

Chicago Veterans

RECOGNIZING 24 VETERANS IN 2024

**Celebrating
Veterans in
business, nonprofit,
government, and
beyond!**

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**SPECIAL 10 YEAR
ANNIVERSARY EDITION**
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About 24 in 2024

Chicago Veterans' annual initiative honors veterans who have made outstanding contributions to their professions and communities. These individuals are celebrated for their professional achievements, leadership, and impact across sectors such as business, entrepreneurship, education, technology, healthcare, and nonprofits.

This initiative acknowledges their dedication to strengthening the veteran community. By showcasing these accomplished veterans, we aim to inspire others to excel in their careers and life.

Honorees are recognized at a special awards event and featured in our Special Edition magazine, highlighting their remarkable achievements.

Chicago Veterans is honored to introduce our
24 Veterans for the Class of 2024.

Carolina Jimenez

U.S. Navy Veteran

Carolina Jimenez grew up in the Back of the Yards neighborhood and served in the U.S. Navy as a Hospital Corpsman from 2004 to 2010. During her service, she was stationed on the USS Boxer, NMCSD, and deployed aboard the USNS Mercy. After earning a bachelor's degree in public health, she returned to Chicago in 2015 to work as a Veteran Service Officer.

In 2017, she became the first Latina and female VA&R Director for the American Legion, Department of Illinois, where she helped countless veterans and their families access benefits for healthcare, disability, pensions, and education.

Her personal experience with chronic pain led her to discover the healing potential of acupuncture, inspiring her to pursue a Doctorate in Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine. Now in her final year, she is committed to improving veterans' health through holistic care. She has also supported fellow veteran students by providing resources and is working to establish a Student Veteran Association on campus.

As the Student Council President, a lifetime member of VFW Post 8821, and an active participant in numerous veteran organizations, including the Marine Corps League Chapultepec #1408 and Merging Vets and Players, Carolina remains dedicated to empowering veterans and improving their quality of life.



“ **The first Latina and female VA&R Director for the American Legion, Department of Illinois.** ”

Ro Zamora

U.S. Army, ILARNG Veteran



“ Founder & CEO of the Chicago Golf Gals Association- the first of its kind women’s golf community providing accessible programs for women of all walks of life. ”

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Ro Zamora is the Founder and CEO of the Chicago Golf Gals Association, the first women's golf community of its kind, providing accessible programs for women from all walks of life. She served in the U.S. Army/ILARNG as a Unit Supply Specialist from 2013 to 2020. After leaving the military, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Media Management & Sales from Illinois State University.

Her most notable achievement to date is growing the Chicago Golf Gals Association from the ground up. Through CGG, she has offered free clinics and opportunities that support the health and wellness of active service members, veterans, first responders, healthcare workers, educators, and their families. She is especially proud of her partnerships with the Wounded Warrior Project, The Veteran Golf Association, Folds of Honor, Troon, FootJoy, and PXG to foster programs for female veterans in the Chicagoland area.

Ro continues to provide access to golf as a positive outlet for those struggling mentally and physically, just as she has herself. She firmly believes that everyone deserves a chance to learn and improve their situation through positive activities, and she plans to expand these initiatives on and off the course at a national level.

Shamika White

U.S. Navy Veteran



“Currently, Ms. White is working on her second book while serving as the Women’s Veterans Coordinator for the MVI: VetHer Program.”

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Shamika White is a selfless veteran, a depression survivor, a loving mother, a faithful friend, and an author. She is a missionary who has traveled to Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras three times to provide dental care to underserved communities. As a United States Navy veteran who served alongside the United States Marines during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Ms. White served as a Chaplain’s Assistant, providing combat stress support to active-duty members and their spouses. After 17 years of delivering care to the underserved and providing dental care to the veteran community, Ms. White has retired.

This journey led her to start two organizations: Blues’ UnVeil and I.C.A.R.E. Collection, which focuses on depression awareness. Shamika published her first book, titled “SHATTERED: Journaling Through the Pain for Healing,” a 21-day devotional where she introduces readers to the Master Repairman, better known as Jesus.

Currently, Ms. White is working on her second book while serving as the Women’s Veterans Coordinator for the MVI: VetHer Program. She is the Ministry Lead of New Life Covenant Southeast Veterans Ministry and a Zumba and trampoline exercise instructor, offering free trampoline classes to veterans.

