



# 25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025



## The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Women's Health Department honors 25 Women Veterans Leaders

Women veterans were nominated for their extraordinary leadership, contributions, and commitment to the women veteran community. Illinois is the home to women veterans who served our nation with courage and sacrifice. They have contributed to the women veteran's community as advocates, innovators, and elected officials.

Thank you to all those who nominated these stunning veterans and to all Illinois women veterans. We are grateful for your service and admire your resilience and courage.

IDVA welcomes all women veterans to join a community to support one another, share stories, and access resources. To learn more, visit: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/programs/women.html> . IDVA is here for you.



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
**VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM





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## Alejandra Hernandez

Alejandra is a distinguished Marine Corps veteran whose remarkable leadership and unwavering commitment to the veteran communities have left an indelible mark on countless lives. Alejandra has successfully created awareness around the unique challenges women and LGBTQIA+ veterans face. Alejandra advocated to the clinical leadership at The Road Home Program, where she has worked since

2022, to create a "specialty cohort" for LGBTQIA+ veterans, which will take place in June 2025.

Alejandra Hernandez served in the United States Marine Corps for four years as a Food Service Specialist with Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Headquarters. She was stationed at the Marine Support Squadron 272 Marine Corps Air Station New River, NC, and was deployed in 2007 to Kuwait, Camp Al Asad, and Camp TQ Air Base. After her time in service, Alejandra attended Waubesa Community College. She later received a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Illinois Chicago.

She is a member and secretary of the American Veterans for Equal Rights Chapter in Chicago and the Women Marines Association President, IL-4 MAJGEN Angela Salinas Chapter.



## Amanda Depew

Amanda Depew served in the United States Air Force during Enduring Freedom (2004-2005) as a Munitions System Apprentice. Her military experience showed her passion for veteran advocacy and led her to focus on suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and increasing access to vital services for veterans and their families.

Amanda is a licensed clinical social worker and the Southern Region Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement Specialist for Illinois Joining Forces. She is committed to bridging the gap between veterans and essential resources and ensuring they receive the support they deserve.

Amanda is also an active member of VFW Post 1739 in Belleville and American Legion Post 199 in Edwardsville, demonstrating her commitment to veteran service organizations and community engagement.



## Cassandra Taylor

U.S. Army Veteran

Cassandra Taylor, U.S. Army veteran and Founder and CEO of veteran service organization Top Flight Defense, Inc., educates veterans on critical issues that shape daily life from wellness and reproductive health to mental health, financial literacy, and homelessness. Cassandra recruits experts to foster dialogue and deliver impactful education. She is a published author and has

shared her experiences and insights in *Why I Serve*, co-author of *"When a Woman's Fed Up."* She volunteers with K9 For Veterans, is a member of the National Association of Black Military Women, and proudly represents Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Since 2019, she has resided in Joliet, IL, where she continues to inspire and advocate for service members, veterans, and women leaders.

Cassandra served in the Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield, and Operation Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom. She continues to lead with compassion and purpose, building stronger, healthier communities wherever she serves.



## Stephanie Kifowit

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

State Representative Stephanie Kifowit represents the 84th District, serving communities in Aurora, Oswego, Naperville, and Montgomery since 2013. As the only female veteran and United States Marine in the General Assembly, she is Chairperson of Personnel & Pension Appropriations Committee, Vice-Chairperson of Veterans' Affairs Committee, and a Committee Member of General Service Appropriations Committee and Personnel

and Pension Committee.

While in the military, she served at Camp Pendleton, California, and Camp Foster, Okinawa, Japan.







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**Evamarie Duff**

U.S. Army and Illinois National Guard Veteran

Evamarie Duff, is a decorated veteran, a passionate advocate for women veterans, and an inspiring example of resilience, courage, and determination. Following military service, she joined the Joshua W. Harris Memorial VFW Post 2868, where she has held numerous leadership roles. She is also a member of the American Legion, Wounded Warrior Project, Order of the Eastern Star, Daughters of the American

Revolution, and DAV.

