronto, Canada, Cynthia now calls the D.C./Northern Virginia region home and enjoys advocating for the military community and mental-health awareness. In her spare time, she serves her community as a volunteer Paramedic, enjoys outdoor sports, spending time with her three grown children and her Russian Blue cat named Chairman Meow



**Meredith Kleykamp**

*Recent Research on Servicemembers' Military Transitions and Civilian Jobs*

**Meredith Kleykamp** is an adjunct sociologist at the RAND Corporation. Her primary research centers on the consequences of military service for servicemembers, veterans, and their families as well as military personnel policies and challenges. Her recent research has examined societal perceptions and reception of returning veterans, military identity in the transition out of military service, hiring discrimination against military spouses, pre-enlistment diversity attitudes among military-propensed youth, and how to desegregate recruit training in the United States Marine Corps among other projects. Her past research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the Army Research Institute. Her work has been published in academic journals and peer-reviewed RAND reports. She served on the Institute of Medicine Committee on the Readjustment Needs of Military Personnel, Veterans, and their Families, and the Maryland Governor's Challenge team on Preventing Suicide. She is also an Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, and previously taught at the University of Kansas and United States Military Academy. She received a PhD in Sociology from Princeton University in 2007.



**Dallas Kratzer\***

*Recruit, Retain and Promote: Connecting Veterans to Employers*

**Dallas Kratzer** has years of experience as a faculty member of multiple Universities and as a consultant with leadership organizations. He currently serves as the Regional Education Coordinator for the University of Charleston, West Virginia, in the School of Business and Leadership. He represents the University through building and maintaining relationships with strategic partners, identifies opportunities for program growth, and conducts and coordinates recruitment events

to attract prospective military-connected students and other constituents. Additionally, he is an Assistant Professor in the graduate and undergraduate programs of the Business School. Dr. Kratzer also works with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). He has been a faculty assessor with ACE for over five years, assessing military workplace learning and official training courses for the award of college-level credit. His work directly impacts the college opportunities for service members in every branch and is documented on their Joint Service Transcript (JST). Additionally, he is a presenter and advisor for ACE in teaching colleges and universities on how they can best use JST credit recommendations in their undergraduate degree programs. At CAEL, his focus is on helping institutions across the country to develop and implement prior learning assessment programs designed for adult learners. Additionally, he represents CAEL, as the Director for Veteran Success, on the McCormick Foundation's Veterans Working Group, helping businesses in the Chicago area develop employment opportunities for veterans. As an Adjunct Faculty member, Dr. Kratzer has taught in the graduate and undergraduate programs at the University of Louisville, Western Carolina University, Midway University, and Central Texas College. He has taught extensively in the areas of leadership and management, prior learning assessment, and adult learning theory in both the in-class and on-line environments. Dr. Kratzer received his B.S. in Management/Human Resources from Park University, an M.Phil. in Military Strategy from the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS) at Air University, an M.A. in Christian Education from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned his Ph.D in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development from the University of Louisville. Additionally, he brings 35 years of leadership and management teaching and experience from his time in the U.S. Air Force, having served in numerous senior advisor positions.



**Stan Kurtz\***

*Entrepreneurship: How to Get Started; Veteran Business Owners – Pathway to Success*

**Stan Kurtz** retired from the US Navy in 2003, completing a 23-year career. Since retiring, he has continued to serve Veterans for over 17 years. He is a graduate of the Navy Senior Enlisted Academy and the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute and is currently serving a second term on the Secretary of the Navy Retiree Council. He is a graduate of the George W. Bush Stand to Leadership program. Stan currently serves as the Director of Policy and Engagement for the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Office of Veterans Business Development (OVBD). His previous roles within OVBD include Director of Programs and the Director of the Veteran Business Outreach Center program. Prior to serving at the US Small Business Administration, Stan served as the Director of Veteran Employment Services for the Texas Veterans Commission and Assistant Veteran Employment Services Coordinator for the State of Florida.



**Henry "Hank" Lahti\***

*Going Above and Beyond; Honoring the Legacy of Mark Sanders*

**Henry Lahti** is a dedicated professional with over 12 years of experience in assisting veterans in their transition to civilian employment. Currently serving as the Assistant Coordinator for the Jobs for Veterans State grant in Alabama, Henry plays a pivotal role in facilitating job placement and support services within the Alabama JVSG program for veterans across the state. With a profound commitment to serving those who have served our nation, Henry has demonstrated exceptional leadership and supervisory skills throughout his career. In his current role, he oversees a team of 27 staff members spread across Alabama, ensuring the efficient delivery of services to veterans and their families. Henry's passion for supporting veterans extends beyond his professional endeavors. He is deeply involved in community initiatives aimed at improving the lives of veterans and advocating for their rights and benefits. Through his extensive experience and unwavering dedication, Henry Lahti continues to make a significant impact on the lives of veterans in Alabama, helping them successfully transition into meaningful civilian careers. Henry served in the Coast Guard as an Aviation Mechanic and Crew Chief on the H52 Helicopter.



**Wendy Ann Lang**

*Recruit, Retain and Promote: Connecting Veterans to Employers*

Wendy Lang began her career in New Jersey state government, serving as Senator John H. Ewing's Chief of Staff, staffing the Senate Education Committee, and later being appointed Governor Christie Todd Whitman's Education Policy Advisor. Since founding Operation College Promise (OCP) in 2008, she has managed all programming, research, outreach, public relations, and development. In this role, she developed one of the first websites for veterans and those who serve them, authored the nation's first comprehensive resource for veterans' service providers (*The OCP Field Guide*), and designed the Certificate for Veterans' Service Providers (CVSP) professional development program – the nation's only national in-person certificate program designed by higher educators for higher educators. In 2011 and 2013, Wendy published landmark research on student veterans' progress toward degree attainment in the Post-9/11 era. In 2021, in partnership with the Texas A&M University System, she released a third "Completing the Mission" report on the COVID pandemic's effects on student veterans. Today, Wendy works with schools, Veterans Service Organizations (VSO'), government agencies, and policymakers nationwide to develop and disseminate initiatives supporting veterans' education and employment opportunities. Wendy regularly presents at national conferences as a subject matter expert in best practices to support the military-affiliated student population. She currently serves on the Stockton University Veterans' Advisory Board and was named "Advocate of the Year" award in 2017. She was a contributing author to *What's Next for Student Veterans*, published by the National Resource Center in 2019. Her work with OCP has been highlighted in "The New York Times, USA Today, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, Military Advanced Education, NBC, Fox News, NPR, and CNN, among others. She is an Honorary Commander Emeriti at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. Wendy holds degrees in Political Science and International Relations from Drew University and resides in Burlington's historic City with her Jack Russell Terrier, Austin, where she continues her lifelong passion for competitive equestrianism.



**Susie Leavell**

*Partnering with the Department of Corrections to Assist Re-Entry Veterans*

**Susie Leavell**, Senior Administrator in the Reentry Division, Washington State Department of Corrections, has worked in the Criminal Justice field for 40 years; 35 of those years have been in the Corrections field. She has built a career doing reentry work with incarcerated individuals and community organizations to provide opportunities in education, skill-building, employment, and other areas of need for individuals. She has presented at countless conferences, including the Drug Endangered Children’s Conference in Oklahoma, Women in Prison Conference in Oregon, Reentry Summit in Washington DC, and various other presentations in Washington state concerning the Parenting Sentencing Alternative. She has also been a keynote speaker at reentry seminars and has participated in developing a national opportunity for other states to follow regarding alternatives to incarceration. She believes every person deserves dignity, respect, and support throughout their incarceration so that they are best prepared to return to our communities in a positive and safe manner.



