

VETERAN AWARD LUNCHEON

OF THE YEAR

SPONSORED BY VETERANS FORWARD AT NATIONAL ABLE NETWORK

PREVIOUS EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

INAUGURAL YEAR VETERAN OF THE YEAR EVENT



ELI WILLIAMSON

Eli Williamson is the cofounder of Leave No Veteran Behind, an Illinois-based non-profit focused on employment opportunities for veterans. Eli served in the U.S. Army. Along with Nicholas, he is co-winner of the first ever Veteran of the Year Award.

NICHOLAS MONTIJO

Nicholas Montijo is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. His work as a therapeutic riding instructor with the BraveHearts organization, which focuses on bringing hope and joy through connections with horses, has helped many veterans. Along with Eli, he is co-winner of the first ever Veteran of the Year Award.

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2ND ANNUAL VETERAN OF THE YEAR EVENT



EMILY MILLER

Emily Miller is a Harvard Business School graduate and U.S. Army veteran. She was one of the first women to serve as a Cultural Support Team member which allowed her to connect directly with Afghan women. This experience led her to co-found Rumi Spice, which is one of the largest employers of Afghan women and imports premium saffron directly from Afghan farmers. Emily is the first woman to receive the Veteran of the Year Award.

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National Able Network is proud to help Chicagoland veterans transition their military skills into civilian careers.

3RD ANNUAL VETERAN OF THE YEAR EVENT



MARY L. TOBIN

Mary L. Tobin served in the U.S. Army for 10 years as a communications officer with two combat tours in Iraq. Her public relations campaigns, activism, and leadership in diversity and inclusion led to her being featured in major publications and media outlets, including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN, and many more. She is an advocate for using data and analytics to combat poverty, and is continuously a champion for diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a nation, we are continuously working to be more equitable, and Mary's work has had tremendous impact. She is the first Black woman to receive the Veteran of the Year Award.



ANDREA N. GOLDSTEIN

Andrea N. Goldstein served on active duty in the U.S. Navy as an intelligence officer from 2010 to 2016. She is a vocal advocate for women veterans and victims of military sexual trauma. Andrea is also the contributing author of two books, and (as of this writing) is currently the Senior Policy Advisor for the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Women Veterans Task Force. Her work for women veterans specifically has led to significant media coverage and policy change. She is the third woman to win the Veteran of the Year Award.



FREDERICK P. WELLMAN

With over 22 years of service in the U.S. Army, Frederick P. Wellman has experience as an Army aeroscout helicopter pilot, Operation Desert Storm scout, Blackhawk battalion executive officer, official spokesperson for General David Petraeus, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, while he was the owner of FPWellman Solutions, Fred stepped up to help by serving as the Chief of Staff for the New York Presbyterian Ryan F. Larkin Field Hospital. He received the Veteran of the Year Award for his dedication and passion to serve the community during such unprecedented times.

**CLICK HERE TO VIEW
THE 3RD ANNUAL EVENT**



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4TH ANNUAL VETERAN OF THE YEAR EVENT



PAM CAMPOS-PALMA

Pam Campos-Palma, an enlisted U.S. Air Force veteran, was presented with the 2021 Veteran of the Year Award. Ms. Campos-Palma is the Director of Peace & Security for the Working Families Party and a strong advocate for bringing justice for Vanessa Guillén, the 20-year-old female U.S. Army soldier whose murder made headlines in April 2020. Pam's intensive and principled leadership has led to transformative efforts in the U.S. Army and Department of Defense, including the unprecedented investigation into the culture at Fort Hood and eventually the Fort Hood report. Behind the scenes and on the frontlines, Pam played a crucial role in the Justice for Vanessa Guillén movement and for the #MeToo movement within the military. Her unwavering dedication, courage, and positive influence demonstrates that structural and cultural change is possible. Pam is the first woman of Guatemalan and Honduran descent to win the Veteran of the Year Award.



FRANCE HOANG

The 2022 Veteran of the Year award was presented to U.S. Army veteran, France Hoang, for his work evacuating our Afghan allies. France served as the Executive Officer of a U.S. Army Special Forces Company in Southeast Afghanistan. In August 2021, as the situation in Afghanistan unraveled, France took action to support Afghan allies by co-founding the Afghan Departure Group and becoming the Chairman of the Board of Allied Airlift, a non-profit that is facilitating the screening of allies for the evacuation process. France, in collaboration with his contacts in the aviation and defense communities, coordinated the travel and logistics to evacuate 400 Afghan allies and their families to Mazar-i-Sharif, which is approximately a nine-hour journey over treacherous mountain roads from the city of Kabul. In addition to his evacuation efforts, France is a veteran entrepreneur who has been on the founding teams of companies that have generated over \$600 million in combined sales and employed over 1,200 professionals across the fields of law, aerospace, defense, government services, and technology. France is the first person of Vietnamese-American descent to win the Veteran of the Year Award.

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FROM THE 4TH ANNUAL EVENT](#)



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5TH ANNUAL VETERAN OF THE YEAR EVENT



RICHARD "RICH" FIERRO

Richard "Rich" Fierro, decorated veteran of the United States Army, was presented with the 2023 Veteran of the Year Award, for his acts of bravery during a mass shooting in Colorado Springs. With courage and resilience born out of his experience as a veteran, Rich's past collided with his present in Colorado Springs's Club Q on November 19, 2022. On a routine evening celebrating with family and friends, his instincts kicked in and drawing upon his military training and sense of duty, he took quick and decisive action to help subdue the gunman and saved many lives.

Rich served in three combat tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, and has been decorated for his bravery and valor. He has over 14 years of proven leadership experience in the United States Army where he earned the rank of Major. Rich's commitment to his country and community continues to this day. In addition to his work as a defense contractor in Ft. Carson, Rich and his wife, Jessica, are the owners of the award-winning brewery, Atrevida Beer Co. Atrevida is well-recognized for its commitment to diversity and was awarded the Colorado Governor's Minority Small Business of the Year in 2019, along with many other recognitions.

FIRST-EVER VETERAN EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR WINNER: CISCO MERAKI



The 5th Annual Veteran of the Year Award Luncheon in 2023 included the presentation of the first-ever Veteran Employer of the Year Award to Cisco Meraki, a leading provider of cloud-managed IT solutions. Cisco Meraki's commitment to supporting veterans in their professional growth and development has been commendable. The Veteran Employer of the Year Award is a testament to Cisco Meraki's ongoing efforts to support veterans and promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. By providing mentorship, training, and employment opportunities to veterans, Cisco Meraki is helping to bridge the gap between the military and civilian worlds and ensuring that veterans can thrive in their post-military careers.

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FROM THE 5TH ANNUAL EVENT](#)



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