As an 88M Transportation soldier, Evamarie played a critical role in convoy security and transportation operations during her deployment to Camp Buehring, Kuwait, and LSA Anaconda, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Despite facing challenges, including a medical evacuation to Germany and the completion of her military career at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in May 2007, Evamarie's dedication to service and leadership only grew stronger.



**Ashley Tubruan**

U.S. Navy Veteran

Ashley Tubruan, U.S. Navy veteran, is a dedicated advocate, leader, and recent graduate of the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law, where she is focusing on the rights and well-being of veterans. Following her military service, Ashley became a police officer in suburban Chicago, where she became a leader on the force's Crisis Intervention Team and Crisis

Negotiation Unit. During law school, Ashley completed three semesters with the school's pro bono VA legal clinic for veterans. Her leadership and advocacy were instrumental in helping pass legislation to expand Illinois' definition of a "veteran," thereby increasing access to housing and healthcare for previously excluded groups.

Ashley plans to continue staying active in the veteran community and focusing on Military Sexual Trauma (MST) resources, counseling, and support groups in a private and safe environment. Ashley helped launch the national campaign "Face the Fight" in D.C. to assist veterans in crisis. Additionally, she plans to share her experiences with MST and help others gain confidence to succeed.



**Tamala Anderson**

U.S. Air Force Veteran

U.S. Air Force Veteran Tamala Anderson's trailblazing leadership brought a new voice to the table and opened doors for other women to step into roles of influence and impact within the veteran support system. She remains a fierce and unwavering voice for equity, recognition, and progress for women who have served.

With over 15 years of experience as a Veterans Service Officer at the DeKalb County Veterans Assistance Commission since October 2008, she has managed more than 5,000 veteran claims, which have changed lives through dedicated support and expert advocacy. Tamala broke barriers by becoming the Superintendent of a Veterans Assistance Commission, an achievement that was once considered nearly impossible for a woman. She remains a fierce and unwavering voice for equity, recognition, and progress for women who have served.

In the Air Force, she served for the Headquarters Office of Special Investigations and was a Military Training Instructor.



**Jill Henry**

U.S. Army Veteran

Jill Henry, a U.S. Army veteran, is the ambassador for the Women's Memorial, a one-of-a-kind tribute to America's Servicewomen, past and present. She is also a member of Post 635's Honor Guard. She helped coordinate the First All-Women Veteran Flight to Washington, DC, Operation HerStory, from the state of IL. She won Legionnaire of the Year for 2021-2022.

Jill began her military career in 1973 at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing Program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. After graduating with a BSN, followed by commissioning into the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in 1977, she specialized in Intensive Care Nursing. Following six years of ICU nursing, Jill was accepted into the Anesthesiology for ANC Officers Course, where she earned a Masters of Health Science as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA).

Jill served in Washington, D.C., Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, and Hawaii with a deployment to Saudi Arabia with the 15th Evacuation Hospital for Operation Desert Shield/Storm. Jill concluded her 20-year career in El Paso, TX, as an instructor in the Anesthesiology for ANC Officers Course. She attained the rank





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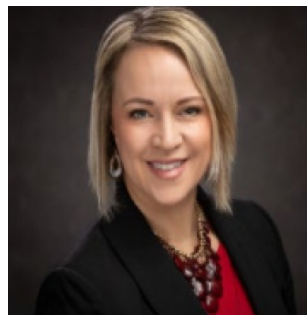
**Treasure Owens**  
United States Army Veteran

Treasure Owens is a six-year United States Army Veteran who served in Korea and Europe. She is the founder and chief executive officer of *Treasure Marketing*, which specializes in mission-driven businesses and nonprofits, with an emphasis on veteran services, youth programs, and criminal justice reform. Her clients include the National Veterans Art Museum, No Salt Sailing, Strugglebeard Bakery, and Merging

Veterans and Players. She has also provided informal consulting to organizations such as the Veterans Chamber of Commerce and Illinois Veterans for Change.