**Chris Liakos**

*Thank You, Next! The Private Sector’s Role in Veteran Employment in an Age of Negative Unemployment*

**Chris Liakos** leads the Fair Employment Practices Compliance function at EY where he is responsible for the firm’s overall strategy and adherence of compliant employment practices as it relates to equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, diversity and inclusion, and federal and state regulatory adherence. Chris has extensive experience leading organizations in three primary areas: equal employment opportunity compliance programs, equity-based employment data and workforce analysis, and strategic recruiting and hiring programs. His industry experience includes leading these functions for Fortune 500 companies in federal defense contracting, professional and financial services, and human capital consulting. Chris maintains a leadership role for a number of professional organizations including: the Washington Metro ILG Steering committee and the DirectEmployers Association Board of Directors.



**Sarah Loizeaux**

*Resources to Increase Employment and Financial Stability for Veterans with Disabilities*

**Sarah Loizeaux** is a subject matter expert on creating inclusive career pathways to leverage resources across systems that promote employment for people with disabilities. She has over fifteen years of professional experience in the fields of disability and employment, with expertise in career pathways, job placement, work-based learning, and cross agency coordination. Sarah serves as a Training and Technical Assistance Manager for the National Disability Institute. Sarah has developed innovative practices that increased programmatic access and workforce performance outcomes. Her expertise includes identifying DEIA promising practices emphasizing universal design principles. She has master’s



degree in rehabilitation counseling and is certified as a Rehabilitation Counselor from the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification.



**Jim Lorraine\*^**  
*I Just Wanted to Serve*

**Jim Lorraine**, the president and CEO of America’s Warrior Partnership, served in the U.S. Air Force as a Flight Nurse with nine combat deployments and retired as the Deputy Command Surgeon for the United States Special Operations Command after 22 years of service. He became the founding director of the United States Special Operations Command Care Coalition and served as Special Assistant for Warrior and Family Support to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.



**Kim Lott\*^**  
*One Tool, Many Applications: How the NLx Makes a Difference in Veterans Employment*

**Kim Lott** came to DirectEmployers Association in January 2023 as a Community and State Outreach Administrator, leveraging expertise gained through her time as a Veteran Program Manager with Florida’s Department of Economic Opportunity. As a U.S. Navy Veteran who experienced challenges and underemployment upon transition, she is impassioned by veterans securing employment, which allows for their flourishing. Kim’s experiences have informed many of the issues that drive her, such as the intersectionality of race, gender, and disability and the significant ways in which these issues often adversely impact employment and career trajectory. Kim is also a New England-born, Florida-transplanted, dog-loving, caffeine sippin’, pun-abusing, kindness-advocating, Christ-adoring, wife and mom to three humans and two Mini Goldendoodles.



**Jared Lyon\***  
*Student Veterans of America*

**Jared Lyon** was appointed National President & CEO of Student Veterans of America (SVA) in 2016. He leads the organization’s efforts to empower student veterans using the transformative power of higher education. Since he took office, Lyon has overseen SVA’s growth to a network of more than 1,500 chapters on campuses in all 50 states and three countries abroad representing more than 750,000 student veterans. During his tenure, he co-authored the National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST), a comprehensive study of the first 854,000 student veterans to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill. In 2017 Lyon led SVA’s commitment to pass the “Forever GI Bill,” the largest expansion of college aid for military veterans in a decade with an economic impact of \$3.4 Billion. A veteran of the U.S. Navy, he served as a submariner and diver, taking part in multiple deployments in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Prior to joining the headquarters team at SVA, Lyon previously served as the National Program Manager for the Institute for Veterans and Military Families Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans and as Manager of Florida Operations for the Washington Nationals Major League Baseball team. Lyon is a member of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran’s Advisory Committee on Education, and a commissioner for the American

Council on Education's Commission for Education Attainment. He also serves on the advisory boards for the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation and the Florida State University Veteran Advisory Board and is a 2018 Presidential Leadership Scholar. He holds an Associate of Arts from Eastern Florida State College, a Bachelor of Science from Florida State University, and a Master of Public Administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, where he is currently pursuing his PhD in Social Science.



**Dr. Jim Martin\***

*Using SkillSet: No-cost Options to Support Transitioning Service Members and Veterans*

**Dr. James Martin (Jim)** is an academic leader with 31 years' experience in higher learning institutions at all levels and many types of institutions. He is the Dean Emeritus of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College, which he led for the last five years. During his 16-year leadership tenure at the Staff College he served as the Associate Dean, Dean of Academics, and the Chief Academic Officer of Army University. He previously served in leadership positions at private four-year liberal arts universities for eight years and was on the faculty at the United States Military Academy. He is an experienced academic administrator and has extensive expertise in professional military education, adult education, academic assessment, and accreditation. Dr. Martin has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in American and Military History, Leadership, and Adult Education. He has served as a member of the Higher Learning Commission's peer corps for the past 20 years and has been a member of the Institutional Actions Committee for the past 7 years. He spent over 10 years serving as a member of the Department of Defense's Joint Staff accrediting teams for institutions throughout the Joint Professional Military Education community. Prior to entering the academic world, he spent 22 years as an Army officer to include service in the first Gulf War. Dr. Martin holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Kentucky in political science, along with both a master's and a doctoral degree in American History from The University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Martin is well published in both the history and education disciplines with two books, multiple book chapters, and several articles spanning both areas. He has spoken widely to audiences about both military and adult education and has significant experience working overseas with partner nations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Dr. Martin has received a variety of awards and honors during his career, including the Association of the United States Army's Joseph P. Cribbins Medal as the Outstanding Department of the Army Civilian for 2021 and induction into the Noncommissioned Officer Leadership Center of Excellence Hall of Honor. Upon retirement he was awarded the Army's Distinguished Civilian Service Medal, the highest honor the Department of Army bestows on civilian employees.

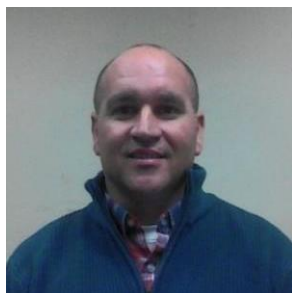


**Anitza Marty-Alicea**

*Ready to Work - Our journey integrating veterans in the workplace!*

**Anitza Marty-Alicea** leads HVRP grant since 2022, in the Business and Special Projects Area, at the Municipal Alliance of Integrated Services (AMSI), in Puerto Rico. In 2023, she received the Patriotic Employer distinction for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, from the Office of the Secretary of Defense of the United States of America. Anitza completed a Master's degree in Business Education. She served as a Business Professor at the University of

Puerto Rico for 15 years, and then moved to the private business area to manage diverse educational projects.



**Mike McCorkendale\***

*Using SkillSet: No-cost Options to Support Transitioning Service Members and Veterans*

**Mike McCorkendale** is a proven leader and manager, who brings 20+ years of senior advisory experience and leadership in the operations and administration of complex organizations ranging in size from 10 to 4,000 Service members. Mike's most recent military service includes as the U.S. Army Garrison, FT Riley First Sergeant, where he oversaw Fort Riley's, In and out-processing center. He also served as a line Company First Sergeant all the way down to a Fire team leader on deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the European Theater. During his time in the Army, he was awarded Bronze Star Medal (3rd award), Purple Heart (2nd award), Meritorious Service Medal (3rd award), Army Commendation Medal (7th award), Army Achievement Medal (7th award), Combat Infantryman's Badge, Expert Infantryman's Badge, Ranger Tab, Airborne, and Air Assault wings. While retiring from the Military he was able to take part in a DoD Skill bridge, Interning for AstrumU. During his internship, he worked in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) center learning every aspect of transitioning out of the Army. Mike now assists with AstrumU's SkillSet program where he facilitates and advises on the operating procedures to successfully assist service members with recommendations on their future outside of the Military with career or education components. He travels throughout the country where he conducts briefings as a speaker at events and career fairs to help transitioning Service members. Mike holds a bachelor's in interdisciplinary studies at Liberty University.



