



Roberts wins T. Michael Fish Quality of Worklife Award



Janna Roberts, winner of NAVAIR's T. Michael Fish Quality of Worklife Award, after an awards ceremony in Patuxent River, Md., June 8. "This award demonstrates NAVAIR's commitment to its people and that fostering a meaningful quality of life and worklife is just as important as our technological innovations and program improvements," she said. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Helping veterans and wounded warriors isn't just a job for NAVAIR's Janna Roberts — it's a passion.

Roberts, a recruitment program analyst for [NAVAIR's Veteran and Wounded Warrior Program](#), won the T. Michael Fish Quality of Worklife Award at a [ceremony here June 8](#). The award recognizes excellence in a leader who makes significant improvements to the quality of work life at NAVAIR.

"Winning this award is a tremendous honor and a personal validation that I am on the right path by following my own passion for helping others, particularly our veterans, wounded warriors and individuals with disabilities," Roberts said. "It shows that anyone can make a difference in their workplace and their communities; it does not require a specific title or role, just a desire and commitment to support others and position them so they may succeed."

Through recruitment, transition assistance, career placement and advocacy — and her



Roberts wins T. Michael Fish Quality of Worklife Award

volunteerism and fundraising outside of work — Roberts has helped hire more than 900 wounded, ill and/or injured service members at NAVAIR and inspired the recovery and physical fitness of more than 5,000 wounded warriors.

“With unrelenting passion, Janna has dedicated her work and her personal life to helping individuals with disabilities, including the wounded, ill and injured of our nation’s service members, where, with incredible commitment, devotion and compassion, she has positively impacted the lives of thousands of individuals, veterans, their families and caregivers,” said Stephen Cricchi, assistant commander for Corporate Operations and Total Force. “Janna’s acts of selfless service are living testaments of — and exemplify the highest levels of — impeccable loyalty, integrity, dedication, honor, courage and commitment.”

Roberts has worked at NAVAIR for seven years, starting in the Contracts Department and Human Systems Department. She transitioned to her current job in June 2014 as part of a one-year rotation with the Engineer and Scientist Development Program and decided to stay. She chose NAVAIR’s Wounded Warrior Program after attending training in 2013 designed to remove barriers and stigmas associated with hiring individuals with disabilities, which further cemented her vision to help veterans.

“I will forever be thankful for the chance to align my passion with my practice,” she said, “and the freedom and encouragement to find my best self in a new area of the command. My professional and personal experiences over the past two to three years with disabled veterans and individuals with disabilities have made me more fully appreciate the ‘total-person’ picture for everyone who serves.”

Roberts helps veterans and wounded warriors every step of the way at NAVAIR — first, recruiting and hiring, then retaining and supporting. After hours, she encourages their physical fitness and helps raise money for suicide awareness and post-traumatic stress disorder throughout Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

The first step is hiring. The jobless rate for all veterans is 4.6 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Roberts said there is still some apprehension among some hiring managers, regardless of industry or sector, to hire wounded warriors and veterans.

“U.S. military veterans have a demonstrated track record of uniquely developed, valuable skillsets that are not found in any other part of the world,” she said. “This is something the command has not only brilliantly tapped into, but more importantly, has committed to further developing and retaining.”

Since the inception of NAVAIR’s Wounded Warrior Program in 2010, NAVAIR has hired more than 1,700 wounded warriors, and Roberts has helped place more than 924 of these hires across all command sites and competencies. She’s done this by working with hiring



Roberts wins T. Michael Fish Quality of Worklife Award

managers across NAVAIR, attending hiring events and visiting military treatment facilities and warrior transition units.

“The biggest surprise has been realizing that veteran and wounded warrior care and employment is actually done by one big family,” she said. “Further, the tremendous reputation NAVAIR has for employing and caring for our veterans and wounded warriors permeates within this family. Other employers, service organizations and Department of Defense wounded warrior programs personally refer and connect candidates to NAVAIR because of our reputation.”

Once they arrive at NAVAIR, Roberts uses personalized outreach, intake, placement and mentoring to enhance wounded warriors’ quality of worklife. For those needing broader skills or work experience, Roberts helps identify internships and works with defense, government and private sector partners to find additional job opportunities.

Her hard work has paid off: The wounded warrior retention rate for fiscal year 2015 was 90 percent, compared to the 86 percent average for the rest of the NAVAIR workforce.

In her spare time, Roberts raises funds and advocates for veteran health and reintegration issues, participates in “awareness ruck marches,” — fast marches over a distance carrying a load — supports adaptive athletics and recreation, has volunteered at the Working Wounded Games — the world’s only adaptive Crossfit competition — and is a member of Warrior360’s Task Force Awesome, an adaptive recreation and community outreach team comprised of disabled veterans, military members and civilian allies. This is among her many other volunteer efforts at the Warrior Games, Wounded Warrior Honor Day, and events funding military suicide awareness and traumatic brain injury research.

What’s next for Roberts? Eventually, she hopes to earn a master’s degree in occupational therapy with a long-term goal of working for the Army to help wounded, ill and injured service members recover, rehabilitate and find meaningful employment.

“It is my hope that hiring decision makers in all industries learn to look beyond the resume to identify the true potential in each veteran and wounded warrior candidate,” she said. “Any differences found between military and non-prior service civilians should be the diversity that strengthens our workforce.”