Additionally, Treasure served as a mentee, Program Facilitator, and past Social Media Manager for Ladies of Virtue, a nonprofit assisting girls ages nine to 18 in preparing for college and careers, and becoming change agents in their community. She served as one of the faces of its "This Black Girl Campaign," and spoke at its 2024 fundraiser, which raised over \$500,000 for the program.

Treasure has earned numerous accolades, including being named a Chicago Innovation Awards Nominee (2024), receiving the Jesse Brown Community Leader Award (2024), and the Project Management Institute's Team of the Year Award (2014). Her leadership, innovation, and passion continue to open doors and create new pathways for veterans, youth, and communities in need.



**Elisabeth Pennix**  
U.S. Navy Veteran

Elisabeth Pennix, an eight-year U.S. Navy veteran, was deployed to Iraq during the surge of forces in 2006-2007 and a Reserve deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba with the Military Commissions from 2015-2016. She began her law practice in the U.S. Navy JAG Corps in 2004.

Elisabeth served as the General Counsel for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Assistant

Chief Counsel with the Department of Homeland Security, and since 2021, she has been the Deputy General Counsel at Sloan Global Holdings.

In her continued service in the Navy Reserves, Elisabeth is a Captain, Appellate Judge, and is recalled to active duty as the Staff Judge Advocate for the Regional Reserve command at Great Lakes.

Elisabeth is actively engaged with multiple nonprofit organizations, including one she cofounded, Operation HerStory, which honors women in the U.S. Military. She also serves on the boards of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library (PMMML) and the Navy League, Chicago Council, and is an active member of Business Executives for National Security (BENS).



**Denisse Montoya**  
U.S. Air Force Veteran

Denisse Montoya, U.S. Air Force Veteran, is a Peruvian American dedicated to serving her nation and community. She has offered her experience in outreach, engagement, and advocacy to support veterans and their families across Illinois. Following her tenure at the Chicago VA Medical Center from 2016 to 2021, she continues to connect veterans with essential resources.

In December 2024, she brought her voice to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Roundtable on Veterans and Military Families, championing critical issues such as increased VA staffing, improved services for women Veterans, and the expansion of bilingual outreach programs.

Denisse has been a member of the VA Women's Improvement Network and the SheForce Committee under AllenForce, which empowers women impacted by the military with tools and resources. She also volunteers with Merging Vets and Players and assists with special events at Jesse Brown VA.

She supported a resolution honoring Women Veterans Day, which was adopted by the Chicago City Council. She has led, organized, and supported impactful events, including the Women Veterans Panel Discussion – I Served Too: The Female Veteran Perspective, the Women Veterans' Conference – Sisterhood of Service, the Women Veterans VA Health Enrollment and Claims Clinic, various Resource and Employment Fairs, and the Reds, Whites, and Rosé Women Veterans Day Celebration.



**Yvette Jones Swanson**  
U.S. Army Veteran

Yvette Jones Swanson, U.S. Army veteran, is the CEO of Vetmeters, LLC., where she designed transformative housing initiatives, including the Beverly Veterans Housing Plan and the Toriano Sanzone "Reformative Housing Models." She educates veterans through professional services, seminars, and public speaking. She has assisted 5,000 homeless veterans in homeownership,

written three books on veteran housing, and conducts workshops at the Jesse Brown VA Hospital.

Yvette is the Founder and CEO of 100 Pretty Purse for Female Veterans, a nationally recognized initiative dedicated to uplifting and celebrating women Veterans for over a decade. With a deep commitment to ensuring women veterans feel appreciated, especially during the holiday season, Yvette has led efforts that go beyond material gifts to foster connection, dignity, and recognition.





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**Ashtin Bader**

U.S. Navy veteran

Ashtin Bader, U.S. Navy veteran, is a passionate leader within The Fallen Outdoors, a non-profit which organizes outdoor adventures including hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping for veterans, active-duty service members, and Gold Star families. She has played a pivotal role in organizing and leading outdoor excursions that provide women veterans with

connection, healing, and adventure. Her inclusive leadership style creates a safe and empowering space where all participants, regardless of experience, feel welcomed and supported.