**Chad McFarlane\***

*Empowering Veteran Transitions: Unveiling the Student Veterans of America (SVA) Career Center*

**Chad McFarlane** serves as one of SVA's Success Coaches, working with student veterans as they navigate the SVA Advising Center. Enlisting in the US Army following 9/11; Chad served as an M1 Abrams Crewmember from July 2002 to September 2007; completing two deployments to Iraq with the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized). Chad received an Army Commendation Medal and two Army Achievement Medals and was honorably discharged in September 2007. After returning to Rhode Island in 2010, he found his passion in working toward Veterans' access to higher education. Through this work, Chad learned that the intrinsic values of camaraderie and esprit de corps that bind veterans together are the same values that can heal the wounds of society and he continues to work toward that end today. Chad has gained valuable experience across nonprofit, government, and private sectors; working as the Military & Veterans Affairs Coordinator for the Rhode Island 1st Congressional District; Early Career, University, and Veteran recruiting with General Dynamics; and finally as Talent Acquisition Manager at Neighborhood Healthcare based in San Diego, CA. Chad got his start with SVA as a chapter leader at the Community College of Rhode Island and is proud that his career has come full circle; once again working directly with student veterans and helping them maximize their potential.



**Colleen Miller**

*The Veterans Consortium: Legal Services for Veterans*

**Colleen Miller** serves as the Deputy Director of Volunteer Outreach, Education, and Placement, CAVC Practice. Prior to joining The Veterans Consortium, Colleen Miller served as sole legal counsel of operations for The Collier Companies, a multifamily housing management and real estate development company with over \$2.0B assets under management and over \$1.0B in development. She also served as a Career and Professional Development Advisor for the University of Florida Levin College of Law. Colleen Miller previously served as the co-managing partner for Quarles & Brady LLP’s Tampa office. With over fifteen years of experience, she specialized in commercial loan disputes, title issues, creditor’s claims, construction defects, and insurance coverage disputes in both state and federal courts. While at Quarles & Brady, Colleen chaired Quarles Cares for the Tampa office and grew its community outreach programs and charitable contributions. She also developed and implemented Quarles’s partnership with The Veterans Consortium across its ten offices. Through this partnership, attorneys represented veterans in their appeals for disability benefits before the United States Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims. Colleen Miller is a Florida native. She graduated summa cum laude from Texas Christian University with a Bachelor of Arts in Biology and a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice. In 2007, Colleen graduated magna cum laude with a Juris Doctor from the University of Miami School of Law. She resides in Maryland with her husband, Joshua Miller, and their retired racing greyhound, Lara, and adopted cat, Mac.



**Don Miller\***

*Veteran Business Owners: Pathway to Success*

**Don Miller** retired from the U.S. Navy after a 22-year career in 1997. He began work for AMSEC LLC in 1997 where he was a Senior Program Manager providing Information Technology solutions for various Department of the Navy agencies and Commercial Entities. In 2007 he founded Analytic Solutions LLC providing Information Technology and Consulting support for the Department of Defense and various Small Business enterprises. He began working with the Veteran’s Business Outreach Center (VBOC) in 2013 providing training, counseling, and mentoring to Veteran and Veteran family Small Businesses. Don is currently the Director of the VBOC supporting Virginia, West Virginia, D.C., Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. He is married to the former Daphane Gamell and has 3 children. He is an Alumnus of the University of Nebraska.



**Sam Mitchell\***

*Opening Ceremonies; Mark Sanders Award Presentation; Going Above and Beyond; Honoring the Legacy of Mark Sanders*

Since May 2019, **Sam Mitchell** has been Washington State Employment Security Department’s Administrator for Military Base Support. He develops policy and strategies for serving veterans and military families. Sam also oversees the operation of WorkSource Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the state’s

only inside-the-gate job center. Previously, he served as the State Veterans Program Coordinator and Operator (2013-2019) and as a DVOP (2010-2013) and is currently the technical chair of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Veterans Affairs Committee. Prior to his employment with Washington State, Sam oversaw HR for Red Lion Hotel Kelso for nearly three years, where he oversaw all recruitment, hiring, compliance and training programs for 80 employees. Sam retired at the rank of Chief Master Sergeant, after 25 years, from the Air Force in 2007 where he spent tours in the Pacific, Europe, Middle East, and the US. His military career culminated in his selection and service as the Regional Functional Manager for 1,500 communications and information technology specialists across Europe. A native of Kelso, Washington; he earned a Master of Public Administration degree from Evergreen State College. He has three daughters, Dianne, Amber, and Cathy.



**Sarah Morrissey**  
*Master of Ceremonies*

The daughter of a Veteran, **Sarah Morrissey** is the Director of Operations and the Employment Service Bureau for New Hampshire Employment Security. Sarah joined the agency in November 2009, and has served in multiple roles including Employer Services Representative, Program Specialist II, Local Office Manager, and Assistant Director, Employment Service Bureau/Operations. She is a 2009 graduate of the University of Maine with a degree in International Relations and Affairs. Sarah is also a Certified Public Supervisor



**(DJ) Donald Odell\***  
*Connecting with Veterans on the Transition Journey*

**DJ** is originally from New York, but now resides in the great state of Virginia. Following high school graduation in 1999, he enlisted in the US Air Force and served honorably for 13 years on active duty. DJ served all over the world in support of the Global War on Terror. Once separated, DJ transitioned directly into federal service as a civilian with the Department of Defense and continues his service today with the Department of Homeland Security. While working as a civil servant, DJ completed both his BA and MS by strategically leveraging his GI Bill. DJ has been serving the United States for over 25 years. However, his most important service is to his family. DJ is a girl dad, raising two daughters with his wife and best friend of 15+ years in Stafford, VA.



**Meghan Ogilvie**  
*Entrepreneurship: How to Get Started*

**Meghan Ogilvie** is Chief Executive Officer of Dog Tag Inc (DTI), a 501c3 that empowers service-disabled veterans, military spouses, and caregivers through an innovative five-month fellowship program. Hired as DTI's first employee in 2012, Meghan partnered with DTI's co-founders to bring their shared vision to life: to create a place that equips transitioning veterans and military families with knowledge, skills, and confidence to pursue their career goals, post

service. Meghan assumed the role of CEO in 2015 and oversees all aspects of DTI's unique, multi-faceted social enterprise including: managing the Fellowship program, growing Dog Tag Bakery, and guiding the development and implementation of DTI's long-term strategic vision. Prior to joining Dog Tag, Meghan spent several years working in finance in New York; first in equities with Lehman Brothers and Barclays and later within executive management at Macquarie Group. Meghan comes from a military family, with both her father and sister graduating from the Naval Academy and serving in the United States Marine Corps.