Sergio Sanchez

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

A proud Marine Corps veteran, Sergio Sanchez served 4 years of active duty in the infantry, assigned to Charlie Co., 1st BN, 1st Marines. There, he honed his skills in discipline, leadership, and teamwork. These strengths, along with the core values of the Marine Corps—honor, courage, and commitment—shaped Sergio's dedication to excellence and service, values that he brings into his current role at Discover Financial Services.

As part of Discover's Corporate Security team, Sergio plays a key role in safeguarding the company's people, assets, and operations. His keen attention to detail and strategic mindset contribute to maintaining a safe and secure environment.

In addition to his professional responsibilities, Sergio serves as the regional lead for Discover's Chatham HMV employee resource group, advocating for veteran employees, promoting an inclusive workplace, and partnering with veteran organizations.

Outside of work, Sergio remains deeply connected to the veteran community, volunteering his time to support fellow veterans. Whether through mentorship, community events, or advocacy, Sergio is passionate about giving back and creating opportunities for those who have served. Driven by a mission-oriented mindset, he continues to lead with integrity and purpose in all he does.



“ Sergio leads Discover's Chatham HMV employee resource group, advocating for veterans, promoting inclusivity, and partnering with veteran organizations. ”

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Roll Call Chicagoland

Roll Call Chicagoland has been a vital resource for veterans seeking employment opportunities and networking connections, uniting veterans, service members, and their families with corporate partners, mentors, employment resource groups, and career pathways.

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Jesus Molina

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

Jesus Molina is a Marine Corps veteran who served from 1999 to 2003, including a deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is an active member of the Marine Corps League, Chapultepec Detachment #1408.

Over the past nine years, Jesus has worked in various roles within the veteran community, including serving as the Associate Director of Veterans Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Veterans Coordinator at Harper College, and currently as an Outreach Coordinator at Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital.

“ My mission is to connect veterans with the benefits and resources they've earned through their service. ”



His mission is to connect with and inform veterans about the extensive benefits and resources available to them. Traveling throughout the VA medical center catchment area, from Chicago to as far as Peru, IL, he meets with veterans and their families to ensure they are aware of and applying for the benefits they have earned through their military service.

In his downtime, Jesus enjoys spending time with his daughter, Eleanor, and going on hikes with his wife, Alicia.

Sheena Rubin

U.S. Army Veteran



“Currently serves as the Social and Earned Media Chief, overseeing social, earned media, paid editorial, and influencer marketing for the U.S. Army Enterprise Marketing Office.”

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Lieutenant Colonel Sheena Rubin joined the Army Enterprise Marketing Office (AEMO) in 2021 and currently serves as the Social and Earned Media Chief. She oversees all organic social, earned media, paid editorial, and influencer marketing efforts to raise awareness among prospective Army Soldiers. Raised in Fayetteville, NC, in a family with a long history of Army service, LTC Rubin enlisted after high school, achieving the rank of Staff Sergeant before commissioning into the Army Reserve.

LTC Rubin holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Fayetteville State University, a Master of Science in Human Resource Management from Troy University, and a Master of Science in Operational Studies from the Command and Staff General College. She has held key development positions as an Officer, including Platoon Leader, Commander, and Public Affairs Director, and has deployed to Kuwait and Iraq.

In addition to her military career, LTC Rubin is active in the Chicago community, serving as the Education and Training Council Vice President for the Junior League of Chicago and on the Pat Tillman Foundation Chicago Chapter Regional Council. She is the proud mother of an energetic daughter, Sienna Denise, who celebrates her ninth birthday on Thanksgiving Day.

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Larry Nazimek is dual-rated as both a Navigator and Pilot, having flown the F-4 Phantom, B-52 Stratofortress, and T-38 Talon. He earned both his B.S. and M.S. in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Illinois. Early in his career, he worked as an Associate Engineer/Scientist for the McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Company, contributing to projects such as Skylab (America's first space station) and the Spartan ABM.

Larry served as Vice President for Public Relations with Lifeline Pilots, where he flew passengers in need of specialized medical treatment unavailable in their hometowns. He also worked to raise public awareness of this life-changing service through media outreach.

A dedicated advocate for veterans, Larry is the Chairman of the Coalition of Veterans Organizations, emphasizing the importance of unified efforts, saying, "We speak louder when we join together to speak with one voice." He also serves on the Veterans and Family Advisory Council at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center.