In 2024, Ashtin and her team facilitated outdoor adventures for over 475 veterans, with Ashtin personally driving 5,326 miles to support and lead events across the region. Her unwavering commitment to the mission was instrumental in helping the organization achieve its goals.

Beyond logistics and leadership, Ashtin serves as a mentor to fellow women veterans, sharing her expertise in outdoor skills while providing encouragement and guidance. She is deeply attuned to the unique challenges women veterans face and uses her platform to advocate for expanded access to outdoor opportunities and supportive networks.



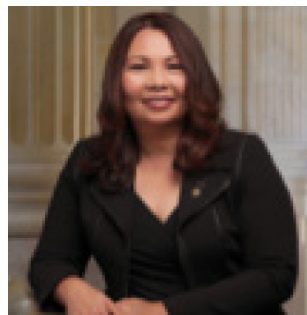
**Tyra Oliver**

U.S. Army Veteran

Tyra Oliver, U.S. Army veteran, served over 4,000 Service Members in supporting behavioral health needs, including walkabouts to check on military members, capability briefs with Commanders, and support that enhanced the fighting force. As the Commander, she promoted Soldiers and, despite many challenges, led a successful mission.

Tyra has been a Clinical Social Worker for more than 28 years, and a United States Army Reserves Major for 13 years. She has worked at UIC Women's Clinic and Inpatient Mother-Baby unit, providing effective therapy services, addressing complex cases, including trauma and crisis intervention.

Tyra is a Reconnection Workshop Facilitator for the American Red Cross, Services to the Armed Forces (SAF), offering support to military members both in garrison and deployed to ensure Service Members are able to continue their jobs in the face of behavioral health concerns.



**U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth**

U.S. Army Veteran

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth is an Iraq War Veteran, Purple Heart recipient and former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. She was among the first handful of Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Duckworth served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in

2014. She was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2016 after representing Illinois's Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives for two terms. In 2004, Duckworth was deployed to Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot for the Illinois Army National Guard. On November 12, 2004, her helicopter was hit by an RPG, and she lost her legs and partial use of her right arm.

Senator Duckworth spent the next year recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where she quickly became an advocate for her fellow Soldiers. After she recovered, she became Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, where she helped create a tax credit for employers that hire Veterans, established a first-in-the-nation 24/7 Veterans crisis hotline, and developed innovative programs to improve Veterans' access to housing and health care.

In 2009, President Obama appointed Duckworth as an Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs, where she worked to help end Veteran homelessness, address the unique challenges faced by female as well as Native American Veterans, and create the Office of Online Communications to improve the VA's accessibility for all Veteran generations. In the U.S. House, Duckworth was an advocate for working families and job creation, introducing bills like her bipartisan Friendly Airports for Mothers (FAM) Act—which is now law—to ensure new mothers have access to safe, clean and accessible lactation rooms when traveling through airports and helping lead passage of legislation that enhanced efforts to track and reduce Veteran suicides.

She also passed her Troop Talent Act to help returning Veterans find jobs in the private sector and worked to cut waste and fraud at the Pentagon and throughout government. As Senator, Duckworth is helping lead the charge to protect reproductive freedoms—including the IVF treatments that millions of American families, like her own, rely on to start and grow their families—and fully restore the protections of Roe v. Wade.

She also continues her lifelong mission of supporting, protecting and keeping the promises we've made to our Veterans as well as ensuring that we stand fully behind the troops our nation sends into danger overseas. She also continues her lifelong mission of supporting, protecting and keeping the promises we've made to our Veterans as well as ensuring that we stand fully behind the troops our nation sends into danger overseas.

And as a member of the Armed Services Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee and the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Duckworth, who has dedicated her life to serving America's servicemembers and Veterans, has continued building her strong record of leadership on national security and foreign policy issues, including successfully working to strengthen our relations with Indo-Pacific nations and improving security in the region and around the globe, all while also securing significant international investments in Illinois.