**Marcus “Ohley” Ohlenforst\***

*Thank You, Next! The Private Sector’s Role in Veteran Employment in an Age of Negative Unemployment*

**Marcus Ohlenforst** – better known as Ohley – currently serves as the Lead Military & Diversity Workforce Strategist responsible for USAAs enterprise Military Workforce Strategy in addition to managing and championing various strategic military talent programs and initiatives to ensure the company attracts world-class veteran and military spouse talent. He served 25 years in the Marine Corps both Enlisted and as an Officer and retired in 2016. His transition led him to some great organizations that connected him with people who invested their time and energy to ensure that he was successful, and he is committed to continuing to pay it forward within the military community. Ohley represents USAA as not only a brand ambassador, but also an expert in national level discussions that impact the military community and works closely with internal and external stakeholders to differentiate the company’s goal of being the employer of choice for the military community. In 2022, Ohley was selected as the GI Jobs Veteran Champion of the Year in Corporate America due to the extraordinary amount of effort that he exerts to inspire, educate, and advocate for the military community. Ohley leads numerous strategic workforce programs and initiatives while also being an active participant in numerous Non-profit advisory boards and committees, such as the US Chamber Veteran and Military Spouse Employment Advisory Councils, JP Morgan Veteran Jobs Mission Advisory Board, and the SHRM Foundation Military Community Advisory Committee. He is sought out as an industry thought leader and influencer who has been featured by nationally recognized magazines and social channels due to his devotion and servant leadership with organizations and respective communities.



**Will Paige\***

*Connecting with Veterans on the Transition Journey*

**Will Paige**, a native of Detroit, Michigan, embarked on a distinguished military career fresh out of high school at the young age of 17. As a veteran of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, he served at numerous duty stations, including Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg), Fort Jackson, the Pentagon, and Fort Leavenworth. His commitment and dedication to service led him to earn a commission and graduate from the University of South Carolina. After a fulfilling and successful military career, Will transitioned to the corporate world, joining Deloitte Consulting. He currently resides in Stafford, Virginia, carrying forward his legacy of service into his professional pursuits.



### **Charlie Palumbo\*^**

*What Makes a Great Story? Discover the power of personal stories and explore how to infuse it into your own work in this interactive StoryCorps workshop*

**Charlie Palumbo** is the StoryCorps Military Voices Initiatives Manager, where she helps amplify and honor the stories of military families, service members, and veterans. She founded Intentional Leaders, LLC, and is the author of *Face of a Memory: Emerging From the Military Through Poetic Voice*. Charlie is passionate about writing stories and spreading joy. She is a certified coach through Her Circle Leadership Coaching Program and Extraordinary Coach, Future Forces Inc. Charlie has had an extensive career in veteran advocacy, including her time at Wounded Warrior Project's Warriors To Work, where she managed a team of six career specialists supporting veterans and their families in finding careers. Previously, she was a consultant for a veteran nonprofit and led partnerships for Amazon's Last Mile Delivery Service Partner (DSP), assisting hundreds of candidates in launching small businesses in partnership with Amazon. As Director of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS), she developed and oversaw the creation of transition and employment programs. She also served as the Veteran Program Manager at the Virginia Employment Commission, overseeing the Bridge to Employment Program and the Jobs for Veterans Program. Additionally, Charlie coordinated leadership programs at the Federal Executive Institute under the Office of Personnel Management. Charlie served four years in the Navy, stationed in Yokosuka, Japan, and accompanied her husband on a four-year tour in Naples, Italy, as a military spouse. She is a mother of two boys, a sunset chaser, and an avid hiker. She holds a Bachelor's in Metaphysics and is currently pursuing her Master's in Metaphysics from the University of Metaphysics. Charlie volunteers as a mentor and speaker for Fresh Start Women's Foundation to help women improve their lives. She is also a board member at Extra Mile Pediatrics, a medical mission organization committed to providing repeated, quality care for children.



### **Andrew Parnell**

*Partnering with Department of Corrections to Assist Re-entry Veterans*

**Andrew Parnell** started with the Washington State Department of Corrections in 2014 as an A/C Cook at MCCCW before promoting to a Classification Counselor 2, then Classification Counselor 3, and eventually was awarded Classification Counselor of the Year, Command B, in 2020. He joined the Reentry Division as the first Resentencing Reentry Navigator for Western Washington in September 2021; this position was created in response to several state senate bills and supreme court decisions related to sentencing reform in Washington. As one of the first two Resentencing Navigators for the department, Andrew helped build a program that supported DOC staff and impacted individuals in managing the quickly changing sentencing environment to ensure individuals released with support back into their communities. Currently, Andrew works as a Corrections Specialist 4 with the Reentry Navigator unit where he serves as a liaison to the Veterans Administration and works closely with specialist navigators to ensure that justice involved veterans in DOC's care have access to resources and support for a successful reentry.



### **Jennifer Prewitt\***

*Suicide Prevention: Overcoming Veteran Stigma*

**Jen Prewitt** serves as the Lead Veteran Peer Specialist at the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs Suicide Prevention Team. She focuses on community education about suicide warning signs, leveraging her experience as a Certified Peer Counselor and Army Veteran. With military service from 2007 to 2015, including duty in Afghanistan and surviving the Fort Hood attack, Jen discovered a purpose in peer support. For eight years, she's dedicated herself to public service, creating safe spaces for veterans to share and heal. Through advocacy, she aims to destigmatize mental health issues for veterans. Jen's journey embodies remarkable dedication to suicide prevention.



### **Colin Reynolds**

*Using SkillSet: No-cost Options to Support Transitioning Service Members and Veterans*

Colin Reynolds brings over 15 years' experience as a classroom teacher, instructor, administrator, and consultant to Education Design Lab as a **Senior Education Designer** in Digital Transformation. Colin's projects include Experience You, Last Mile to Hire, and advises on projects related to learning and employment records, digital credentials, and open technology and learning standards. Prior to joining the Lab, Colin was the Vice President of Learning for Learning Economy Foundation, where he led projects related to open technology standards, learning and assessment design, and social architecture. Colin holds a Bachelor of Science in Education and a Master of Education in Leadership and Policy Studies. Colin is excited to join the Lab because he believes that individuals should be empowered through their lived experiences and wants to continue building systems that support learning and employment opportunities. HOMETOWN: Crookston, Minnesota, BACHELOR'S: B.S. Elementary Education, Valparaiso University, MASTER'S: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Loyola University Chicago,



### **Chesley Roberts**

*The Veterans Consortium: Legal Services for Veterans*

**Chesley Roberts** serves as the Deputy Director for The Veterans Consortium's Legal Assistance Programs. She began working at TVC in 2020 as an Equal Justice Works Fellow, sponsored by Lockheed Martin Corporation. During her fellowship, Chesley managed TVC's Women Veterans Legal Assistance Program (WVLAP) and focused on the unique legal issues women veterans face. In her current role, Chesley manages WVAP, where she assist women veterans, who are survivors of Military Sexual Trauma, with their claims for VA disability compensation. She also manages our Veterans Naturalization Assistance Program (VNAP), which assists veterans who are applying for U.S. citizenship through their military service. Chesley is a graduate of Florida State University- (B.S. 2017) and Stetson University- College of Law (J.D. 2020). While in law school, Chesley worked at Stetson's Veteran Advocacy



Clinic in St. Petersburg, Florida. She assisted veterans who were appealing decisions denying VA disability benefits.



**Wayne Robinson\***

*Entrepreneurship and AI: Veterans and Spouses Thriving in the Age of AI*

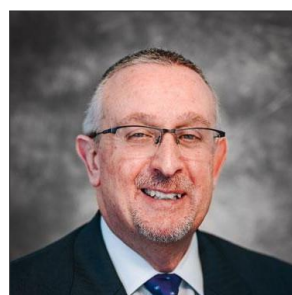
**Wayne Robinson**, a retired US Army Command Sergeant Major, exemplifies leadership excellence. After earning his MBA from the prestigious University of Chicago Booth School of Business, he leveraged his military experience for success in the business world. Robinson's impact extends far beyond his work with veterans (securing an extra year of GI Bill education for STEM fields) and advising the Secretary of VA. He's become a current AI champion as the Global Head of Talent Management at an AI-first company (Moderna), demonstrating his adaptability and forward-thinking approach. His diverse career path includes Wall Street experience, consulting, thought leadership for Google, Deloitte, and currently Moderna. Robinson's unique skills and access to top companies make him a highly sought-after advisor for entrepreneurs and business leaders globally.