In his local community, Larry is a Beat Facilitator in the City's Community Policing Program and a member of the 25th District Advisory Council. Drawing on his experience as a military pilot and aerospace engineer, he contributes as a writer for aviation magazines.

Larry Nazimek

U.S. Air Force Veteran



**“ We speak
louder when
we join
together to
speak with one
voice. ”**

Ephraim Lee

U.S. Navy Veteran



“ Currently serves as the 2nd District Police Counselor and was recently elected to the Police District Council, receiving over 10,000 votes for a four-year term. ”

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Ephraim Lee joined the U.S. Navy from 1999 to 2022 and served at various naval stations, including NR Naval Station Naples, Naval Station Souda Bay in Greece, Navy Operations Support Center, and AFRICOM, J5 State Department: Mali/Tanzania. Some of his notable deployments include serving with the Naval Expeditionary Logistics Support Force in 2005 and Special Operations Command in Bagram, Afghanistan.

Mr. Lee earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Chicago State University and later obtained his Masters in Social Work (MSW) from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He continues his service in the community and currently serves as the 2nd District Police Counselor. He was most recently selected for a seat on his Police District Council, garnering over 10,000 votes for a four-year term. He credits much of his success to the fairness and leadership skills he developed as a Senior Chief in the U.S. Navy.

As a military veteran, he has brought discipline, foresight, and dedication to the police district. These skills have helped him connect with constituents, police officers, and voters who care about safety, security, and police accountability.



Women Veterans Empowerment Events

Chicago Veterans Women Veterans events are hosted, organized, and led by women Veterans in our community. These events are dedicated to supporting, empowering, and connecting women Veterans in the Chicago area. They provide a platform for women who have served in the military to share their experiences, access resources, and build lasting networks.

We recognize the unique challenges women Veterans face, and we strive to create a sense of community, and provide opportunities for personal and professional growth. By providing an inclusive and supportive environment, these events positively impact women veterans, helping them thrive in civilian life and ensuring they have the resources and connections they need to succeed.

Although women veterans make up only 10% of the veteran population in Chicago, they represent nearly 42% of our Chicago Veterans community, underscoring the importance and need for these events.

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Staci Boyer is the Founder and CEO of Motiv8n'U, an award-winning author, IFBB pro, NPC promoter, dedicated personal trainer, motivational speaker, and transformational wellness coach. With 12 years of experience as a U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman and over 36 years in the health and wellness industry, Staci brings a wealth of expertise and passion to inspire others to achieve their potential. She holds a Master of Fitness Sciences from ISSA, a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science, and serves as the Commander of the Naperville VFW post.

Staci is also deeply engaged in her community through the Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, and various veteran initiatives. She has recently passed new legislation aimed at overcoming obstacles related to veterans' burial rights, demonstrating her commitment to supporting those who served. Staci's sixth book, *Dear Woman: The Letters*, is a powerful project in women's empowerment, featuring letters that encourage women to embrace change in all aspects of their lives. Through her work and advocacy, Staci continues to empower individuals to live their best lives while advocating for veterans and championing the community.

Staci Boyer

U.S. Navy Veteran



“ Founder and CEO of Motiv8n'U, award-winning author, IFBB pro, NPC promoter, personal trainer, motivational speaker, and transformational wellness coach. ”

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Oluwatoyin Hines

U.S. Army Veteran

Oluwatoyin Olabisi Hines is the Owner and Founder of Peace of Mind Counseling, Coaching, and Consulting, Igniting Intuition: Mind, Body, Soul, and The Woman Cave. She is a retired Brigade Chaplain at the rank of Major with a Family Life Chaplain skill identifier in the Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG).

Hines provides consulting and training to leaders and groups on psycho-theological integration. Her training incorporates wellness competencies to enhance the lives of community members and their families. Hines also conducts community training for those who serve veterans, families, communities, and individuals. As a clinician, she delivers timely and confidential support, counseling, and mental health services to help clients understand, heal from, and cope with the dynamics impacting their daily lives.

“Hines helps people heal using person-centered care, mindfulness, coaching, and trauma-informed yoga.”



Hines works with clients using a psychodynamic approach, person-centered care, mindfulness-based practices, coaching, and alternative and integrative models, including trauma-informed yoga. She helps clients identify their values, navigate life changes, explore their identity, resolve conflicts, determine boundaries, and heal from anxiety, depression, and trauma.

Additionally, Hines offers trauma-informed yoga training for healing and transcending sexual trauma. She delivers inspirational messages and wellness tools through her podcast and social media platforms.