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**Rose E. Connolly**  
U.S. Air Force Veteran

Rose E. Connolly, a 23-year U.S. Air Force veteran, where she served primarily as an administrator with four years as an instructor. She has been deeply involved in veterans' organizations, holding leadership and lifetime memberships in groups such as the Air Force Sergeants Association, American Legion, VFW, AmVets, and Catholic War Veterans, where she

also serves as a historian and webmaster. Her contributions to veterans' causes have earned her numerous accolades, including Illinois Veteran of the Month (March 2011) and the 2022 DAR Outstanding Service for Veterans Award.

An active volunteer, Rose participates in Camp Butler Wreaths Across America, serves as Chaplain for the Interveterans Council of Sangamon County, and is a Veterans Assistance Commission board member. She is passionate about history, working as an interpreter for state historic sites, and giving presentations on military history, including the WWI Hello Girls and Civil War reenactments.

Beyond her advocacy and historical work, Rose is a dedicated therapy dog handler, training her dogs, Amber and Sophie, through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs. She also actively supports the Land of Lincoln Honor Flight and is currently learning American Sign Language to expand her outreach.

Her two sons, Sean and Alan, both U.S. Marine Corps veterans, continue the family tradition of service by working at Veterans Centers.



**Laura Doss**  
U.S. Army Veteran

Laura Doss, a thirteen-year veteran of the United States Army, served in the US Army Reserve, the Ohio Army National Guard, the United States Army, and the Illinois Army National Guard until her discharge on July 16, 2003. Laura held three Military Occupational Specialties (MOS): Cargo Specialist, Aircraft Structural, and Military Policeman. At her last unit of assignment, she

was a Sergeant (Promotable), serving as a Military Police Team Leader and Assistant Squad Leader with the 233rd Military Police Company. She was stationed in Germany for three years, served on training missions in Panama and Nicaragua, and at stateside locations. She was activated and remained stateside twice during her time in service for Desert Storm and Operation Noble Eagle. Laura's awards include the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal (with oak leaf cluster), the Good Conduct Medal, Primary Leadership Development Course ribbon, and the German Armed Forces Badge for Weapons Proficiency (Bronze Level).

Currently employed by Illinois College, Laura is the 1st Vice Commander AMVETS Post 100 in Jacksonville, State Commander for the AMVETS Department of Illinois, plays tuba in Jacksonville's Community Band, and serves on the Morgan County Combined Veterans Color Guard.

Laura graduated from MacMurray College in 2003 with a Bachelor of Science in History, minors in Political Science and Liberal Arts, and an Associate of Science in Criminal Justice. A native of Ohio, Laura currently resides in Jacksonville with her husband of nearly 32 years, Matt. They have four children.



**Dr. Renee Dickerson**  
U.S. Air Force Veteran

Dr. Renee Dickerson, a seven-year U.S. Air Force veteran, is the founder and CEO of Her Service Matters, LLC., and Victory Place, NFP. She has also worked in various mental health and social service programs, including the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs, the Department of Child and Family Services, and the Government of Guam. She specializes in community and

military trauma, the relationship between diagnosis and treatment, integration of womanist theory and psychodynamic knowledge, and the application of psychodynamic understanding to the problems of diverse clinical populations, trauma disorders, and dissociative symptoms.

Renee is alumni of the Institute for Clinical Social Work, a member of the NCNW, NAACP, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, the Chicago Center for Psychoanalysis, Division 39 (Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology), and the American Association for Psychoanalysis in Social Work, and the International Association for Psychoanalytic Self Psychology. Renee believes that we all can exceed our history of trauma and limitations. And that we all can live a happy, healthy, and more productive lifestyle. In her words, "working to grow into our better selves is a true possibility."