**Clint Romesha\***

*I Just Wanted to Serve*

**Clint Romesha** is a retired United States Army soldier who received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Kamdesh in 2009 during the War in Afghanistan while serving with Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. After leaving service in 2011, he moved to North Dakota to work in the oil and gas industry. When presented with the MoH in 2013, he was the fourth living recipient for the Global War on Terrorism. [Medal of Honor citation](#) | [Video](#)



**Scott B. Sanders**

*Mark Sanders Award; NASWA Update*

**Scott B. Sanders** is NASWA's President and Chief Executive Officer. Scott manages the association of state administrators who handle workforce training, unemployment insurance, employment services, employment statistics, labor market information programs and veteran reemployment. The association provides advocacy at the national level for a more effective workforce system, and engages with the US Department of Labor, employers and the public. Scott currently serves on the national board for Job for America's Graduates (JAG), the UWC Foundation and the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES). He previously served on the US Department of Commerce's 25-member American Workforce Policy Advisory Board. Prior to joining NASWA in October 2014, Scott served as the Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. He was responsible for managing the operations of the agency, its 1,000+ employees, WorkOne offices across the state, and its \$2+ billion-dollar expenditures. Scott received his master's in business administration from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, and his bachelor's in accounting from Miami University. His son served in the US Navy for eight years after graduating from the US Naval Academy in 2012, and his father and brother are both veterans.



### **Shane Sawyer\***

*One Tool, Many Applications: How the NLx Makes a Difference in Veterans Employment*

Burlington Iowa native, **Shane Sawyer** joined the United States Air Force July 13th, 1999, at 19 years of age. He began his career as an Aircraft Maintenance Technician. In 2011 Shane retrained into the Flight Engineer Career field where he later went on to crew on the AC-130W Spectre gunship. In this capacity Shane served as a Flight Chief for the 16th Special Operations Squadron. In his time with the 16th Shane would fly close air support missions for our nation's special operations forces, in the fight against the Taliban, ISIS, and many more. After his retirement from the Air Force in August of 2019, Shane redeployed to Iraq as a government contractor in 2020. He later relocated to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to become a Veteran Career Planner (DVOP) for IowaWORKS. There he relocated to the Davenport office where he lives with his wife Lorinda and his daughter Audrey Sawyer. Shane found "purpose in people" as he tirelessly works to provide employers with top veteran talent and provide support for transitioning servicemembers and their spouses. Shane sits on the Muscatine County Commission for Veteran Affairs and is the co-founder of the Muscatine Veterans Network. A professional networking event that aims to link employers, resource providers, higher education, and local leadership with the veteran and military communities. His goal is that every Veteran find their tribe and their passion. Discover purpose driven living in an effort to strengthen the community as a whole within the state of Iowa.



### **Megan Schlitt**

*Unlocking the Power of Credentials: Strategies for Quality Selection*

**Megan Schlitt** brings extensive experience in research, policy analysis, qualitative analysis, data collection, and evaluation on projects related to civilian credentialing for Service members and the issues surrounding the transition from military service to the civilian sector. She has provided support to military Service members by providing information on the credentialing and licensure process and has worked with civilian certification agencies to address gaps between military training and experience and civilian credential requirements. In her current role as Standards Lead at Solutions for Information Design (SOLID), Megan and her team support the DOD Credentialing Standards vetting process for civilian credentials that appear on the military services' Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) websites, evaluating civilian credentials against established criteria to ensure the credentials meet Department of Defense (DOD) standards for inclusion on the COOL websites. This involves collaboration on the evaluation of credentials with relevant stakeholders to include the military services, credentialing agencies and a psychometric consultant.



**Rosa Schmidt**

*Veterans Needed for America's Clean Energy Workforce*

**Rosa Schmidt** is Director of Members Services and Veteran Programming for the Center for Energy Workforce Development. She has been with CEWD for over 10 years and serves as advisor and lead consultant for the Northeast, MidAtlantic, South and Southeast Regions of the country. She provides coaching to companies and consortia on strategy and workforce development solutions. She also leads the Troops to Energy Jobs initiatives as well as managing the Contractor Community of Practice. Before CEWD, Rosa worked at PSEG as a Human Resources leader where she led major initiatives in organization development, change management, talent acquisition/ management, strategic staffing, and training. She has over 20 years in workforce and leadership development, performance management, career planning, and succession planning. She has also served as an adjunct instructor for Executive and Professional Education at Rutgers University, in New Jersey. Rosa holds a Masters in Organization Development/ Human Resource Management from American University and a Bachelor in Human Resource Management from Upsala College.



**Kevin Schmiegel\***

*Creating Military Thriving™ Cultures and Communities - Changing the Narrative*

**Kevin Schmiegel** is Chief Executive Officer at [ZeroMils](#) -- a social impact Veteran owned business based in Washington DC that connects corporations, foundations and individuals with best-in-class nonprofits to create military thriving communities. In his current role, Schmiegel helps Fortune 500 companies build a military thriving culture that hires, values, and retains Veterans and Military Spouses; is supportive of them through purpose-driven nonprofits at the national and local level; and tells that story through their Veteran and other diversity employee resource groups and an effective marketing strategy. A retired Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel, Schmiegel worked at the highest levels of the Department of Defense, deploying to more than 50 countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. At the end of his 20 year military career, Colonel Schmiegel served as the Aide de Camp to the NATO and U.S. European Commander from 2003 to 2005, the Head of Enlisted Assignments at Headquarters Marine Corps from 2006 to 2007 where he spearheaded the assignment and retention of 172,000 Marines worldwide during a time of war; and as the military assistant to the Special Envoy for Middle East Regional Security working on the peace process between Israel and Palestine throughout 2008. Kevin is a mission-focused leader with a proven track record for rapidly scaling organizations and a reputation for delivering significant results across the biggest organizations and employers across the public and private sectors. Upon retirement from the Marine Corps in 2009, Schmiegel pursued his life's work to strengthen communities and bridge the civilian-military divide. He first served as the Chief of Staff at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce from 2009 to 2011 and then founded Hiring Our Heroes (HOH) there, quickly growing HOH into the largest Veteran and Military Spouse employment nonprofit in the country. As the CEO of two other national military and veteran nonprofits, Schmiegel gained a reputation for growth and development and creating change on the most pressing issues facing the military and veteran community at large . Raising \$100 million for these causes over a decade, Kevin and

the teams he led have impacted more than 10 million Americans, in and out of uniform. He is a proud husband to Laura and a father of five.



**Laura Schmiegel<sup>^</sup>**

*Thank You, Next! The Private Sector’s Role in Veteran Employment in an Age of Negative Unemployment*

**Laura Schmiegel** is currently the Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at Orion Talent where she is responsible for driving new business for Orion through collaboration with government, nonprofit and private sector institutions. One result is Orion’s HireSkills initiative, which pipelines junior enlisted military talent into high-paying skilled manufacturing careers.

