



## NAVAIR supports conference aimed at uniting warriors, employers

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NAWCWD Commander Rear Adm. Paul Sohl, second from left, speaks about the benefits of hiring wounded warriors during the Department of the Navy's third annual Wounded Warrior Hiring and Support Conference on Oct. 29 in San Diego, Calif. (U.S. Navy photo)

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — Rear Adm. Paul Sohl, Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division commander, spoke at the Department of the Navy's third annual Wounded Warrior Hiring and Support Conference on Oct. 29 in San Diego.

As a panelist in an eight-person roundtable discussion, Sohl talked about the benefits of hiring a wounded warrior, and shared a personal experience from his time at Fleet Readiness Center South East in Jacksonville, Fla. The lesson he learned from that experience was not to underestimate the connections and contributions that these heroes make with teams already in place.

At FRC-SE, a wounded warrior was hired into the engine shop and put on a development plan that would take him through the various shops at the depot.

"What we didn't anticipate was how difficult it was to pull him out of there because the team said, 'you can't have him.



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He's too connected to us'."

Sohl explained that NAVAIR's wounded warrior efforts began about three years ago in pockets around the command, which employs about 37,000 people spread across eight sites. The enthusiasm for a successful program was there but a coordinated plan was lacking.

Under the direction of NAVAIR's then commander, now retired Vice Adm. David Architzel, 'to do more than just talk,' the command inserted a wounded warrior requirement into performance appraisals of its senior executives.

"When we send folks out to recruiting events, we've screened jobs and we're ready to hire," Sohl said.

In 2010, about 5 percent of NAVAIR's new hires were wounded warriors. "In 2012, we're at about 12 percent," Sohl said. "We're making headway."

Sohl acknowledged the barriers and frustrations faced by wounded warriors looking to get into the federal civilian workforce.

"We are trying to resolve them but unfortunately it's not going to happen over night," said Sohl, who shared that NAVAIR makes every attempt to track every contact with wounded warriors at each event, who was hired, who wasn't and why.

Joan Johnson, head of the NAWCWD Systems Engineering Department, and Dr. Ron Smiley, head of the NAWCWD Avionics Department, also attended the event.

"I am very interested in any activity that relates to improving the tapestry of our workforce," said Smiley, a goal champion for diversity efforts at NAWCWD. "Wounded warriors are a tremendous potential source of talent for us. They bring experience, proven leadership capabilities, loyalty and dedication, and a skill set that we need. For all that they have given up for our country, we owe them a shot."

NAVAIR co-hosted the two-day conference with Naval Sea Systems Command and the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command. The Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs sponsored the conference.

This year's conference, held for the first time on the west coast, focused on building employers' capabilities for hiring returning service members with disabilities. The theme was "Hiring our Nation's Heroes - Rise to the Challenge - Diversify Your Workforce!"



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Since last year's conference, DoN has hired nearly 9,500 veterans to include about 1,600 returning service members with 30 percent or higher disability ratings.



NAWCWD Commander Rear Adm. Paul Sohl, left, goes after a loose ball during a wheelchair basketball game hosted by the Naval Medical Center San Diego on Oct. 29. Military leadership competed alongside wounded warriors from all branches of military in this hands-on adaptive sports experience. (U.S. Navy photo)



NAWCWD Commander Rear Adm. Paul Sohl, number 22, cheers on his team from the sideline during a wheelchair basketball game on Oct. 29 at the Naval Medical Center San Diego. The game was held in conjunction with the Department of the Navy's third annual Wounded Warrior Hiring and Support Conference. (U.S. Navy photo)



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Dr. Ron Smiley, head of the NAWCWD Avionics Department, and Joan Johnson, head of the NAWCWD Systems Engineering Department, show their appreciation for the friendly yet spirited efforts of the wounded warriors and military leadership competing in a wheelchair basketball game Oct. 29 at the Naval Medical Center San Diego. (U.S. Navy photo)