Denisse Ocasio

U.S. Army/IL National Guard Veteran



“ Denisse is an accomplished runner and a Six World Marathon Majors finisher. ”

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Denisse Ocasio served in the Illinois Army National Guard from 2006 to 2016. As a Chaplain Assistant with the 108th Sustainment Brigade, based in Chicago, IL, she provided vital support to soldiers and their families, ensuring their spiritual and emotional well-being. In January 2014, she deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, playing a key role in sustaining mission readiness and morale during her time overseas.

Since completing her military service, Denisse has remained dedicated to supporting the veteran community. She serves as one of the Deputy Chapter Captains for Team Red, White & Blue (RWB) in Chicago, where she helps foster connections among veterans and the local community through programs promoting health, wellness, and camaraderie. Additionally, Denisse has been actively involved with Chicago Veterans and other military-focused organizations, contributing her time and efforts to support veterans and their families through events and community initiatives.

Outside of her work with the veteran community, Denisse is an accomplished runner and a Six World Marathon Majors finisher. Having completed these prestigious races, she now channels her passion into running ultramarathons and pursuing her love for archery.

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Jennifer Mullins

**U.S. Air Force,
National Guard**

Jennifer Mullins proudly served for 6 years in the Illinois Air National Guard in the Personnel and Recruiting Departments, where she was known for her commitment to excellence, teamwork, and service to her country. Her military experiences played a crucial role in shaping her leadership skills, strategic thinking, and ability to adapt to high-pressure environments.

Jennifer is married to a Master Sergeant (MSgt) who continues to serve in an Anti-Terrorism role, reflecting their shared commitment to national security and the protection of American values.

“ Jennifer transitioned to the corporate world and is a Talent Acquisition Executive with years of experience in recruiting and retaining top talent. ”



After transitioning into the corporate world, Jennifer became a respected Talent Acquisition Executive with over 16 years of experience. She has a proven track record of successfully identifying, recruiting, and retaining top-tier talent across diverse industries.

Jennifer has been recognized for her leadership, ability to connect with people, and strategic vision in talent acquisition. Her background as a veteran brings a unique perspective to her role, allowing her to emphasize the importance of teamwork, dedication, and integrity in the workplace. Outside of work, Jennifer serves as the Head Cheerleading Coach for her daughter's team, runs her son to wrestling, and is an active member of her Catholic church.

Elevating the Voices of Chicago Veterans

For the past 10 years, the Chicago Veterans community has amplified the voices of military Veterans, addressing a range of issues, including transitioning out of military service, homelessness, career advancement, mental health, and the unique experiences of women Veterans. Our community has engaged with key stakeholders, government leaders, and fellow Veterans to build collaboration and improve the overall experience of military veterans as they navigate various stages of life. Our ultimate goal is to celebrate the achievements and successes of every Veteran.



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An expert in leadership, customer service, and sales, Mr. DeVito applies his skills as a leader in the HVAC industry. Before beginning his private career, he served honorably as a machinist's mate in the U.S. Navy from 1987 to 1991.

Since 2021, Mr. DeVito has been the president of Air Comfort, an HVAC company specializing in installing high-quality equipment and providing mechanical services. To stay informed about industry developments, he is an active member of the Chief Engineers Association of Chicagoland and BOMA Chicago. He remains deeply grateful to his team, recognizing their commitment to excellence as vital to the company's success.

Mr. DeVito began his career with Air Comfort Corporation in 1991 as a service technician. He was promoted to sales engineer in 2002 and later to vice president in 2015, serving in that role until advancing to his current position. Under his leadership, Air Comfort earned recognition as one of the Chicago Tribune's Top 100 Workplaces for four consecutive years.

Looking ahead, Mr. DeVito aims to continue developing the company while serving as a positive force in the mechanical industry.

Mike Devito

U.S. Navy Veteran



“ Air Comfort earned recognition as one of the Chicago Tribune's Top 100 Workplaces for four consecutive years. ”

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Jorge Davila

U.S. Air Force Veteran

Jorge Davila enlisted in the Air Force at 17 years old in July 1998. After completing basic training and security forces tech school, he spent six years at Kirtland AFB before deploying to Kuwait. He then cross-trained as a Military Working Dog Handler, was promoted to Staff Sergeant, and was reassigned to Japan.