Prior to joining Orion, Laura was the Head of Military and Veteran Affairs at Booz Allen Hamilton, where she was responsible for all aspects of the firm’s military partnership strategy and for advising the firm’s military recruiting, diversity and government relations teams. While at Booz Allen, Laura created their MilTech Initiative, increasing both recruiting and retention of cleared technical military talent, and was awarded Booz Allen’s highest honor, the Booz Allen Excellence Award, for her work developing their national award-winning Military Spouse Business Resource Group, including the Group’s role in creating federal legislation to help military spouses who work in government contracting find remote work. Laura’s career began in military nonprofits. She was a founding member and later Chairman of the Board at Blue Star Families. She created and for four years served as the first Director of the military spouse program at Hiring Our Heroes. Laura earned her law degree from the University of Michigan. She has been published in the Washington Post and the Christian Science Monitor and has served on the advisory boards of VetsInTech, VetsJobs/SpouseJobs, as a Trustee at the Virginia Veterans Services Foundation and as Chair of the US Chamber of Commerce Hiring Our Heroes Military Spouse Employment Advisory Council.



**Donald Seese\***

*Suicide Prevention: Overcoming Veteran Stigma*

**Don Seese**, originally from San Diego, California, currently resides in Lacey, Washington, where he serves as the Region 2 Suicide Prevention Peer Specialist for the Washington State Department of Veteran’s Affairs. With 13 years of service in the US Army as a Cavalry Scout, Don transitioned from military life to pursue higher education. He earned a Bachelor of Social Work

from Saint Martin’s University in 2022, focusing on Trauma and Substance Use Disorder, followed by a Master of Social Work from Columbia University in 2023, specializing in Veteran, children, and Prolonged Grief Disorder. Passionate about giving back to his community, Don dedicates his free time to volunteering with several local organizations. His commitment to service extends beyond his military career, as he previously worked as a Victim Advocate for the Thurston County Prosecutor’s Office, providing crisis interventions and developing programs to support juvenile victims. Don’s diverse experiences and education equip him with the skills and empathy to support fellow veterans, their families, and communities, making life after service meaningful and enjoyable.



**Morgan Shepard-Vierra\***

*Connecting with Veterans on the Transition Journey*

**Morgan Shepard-Vierra** is a seasoned Human Capital Consultant with a unique blend of military, educational, and corporate experience. With 16 years of service in the National Guard and 8 years as an educator, Morgan transitioned from active duty to the corporate sector in 2021, bringing a wealth of knowledge and leadership in Learning & Development. Her expertise spans over a decade in curriculum design, implementation, and assessment, making her a force in organizational training and development. A dynamic leader, Morgan is adept at using her experiences to serve as an instrument of change, particularly in supporting the growth and transitions of military spouses and veterans. Her dedication to these communities is fueled by her own journey as a Military Veteran and former classroom teacher, which allows her to connect authentically and advocate passionately for their unique needs. Morgan's approach is characterized by a blend of authenticity and vulnerability, employing candid communication to highlight and address the challenges faced by these groups. Morgan's mission is clear: to foster environments that recognize and amplify the voices and needs of public servants such as teachers, veterans, and military spouses. She is dedicated to ensuring their successful integration and growth in every aspect of professional life. By focusing her efforts on these pivotal groups, Morgan aims to create initiatives that not only acknowledge their contributions but also enhance their professional trajectories, ensuring that their unique experiences and skills are respected and utilized across industries.



**Jon Smyrl\***

*Connecting with Veterans on the Transition Journey*

**Jon Smyrl** grew up in the greater area of Philadelphia, PA. He attended Penn State University on an ROTC scholarship. Immediately after graduating, he served on Active Duty across multiple duty stations such as Fort Drum and Fort Leavenworth, including a deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. After finishing his time of service, he completed his MBA at Auburn University. His corporate path started with Amazon and now he continues his dedication to serving fellow Veterans at SaraWorks and lives in the Kansas City area.



**Bill Stierle**

*Emotionally and Mentally Safe: Fostering Well-being in the Workplace*

**Bill Stierle** provides a powerful and groundbreaking understanding of everyday language which enables people to interact and communicate in a healthy, compassionate, and productive way. Over the last 37 years, Bill has been sharing the keys that unlock the secrets to how people's thinking, behaving, and beliefs impact their quality of life. What began with his search to understand difficult personal interactions led to a consulting career that transforms personal relationships as well as the companies and executives who experience his work. Bill has mastered a unique blend of emotional intelligence expertise which accelerates your understanding

of emotions and language and supports you to communicate effectively. People who work with him experience how simple changes in language dramatically improve every aspect of life.



**Tom Summers\***

*Promising Practices – Oregon: Incorporating Peer Support Methodology in DVOP Practice*

**Tom Summers** is a DVOP with the Oregon Employment Department. He currently is assigned to WorkSource Oregon Gresham and serves East Multnomah County. Before becoming a DVOP in 2020, Tom served as a US Army Medic (1970-1973). He holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Florida and an AA in Social Sciences from Sante Fe College. He also holds a Certificate of Labor Studies from Florida International University. Tom has worked as a postal worker, children’s case worker, emergency shelter manager, and is an active volunteer to the homeless community in Portland, Oregon. He is also a Certified Peer Counselor.



**Vernon Taylor\***

*Recruit, Retain and Promote: Connecting Veterans to Employers*

**Vernon Taylor** was born in rural Georgia. At age 18, he joined the U.S. Army and completed 3 years’ active duty in Germany. Upon completion of military service, he remained in Germany for a total of 25 years. While there, he worked for the U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps, University of Maryland, and Boston University,. He held positions as a Learning Center Director, an Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor, Confinement Facility Counselor, Drug and Alcohol Counselor, University Field Representative, Guidance Counselor, and Education Services Officer. In May 1996, Mr. Taylor became the Director, Off Duty Voluntary Education (VOLED) at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, DC. – the predecessor of the **Lifelong Learning Program**, where Mr. Taylor was appointed Director. He was responsible for policy, guidance, funding and procedure for its worldwide academic program that provides services to approximately 174,000 active duty Marines and their family members. **The Lifelong Learning Program** consists of programs for Afloat College Education, Tuition Assistance, Marine Corps Satellite Education Network, Servicemember Opportunity College of the Marine Corps, Apprenticeship Program, Veterans Education Benefits, DOD Dependent Education Association for the Marine Corps, Libraries, and Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. In August 2000, Mr. Taylor became the Head, Personal Services Branch (MRR) at Headquarters, U.S. Marines Corps, Quantico, VA. He is responsible for full legal compliance, implementation, administration and evaluation for the Lifelong Learning, Prevention and Intervention and Mobility Programs. He holds an undergraduate degree in Law Enforcement, Business & Management, and Social Science from the University of Maryland, and a graduate degree in Guidance and Counseling from Boston University



### **Maria Temiquel**

*USDOL VETS Listening Sessions*

**Maria E. Temiquel** serves as the Director of Grants and Training at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). She brings extensive experience in workforce development and strategic planning. Ms. Temiquel has made significant contributions to various areas within the federal domain. As the Director of Grants and Training at the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service, she oversees the management and administration of grants and training. She has successfully formulated and executed program budgets, established program goals, and developed national policies and processes that have improved the quality and efficiency of the programs. She has also received several awards and recognitions for her outstanding leadership and performance, including the prestigious White House Leadership Development Program Fellowship. Prior to her current role, she held pivotal roles in the Office of Job Corps at the DOL and served as a Program Coordinator of Multicultural Educational Services at Sauk Valley and Rock Valley Community Colleges through Western Illinois University. She started her career as a counselor in a Federal Trio Program at Northern Illinois University, positively impacting the lives of many students. Beyond her professional career, she demonstrates a deep commitment to volunteerism and community service, involving esteemed organizations such as the United Service Organization (USO) and the Honor Flight network. She also served as a Trustee and former Chair of the Sigma Lambda Gamma Education Foundation, exemplifying her passion for empowering women through education and opportunity. Throughout her career and volunteer efforts, she consistently demonstrates exceptional leadership, unwavering commitment to excellence, and a dedication to making a positive impact on the lives of those she serves.