**Kimberly Yantis**  
U.S. Navy Veteran

Kimberly Yantis, U.S. Navy veteran, is a passionate advocate for veterans, currently serving as the Central Region Supervisor at the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs for the past five years. Before this role, she served for 13 years as the Superintendent at the Sangamon County Veterans Assistance Commission. With over 18 years of experience in supporting veterans in Illi-

nois, she has made a significant impact through her leadership and commitment to improving the lives of those who have served. Kimberly also proudly serves as the first female Commander of the Chatham-Auburn VFW, currently in her fifth year of leadership, where she continues to promote camaraderie and advocacy for fellow veterans.

Kimberly holds a Master's Degree in Human Services and is currently pursuing a Master's in Public Administration to enhance her ability to serve and lead in the public sector. Outside of her professional life, she enjoys spending time outdoors with her family, riding side-by-sides, and contributing to her community.



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**Nekohl Chantelle Johnson**

U.S. Army Veteran

Nekohl Chantelle Johnson, a U.S. Army veteran, is an educator and advocate committed to the empowerment and well-being of women veterans and trauma survivors. With over 35 years of experience in the clinical laboratory field, she has progressed from laboratory technician to director-level leadership, utilizing her expertise in healthcare, business, and education to develop

impactful programs that promote healing and growth.

As the Founder and President of Where We Meet, Inc., a nonprofit theatre company for veterans and trauma survivors, Nekohl harnesses the power of storytelling and the arts to facilitate healing. She is also the visionary behind Be Whole with Nekohl, a platform that equips women veteran leaders with resources, education, and custom tools to achieve wholeness in all aspects of life.

Beyond her nonprofit work, Nekohl is a health sciences professor in both college and private education sectors, shaping future leaders in healthcare. She is also a dedicated veteran community leader, having established multiple Veterans Coffee Chats across Chicagoland, creating safe spaces for veterans to connect, share resources, and support suicide prevention efforts.

She currently serves as the 2025 Ambassador for the Shero Coffee Club, the 16th District Women's Chairperson for VFW Illinois, Assistant to the State Women's Chairperson, and will ascend to State of Illinois VFW Women's Chairperson in June 2025. Nekohl is also a proud member of American Legion Post 800 and the National Women Veterans United.

A published author (A Queen Was Born Again), speaker, and evangelist, Nekohl's work is rooted in faith, resilience, and community. Through leadership, education, and innovative wellness initiatives, she continues to uplift and advocate for women veterans, ensuring they have the support and resources to thrive.



**Elizabeth D. Soto**

Illinois National Guard (ILARNG) Veteran

Elizabeth D. Soto, Illinois National Guard veteran, is a dedicated and trailblazing professional with a distinguished career in service and advocacy for veterans. From 2004 to 2013, she proudly served in the Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG), where she developed a strong commitment to duty and community.

Following her military service, Elizabeth transitioned to various government positions, bringing her expertise and dedication to public service. Her passion for supporting the veteran community led her to join the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC). It was in this role that Elizabeth discovered her true calling to work with and serve her fellow veterans. Her work in the veteran community with the VACCC has made a significant impact, culminating in her historic election as the first Latina female Superintendent in the entire 80-plus history of the commission. Elizabeth's groundbreaking achievement as Superintendent reflects not only her professional excellence but also her commitment to breaking barriers and paving the way for future generations. She brings a unique perspective to her role, combining her military background, government experience, and personal dedication to Veterans' issues. Elizabeth's journey highlights her dedication, leadership, and pioneering spirit.

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**Angela Walker**

U.S. Navy Veteran

Angela Walker, U.S. Navy veteran, advocates for veterans through participation and leadership in veteran service organizations including the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Lovell Federal Healthcare Facility, Edward Hines Veterans Hospital, Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Hospital, Military

Outreach USA, Rotary Club of North Chicago, and the PETS Council. Angela is a motivational speaker, community navigator, and advocate for veterans.

She is the Assistant Governor, District Membership Chair, and Council Member at Large for the PETS Council. She serves as a facilitator for the District Leadership Academy and is the District Literacy Chair. Angela also supports and promotes global grants through Rotary International, collaborating with multiple clubs.