In 2005, SSgt Davila deployed to FOB Remagen, Tikrit, Iraq, with MWD Kibo, conducting combat patrols. In 2006, Sgt Davila and MWD Kibo were deployed to Manas AB, Kyrgyzstan. In 2008, Sgt Davila was reassigned to Andersen AFB, Guam, and was subsequently deployed to Bagram AB, Afghanistan, with MWD EMY, conducting entry control point searches to ensure the safety of base personnel.

In 2011, Technical Sergeant Davila was reassigned to Langley AFB, Virginia, and deployed again to Bagram AB, Afghanistan, where he served as the flight chief for the Provost Marshal's Office, overseeing law enforcement operations.

Davila retired from the United States Air Force in 2014 and returned to Illinois. In 2015, he continued his law enforcement career at Edward J. Hines Medical Center, where he now serves as a Captain for the Hines Veterans Affairs Police Department.

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“ Jorge was trained as a Military Working Dog Handler while in the service and now serves as a Captain with the Hines VA Police Department. ”



“ I knew I was saved for a purpose, and it was time to walk in it. Turning my dream into reality, I created Jus Sandwiches to offer more than just food. ”

Karen Roberts

U.S. Army (ILNG) Veteran

Karen Roberts, a proud 1997 graduate of the greatest school in Chicago, Morgan Park High, grew up enjoying the delicious sandwiches from her neighborhood sandwich shop. After graduation, she served 12 years in the Illinois Army National Guard, completing her service in 2009.

In 2006, Karen survived being shot in the neck, a life-altering moment that affirmed her belief she was saved to fulfill her God-given purpose. She enrolled at St. Xavier University, earning a bachelor's degree in nursing in 2013.

Following graduation, Karen faced homelessness with her two young daughters. Despite the challenges, she envisioned creating a sandwich business that would offer something unique. Growing tired of mundane options, she decided to bring her dream to life.

In 2016, Jus Sandwiches was born. Known for its "Simple Sexy Sandwiches," Jus Sandwiches offers homemade creations with a gourmet twist, delivering a tantalizing feasting experience in every bite. Over the past eight years, Jus Sandwiches has become a trusted corporate catering partner.

Karen is also a graduate of the Bunker Labs Veterans in Residence cohort and the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program, further demonstrating her dedication to entrepreneurship and success.

Peter Delgado

U.S. Army Veteran



As the eldest child of a single mother in a low-income Chicago neighborhood, Peter Delgado felt a deep responsibility to break the cycle of generational poverty. Without a passion for sports or the financial means to attend college, he chose to join the United States Army—a decision that would transform his future.

The quiet, reserved high school student grew into a confident, adaptable, and principled individual during nearly 10 years of military service. As an 11B Infantryman and later a 35M Human Intelligence Sergeant, Peter developed traits that have continued to serve him well in civilian life.

Since transitioning out of the Army, Peter has spent the past 11 years serving his community as a law enforcement officer. He is also a proud father to a vibrant autistic daughter and a devoted husband to his supportive wife, who is also a veteran. Together, they are passionate about giving back to underprivileged communities and creating a positive impact.

“ Breaking the cycle of poverty starts with responsibility and action. The Army gave me confidence, integrity, and purpose—tools I now use to serve my community and build a better future for my family. ”



Chicago Veterans Ball

The Chicago Veterans Annual Ball is our premier event celebrating the service and sacrifices of our Veteran community. This elegant evening brings together Veterans, their families, and supporters for a night of fun, recognition, and reflection. The event features dinner, dancing, and inspiring moments that honor the resilience and achievements of those who have served. As one of the most anticipated gatherings of the year, the Annual Ball highlights the strength of our Veteran community while fostering connections and support for the ongoing mission of Chicago Veterans.



“Oscar is living his passion for martial arts, competing in MMA and coaching others. He remains an active competitor, most recently at the UFC APEX in Las Vegas.”

Oscar Kush

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

Oscar Kush is a Marine Corps veteran and the founder of GOATAlert.com, a Chicagoland-based digital content creation and event coverage company. As a Mortarman with 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, WPNS Company, 81's Platoon, Oscar served from 2009 to 2014, deploying with the 13th MEU and in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

After transitioning from active duty in 2014, Oscar pursued his passion for martial arts, competing in MMA while continuing to coach and mentor others. He remains an active competitor and coach, having most recently competed at the UFC APEX in Las Vegas. His martial arts journey highlights his dedication to resilience and personal growth.