### **Merryl Tengesdal\***

*A Fireside Chat. Embracing the Challenge: Where the Beauty Lies?*

**Merryl Tengesdal**, a remarkable woman from The Bronx, New York, born in 1971, had her eyes set on the stars from a young age. She nurtured a dream of becoming an astronaut, fueled by her fascination with flying and the space program. Merryl's journey kicked off when she graduated from the University of New Haven with a degree in electrical engineering, being one of only three women in her program. She was also a part of the basketball team and the ROTC during her time there. In 1994, after her time at Officer Candidate School, she stepped into the Navy as a commissioned officer. Merryl started her flying career as a Naval Aviator, piloting the SH-60B Seahawk Helicopter from Naval Station Mayport, Florida. Her assignments took her to various parts of the world including the Middle East, South America, and the Caribbean. After some years, Merryl transitioned to a role as a flight instructor, where she shined, earning high praise from her own instructors and those she trained. Her ambition didn't stop there. Merryl transitioned to the Air Force, where she achieved a historic milestone. She became the first and only Black woman to pilot the U-2 spy plane, also known as The Dragon Lady. This feat wasn't just a personal achievement; it was a groundbreaking moment that brought her closer to her childhood dreams. Flying the U-2 took Merryl to various locations worldwide, fulfilling critical reconnaissance missions. She logged over 1,000 flight hours in the U-2, showcasing her skill and dedication to her craft. On the ground, Merryl took on significant responsibilities too. She served as the Director of Inspections for The Air Force Inspector

General, ensuring the readiness and effectiveness of Air Force units. Merryll's quest for knowledge was insatiable. She furthered her education by earning a Masters of Aeronautical Science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Her career saw her rising to the position of Director of Inspections at the Pentagon, a testament to her skill and dedication. Yet, despite the high ranks and accolades, Merryll remained as grounded and focused as the young girl dreaming of the stars in The Bronx. In 2017, Merryll retired from her remarkable military career. Yet, her legacy continues to inspire countless individuals to chase their dreams, no matter how high they aim.



**Hannah Toney, Ed.D.**

*US DOL Listening Sessions; The National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI):  
Unlocking your Veteran Service Provider Superpowers with NVTI*

**Hannah R. Toney** is a Director in Custom Learning Solutions at Management Concepts and serves as a program manager and the curriculum director for NVTI. She has a background in instructional systems design and consulting services. Prior to her current career, Hannah spent eight years working in the theatrical arts and education, writing state-wide standards and presenting research nationally. She also taught asynchronous and traditional college courses focused on curriculum design, educational philosophy, and theatre. Hannah holds a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, a Masters of the Art of Teaching, and a BFA in design and technical theatre. In her free time, she enjoys painting, creating wheel thrown pottery, gardening, and hanging out on her farm with her pack of rescue dogs.



**Sue Trobaugh\***

*Promising Practices – Iowa: Why and How to Advocate for Veteran Resource Rooms*

**Sue Trobaugh** is a Sioux City native, born and raised. I proudly served in the U.S. Air Force and now serve fellow Veterans as a Veteran Career Planner. I was a participant in the Chapter 31 VR&E program after discharge and completed my Bachelor's Degree in Accounting at Penn State. After working in the accounting field for both private and government venues, I decided it was time for a change. I started working as the Veteran Career Planner in my hometown in 2020, took on the role of Team Lead in 2023, and enjoy every moment. When I am not working, I spoil my grandchildren and love to travel with my husband.



**Hyacinth Tucker\***

*Veteran Business Owners: Pathway to Success*

**Hyacinth Tucker** is an Army Veteran and the proud owner of The Laundry Basket LLC, a leading mobile laundry and dry-cleaning delivery service catering to the Greater DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia areas. With a strong commitment to excellence and service, Hyacinth has leveraged her military background to instill discipline, efficiency, and attention to detail into every aspect of her business operations. During her time in the Army, Hyacinth honed invaluable leadership skills and a strong work ethic, laying the foundation for her entrepreneurial journey. Inspired by her



military experience and a desire to serve her community, she founded The Laundry Basket LLC with a vision to revolutionize the way people approach laundry chores, offering unparalleled convenience and quality service to her customers.



**Christopher Tyson\***

*Serving Your Client Through Understanding: Military Cultural Competency*

**Christopher J. Tyson** is a former U.S. Navy nuclear engineer, now registered patent attorney, with over sixteen years of experience handling complex IP litigation, transactional matters, and prosecution matters for clients ranging from some of the world's largest technology companies to startup companies and individual inventors. Most recently, Chris was part of a Duane Morris trial team that secured what has been described as the largest defense victory in the history of patent litigation, a complete win (on non-infringement) in a multi-billion dollar patent infringement bench retrial in the Eastern District of Virginia's rocket docket. Chris's current practice is primarily in patent litigation matters before federal courts throughout the country, including in Texas, Delaware and California, and in post-grant proceedings before the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB). In patent litigation matters, Chris leads the technical team responsible for distilling down the merits and strategies of the infringement and validity aspects of the case, as well as for interfacing with client engineers and technical experts, and overseeing substantive discovery. Chris also regularly argues at claim construction (Markman) and dispositive motion hearings at the district court level, and has argued several appeals at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. In PTAB post-grant proceedings, Chris serves as lead counsel, from drafting the initial petitions through arguing in final Trial hearings and is a valued contributor to the firm's PTAB practice group that is consistently ranked as the best in the country at representing petitioners in inter partes review (IPR) proceedings. See Unified Patents' institutional success index (2018-2023). In addition to his litigation and PTAB practice, Chris prosecutes patent and trademark applications before the United States Patent and Trademark Office, counsels clients on the development, commercialization and licensing of their intellectual property, and drafts and negotiates patent, trademark, software and know how license agreements. Chris is also widely recognized as a staunch advocate for U.S. military veterans and has more than a decade of experience representing clients pro bono before the U.S. Court of Appeals of Veterans Claims, Board of Veterans Appeals, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and branch-specific Discharge Review Boards and Boards of Correction for Military Records. Chris also serves as a firm-wide mentor to attorneys representing U.S. military veteran clients in cases before these courts and agencies, and as a mentoring attorney to junior attorneys of The Veterans Consortium's National Volunteer Corps. Prior to his legal career, Chris served for over eight years as an officer in the U.S. Navy, where he managed the operation and maintenance of nuclear power plants in a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, including electrical power generation and distribution, and mechanical and propulsion plant systems, and was qualified as a nuclear engineering officer. Chris is a 2010 graduate of George Mason University School of Law, Virginia Juris Doctorate), a 2007 graduate of Old Dominion University, Virginia (Master of Engineering Management), and a 1999 graduate of the United States Naval Academy (Bachelor of Science, Ocean Engineering).



**Brandon Webb\***

*The National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI): Unlocking your Veteran Service Provider Superpowers with NVTI*

Brandon retired from the Air Force with over 22 years of service. He has a background in training, education, and program management. He has experience with the JVSG, HVRP, and TAP programs as well as USERRA and Veterans' Preference investigations. Brandon has been with VETS for 7 years and served as the NVTI Lead for 3 years.