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**Lisa Mannion**

U.S. Army Veteran

Lisa Mannion, U.S. Army Veteran, empowers women veterans and their families by volunteering at the Metro Achievement Center for Girls, where she teaches music to female veterans and their daughters. Through her "Strumming for Wellness Ukulele Workshop," she brings women veterans together to heal, bond, and find strength in music. It's a space where they

can share experiences, lift one another, and unleash their inner rockstars. Her mission is simple: to create a lasting community of empowered women, one strum at a time

Lisa is interning for a master's degree at the Veterans Village through Project Headspace and Timing, a homeless shelter for veterans, where she'll be leading art therapy for women. Her goal is to help them tap into their creativity, find healing, and build a sense of community.

Through many challenges, Lisa found that creativity was her secret weapon to clear her head and refocus her goals. She used songwriting as a reminder that she could control her future and turn adversity into strength.



**Milana Herman**

U.S. Army Veteran

Milana Herman, a U.S. Army veteran, is a dedicated and impactful leader, deeply committed to serving veterans and fostering success within the community. A former U.S. Army Personnel Administrative Support Specialist, Milana served active duty from 1989 to 1994 and continued in the reserves until 1997. Today, she brings her leadership skills to Rock Valley College, where

she serves as the Program Manager for Student Employment/Veterans Affairs. In this role, Milana advises the RVC Veterans Club and ensures that veterans are supported in their academic journey. In addition to her work at Rock Valley College, Milana is a passionate advocate for women veterans, making substantial contributions to the visibility and support of their unique needs.

She actively participates in the National Women Veterans United Rockford Chapter, is a member of VFW Ross Pearson Post 5149, and serves on the Advisory Board for the Vet Center. One of her proudest accomplishments is her involvement in the short film Take Your Own Notes, where her story is shared, alongside those of other women veterans, highlighting their sacrifices and invaluable service to their country. Milana's resilience in overcoming the challenges she faced as a woman in the military has made her a trailblazer for others.

She earned a Bachelor's in Psychology from Northern Illinois University and a Master's in Organizational Leadership from Judson University, further underscoring her commitment to personal growth and empowering others. Milana's unwavering belief in every individual's potential continues to inspire and uplift those around her.



**Vernessa Henderson**

U.S. Army Veteran

Major Vernessa L. Henderson, U.S. Army veteran, is a Logistics Officer currently assigned to the Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield, IL, where, for over 13 years, she has been the Liaison Advisor for the Military Entrance Processing Command in North Chicago, IL.

A native of Illinois, Vernessa earned her Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Chicago State University, an Associate of Applied Science at Rock Valley College, and an Associate of Science in Electronics at DeVry Academy.

She is the visionary CEO and Founder of One Shift Mastery Consultant, a dynamic force in the world of personal and professional development. With an impressive 30+ year tenure in military service, Vernessa has seamlessly transitioned her discipline and leadership skills into the entrepreneurial realm, emerging as a High Impact Growth Coach with a mission to empower fellow veterans. As a Certified Consultant for both the Proctor Gallagher Institute and Jack Canfield, Vernessa leverages world-class methodologies to guide prior service military members in transforming their unique military skills into thriving seven-figure entrepreneurial success stories. Vernessa's approach is centered around cultivating a deep awareness of self, breaking through limiting beliefs, and unlocking new levels of influence and income.

Her dedication to turning service into abundance is not just a professional mission but a personal passion. She believes in the power of dedication and discipline, and through her coaching, she inspires others to harness these qualities to achieve extraordinary results.

Vernessa's involvement in The Edge Mastermind, hosted by Dean Graziosi, further amplifies her impact. This exclusive mastermind is a gateway to transforming businesses through advanced growth strategies and an unparalleled network of business leaders. With a commitment to lifelong learning and helping others realize their potential, Vernessa is a beacon of empowerment and transformation. Her work has touched countless lives, proving that with the right mindset and guidance, anyone can achieve greatness.

Vernessa's military awards include Army Commendation Medal, Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Army Reserve Components Overseas Training Ribbon, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and a Meritorious Service Medal.