Oscar has also made a lasting impact through community leadership. For over six years, he volunteered and led Merging Vets and Players in Chicagoland, helping veterans and athletes navigate life's transitions. Today, he serves as a board member for Kids at Promise/2XL Boxing, a youth development nonprofit that empowers at-risk youth through sports, mentorship, and community service.

Passionate about service, leadership, and collaboration, Oscar combines his military experience, competitive spirit, and entrepreneurial mindset to uplift veterans, youth, and his Chicagoland community.

Amanda Bethards

U.S. Navy Veteran

Amanda joined the Navy after graduating high school, knowing she wanted to dedicate her life to helping others. Serving as a Hospital Corpsman gave her the opportunity to do just that. After her time in the Navy, Amanda continued her work in the medical field for nearly 17 years.

In 2017, Amanda and her three children were introduced to BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding and Education Center in Harvard, IL, an experience that profoundly changed their lives. She remains deeply grateful for the life-changing impact of this incredible organization.

Through the guidance of the BraveHearts team, their therapy horses, and the camaraderie of her fellow brothers and sisters in arms, Amanda has made remarkable strides in managing stress, anxiety, PTSD, and chronic pain. BraveHearts, the nation's largest equine therapy program for military veterans, provides all of its services at no cost to veterans and their families.

Amanda's connection to BraveHearts deepened in 2021 when she became the organization's Volunteer Coordinator, overseeing 494 volunteers who contributed an astounding 26,000 hours of service last year alone. She also achieved her PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor certification, thanks to the mentorship and support of the BraveHearts team.

For Amanda, BraveHearts is more than a program—it's her happy place and a source of healing, growth, and connection.



“ BraveHearts is more than a program—it’s her happy place and a source of healing, growth, and connection. ”



“Turning his military service into books, sharing his trauma with loved ones to help others share theirs.”

Mathius Carter

U.S. Army Veteran

Mathius Carter served in the United States Army as a Multi-Channel Transmission Systems Operator. Stationed in Germany, he was deployed in 2003 during the invasion of Iraq (OIF), supporting the 3rd Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division by providing critical communication for infantry units to call for backup. He completed his military service with the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2005.

After his service, Mathius attended Western Illinois University, earning a Bachelor of Science degree with honors in 2009. He went on to complete his MBA in 2013 and a Master’s in Education from National Louis University in 2018. Through these experiences, Mathius discovered his passion for helping fellow veterans.

He has served as a Past All-American Commander of the VFW in Crystal Lake, District 5 Commander, and is an active member of American Legion Post 171, a Wounded Warrior Project alumnus, and a participant in Team RWB. Currently, Mathius works as a Veteran Outreach Coordinator for the Road Home Program, a nonprofit organization through Rush University Medical Center that supports veterans and their families with the invisible wounds of war.

In his free time, Mathius enjoys spending time with his wife and two sons. He also writes books to share his experiences and help others open conversations about trauma with their loved ones.



“ Justin Miller lives by two mottos: "Try everything twice" and "Don't sweat the small stuff!" ”

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Justin Miller

U.S. Army Veteran

After nearly a decade of service in the U.S. Army, including two deployments to Iraq, Justin Miller separated from the military in January 2013 and has been actively involved in the veteran community ever since. He has been a part of the Roll Call Chicagoland staff since its inception and currently serves as the Vice Chair of Operations. Justin leads with heart, and his passion for serving veterans has been his driving force.

He is known as a connector of people, organizations, communities, corporate partners, and leaders in the industry. Justin previously served as the Executive Director of SVA, where he led a nearly all-volunteer team focused on improving the lives and opportunities of student veterans in Illinois and neighboring states. His leadership, values, and integrity have had a positive impact on the lives of countless veterans.

A father of three, Justin enjoys spending time at home working on DIY projects. His favorite meetings are held at the Friendly Confines, and he lives by two mottos: "Try everything twice" and "Don't sweat the small stuff!"

Akeela White

U.S. Army Veteran



“ Akeela M. White is a partner in the Consumer Financial Services practice group at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP in Chicago. ”

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Akeela M. White is a partner in the Consumer Financial Services practice group at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP in Chicago. She advises national financial services companies on compliance with state and federal laws, including the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, Military Lending Act, Telephone Consumer Protection Act, Fair Credit Reporting Act, Consumer Financial Protection Act, and Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. White also defends companies against regulatory investigations and litigation initiated by governmental entities. Previously, she served as an executive director and assistant general counsel at JPMorgan Chase and as Assistant Attorney General in the Illinois Attorney General’s Consumer Fraud Bureau, where she also served as Assistant Bureau Chief for the Military & Veterans Rights Bureau. White earned her B.A. from Illinois State University and her J.D. from the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law.