**Jimmie Weeks\***

*Franchising 101: Go into Business for Yourself, But Not By Yourself!*

**Jimmy Weeks** is a seasoned entrepreneur and veteran advocate with over 12 years of active-duty service in the Air Force and a distinguished career in digital marketing and software development spanning more than two decades. Following a robust military career where he worked in hospital administration settings and earned a degree in Healthcare Management, Jimmy founded a digital marketing agency in 2001, specializing in digital marketing. His innovative approach led to the creation of the first multi-location dashboard in the franchising space in 2010, nearly half a decade before Google. In 2014, he pivoted his focus towards expanding his software as a service (SaaS) platform, Internet Strategy Labs, which provides unbiased marketing analytics and data transparency. This platform quickly became a trusted tool among brands and veteran-owned businesses, earning a rare Grow with Google Partnership due to its impartial insights. A dedicated member of the VetFran committee for six years, Jimmy passionately combines his military experience with his expertise in franchising to support franchise brands and veteran entrepreneurs alike. He also recently founded [CoverYourSix.com](https://CoverYourSix.com), a community based portal exclusively for veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs, leveraging his innovative SaaS solutions to empower small business owners with actionable analytics. Jimmy's commitment to service and innovation continues to impact the franchising world and the veteran community, making him a respected leader and a visionary in his field.



**Karen White**

*Unlocking the Power of Credentials: Strategies for Quality Selection*

**Karen White** has over 25 years of professional experience providing services to public and private sector organizations in the areas of program evaluation, policy research, data analysis and survey research. At Solutions for Information Design (SOLID), Karen has focused on the translation of military skills and experience to the civilian workforce and the identification of related credentials and pathways for military professionalization and transition. She currently serves as Program Manager for SOLID's military credentialing portfolio, which includes the research and analytical

processes that provide the foundation for the implementation of the military services' Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) programs and the MilGears, Powered by COOL, application.



**Kayla Williams \*^**

*Recent Research on Servicemembers' Military Transitions and Civilian Jobs*

**Kayla Williams** is a Senior Policy Researcher at the RAND Corporation; her focus areas include optimizing policies and programs to support veterans and military personnel. She was most recently Assistant Secretary of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs. She was previously a senior fellow and director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at Center for a New American Security and prior to that served as Director of the Center for Women Veterans at VA. Kayla formerly spent eight years at RAND researching servicemember and veteran health needs and benefits, international security, and intelligence policy. Ms. Williams was enlisted for five years and authored the memoirs *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* and *Plenty of Time When We Get Home: Love and Recovery in the Aftermath of War*. Kayla has a BA from Bowling Green State University and an MA from American University. She has served on the Department of Labor Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach, Army Education Advisory Committee, and VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.



**Dennis Wimer\***

*Opening Ceremonies - The National Anthem; Partnership Update*

**Dennis Wimer** started his military career at Undergraduate Navigator Training at Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, California where he received the Paul F. Lorence Award as the top navigator student. Upon graduation, he served in the 16 Airlift Squadron at Charleston Air Force Base as a C-141B Starlifter Navigator. His last duty assignment was at McGuire Air Force Base in Wrightstown, New Jersey. At McGuire, Dennis became the first operations officer for McGuire AFB's C-141B Special Operations Low Level II squadron. At the same time, he completed his MBA at the University of Pennsylvania. After leaving the Air Force, Dennis worked in multiple sectors of the economy, small private businesses, large public enterprise, non-profit, government and higher education. He has worked at companies like McKinsey & Company, Eli Lilly & Company, ExaroMed LLC, Lutheran Child and Family Services of Indiana and Kentucky, Butler University and most recently his family business LADS Consulting, LLC. Dennis was appointed Deputy Commissioner, field operations in the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. In this capacity, he led multiple state and federal programs including the Jobs for Veterans State Grants, ReEmployment Services Program, Trade Adjustment Assistance. Dennis started the Hoosier Initiative to Re-employ Ex-offenders (HIRE) and the Indiana Robotics Initiative. Dennis served on the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) board and was the chair of the NASWA Veteran Affairs Committee. Dennis is honored to be selected by Governor Eric Holcomb to serve as the Executive Director of the Indiana Department of Veterans' Services. He brings a servant's mindset to the department and is excited to lead the department to serve Indiana's Veterans and their families. Dennis has been married for 30 years and has two children. He is passionate about coaching youth soccer and enjoys the time it gives him with his

children and their friends. He currently serves as President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs.



**Michael Witt**

*One Tool, Many Applications: How the NLx Makes a Difference in Veterans Employment*

**Michael Witt** is the Community & State Outreach Manager for DirectEmployers Association (DE). DE is a non-profit member association built by employers, for employers. After 21 years of service with Iowa Workforce Development, including as the Division Administrator of Field Operations, he works closely with DE's 1k+ Member companies to implement better strategies for improved recruitment and retention of Veterans, as well as connect them with Jobs for Veterans State Grant teams and American Job Centers throughout the country. He also works closely with DE Partners to increase the employment and advancement of Veterans in the workforce.



**Charlette K. Woodard\***

*Welcome to Washington DC*

**Colonel (retired) Charlette K. Woodard**, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) is a native Washingtonian and assuming this role enables her to continue contributing to the veteran community. Before joining Mayor Browner's Administration, she served our country for 30 years in the Department of the Army as a senior Human Resources officer specializing in Human Resources Management, Strategic Planning, and Operation Management. Over her years of experience, she has a proven track record of providing strategic leadership in personnel management, including recruitment, compensation policy, and career development. She is adept at building and maintaining solid relationships with internal and external stakeholders, ensuring effective collaboration and communication. Ms. Woodard's career encompasses various assignments within and outside the United States including two deployments in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her most recent assignment was as the Assistant Director of Reserve Compensation at the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)/Military Personnel Policy, Military Compensation Policy at the Pentagon. In this role, her responsibilities covered a broad spectrum of personnel management and compensation policies that profoundly impacted the Reserve Component (RC) workforce of the United States Armed Forces. Notably, Ms. Woodard graduated from the National War College, Fort McNair, Washington, DC, where she engaged in strategic planning for national security with government and non-government entities, including abroad studies in Nigeria and Africa. Before her tenure at the National War College, Ms. Woodard had an honor and was the first black female to command Devens Reserve Force Training Area (Fort Devens) in Devens, MA. Colonel (retired) Woodard has held numerous leadership positions throughout her career, including Personnel Officer Branch Chief within the Headquarters Department of the Army, Military Personnel Directorate at the Pentagon; the Director of Human Resources for the 377th Theater Sustainment Command in Belle Chasse, LA; Executive Officer to the Army Reserve Command Deputy Chief in Washington; Human Resources commander in Decatur, GA and Kuwait; Equal Opportunity Advisor; Postal Commander in Iraq; and Human Resources Officer. Colonel (retired) Woodard has received numerous awards and decorations,

including the Defense Superior Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, and Joint Service Commendation Medal.



**Elaine Zavala**

*Promising Practices – Texas: Helping Veterans Starts Here*

**Elaine Zavala** is the Fund for Veterans’ Assistance Director at the Texas Veterans Commission. Governor Greg Abbott appointed Ms. Zavala to the State Employee Charitable Campaign Advisory Committee in 2017. The committee advises the comptroller and the state policy committee in adopting rules and establishing procedures for the campaign. She is a member of the Texas State Set-Aside Committee for the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program. The committee allocates federal FEMA funds for food and shelter. She also serves as President of the American Society of Public Administration’s Central Texas Chapter. The chapter is dedicated to advancing the teaching and practice of public and non-profit administration. Ms. Zavala is a member of the State Agency Council, which provides support to the Governor’s Commission for Women and offers professional development training to its members. She also serves as a board member of the Young Catholic Professionals Austin Chapter, which connects young professionals in their 20’s and 30’s to grow in their Catholic faith. Elaine earned a Bachelor of Science in Advertising from The University of Texas at Austin and a Master of Public Administration from Texas State University.

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**Please note:**

- The information in italics under each individual’s name indicates the conference session(s) they are participating in.
- An \* denotes an individual is currently serving or is a Veteran of the United States military.
- An ^ denotes the individual is or has been a military spouse.