Before pursuing her legal career, White served eight years in the U.S. Army, with deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Joint Endeavor. In addition to her law practice, she is an active member of Hinshaw’s Veterans Employee Resource Group and facilitated the firm’s sponsorship of the USO Juneteenth 5K. She is also a member of VFW Post 311 Benjamin O. Davis and volunteers for Chicago Standdown, supporting homeless veterans.

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20
Miles

Chicago Veterans Ruck March

The Annual Chicago Veterans Ruck March unites over 2,500 participants each Memorial Day weekend for a 20-mile walk dedicated to raising awareness of mental health and fostering community connections. This impactful event honors those we've lost, encourages dialogue about veteran mental health, and strengthens bonds among veterans, families, and supporters. Together, we walk to inspire hope, build resilience, and ensure no veteran feels alone in their journey.

Bryan "Tank" Soske

U.S. Air Force Veteran

Bryan "Tank" Soske retired as a Master Sergeant (E7) in the United States Air Force after 21 years of service, where he served as Superintendent of Readiness and Plans. Following his retirement in 2015, he continued to serve veterans as the Veterans Services Specialist at Wilbur Wright College, bridging the transition gap for student veterans. His unique background makes him the ideal person to assist Wilbur Wright student veterans in navigating their benefits and adjusting to civilian student life.

Bryan is well-known for his humor, adaptability, and extensive knowledge of veteran benefits. He has been an invaluable asset to student veterans, helping hundreds access their benefits and community support. He also encourages veterans to share their knowledge and experiences with those recently transitioning out of service.

In addition to supporting student veterans, Bryan advises THE Veterans Club at Wright College, part of Student Veterans of America. The club is one of the most active SVA chapters in Illinois, and Bryan motivates his students to maintain military camaraderie and pay it forward to the next generation of veterans. Outside of his military and civilian career, Bryan is also known for driving the Beer Truck during the annual Chicago Veterans Ruck March.



“ He has been an invaluable asset to student veterans, helping hundreds of veterans access their benefits and get connected to community support. ”

Eduardo Lucatero

U.S. Army

Sergeant Eduardo Lucatero was born and raised on the south side of Chicago in the Little Village community. He enlisted in the Army in 2015 to set himself apart, be a role model for his community, and inspire someone in his family to join the military. His driving force is to make his parents proud.

Eduardo is an 11B (infantryman) and has spent the past three years as a recruiter at the same office he enlisted from in Chicago. The best part of recruiting, he says, is getting to know the individual and their reasons for wanting to join the Army. He enjoys mentoring future soldiers and helping them achieve their goals.

Mr. Lucatero is passionate about giving back to his community. He finds it rewarding to witness the transformation when recruits become service members. After nine years in the Army, he plans to serve for 20 years. Recently, he reenlisted and will be reclassifying to a 14T Patriot Missile Operator and Maintainer. His hobbies include traveling, trying new food and local bars, working out, and most importantly, taking his mom to work in the mornings.



“ He enlisted in the Army to set himself apart, be a role model for his community, inspire others, and make his parents proud. ”

Ryan Pavel

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

Ryan Pavel serves as the CEO of Warrior-Scholar Project, driven by a deep belief that enlisted veterans have the potential to leverage military service for significant impact in higher education and beyond.

At 17, Ryan enlisted in the Marine Corps, completing two non-combat deployments to Iraq. He later earned his B.A. from the University of Michigan and his J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law. Ryan's teaching experience includes serving as a Teach For America corps member at an inner-city Detroit high school and as an adjunct instructor at the Virginia Military Institute. He has also worked at various legal institutions, including legal aid organizations and a large national law firm.

Ryan is a board member of the Union League Club of Chicago, where he focuses on the club's commitment to country and community. In 2023, he was selected for the inaugural cohort of the Obama Foundation Leaders USA, a nonpartisan leadership development program designed to inspire, empower, and connect emerging leaders across the country.



“ CEO of Warrior-Scholar Project, driven by a belief in the power of enlisted veterans to use military service for impactful contributions in higher education and beyond. ”



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