NAVAIR recognizes 2017 Mentor of the Year winners

Rob “Waldo” Waldman, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, delivers a motivational speech on the benefits of mentorship and leadership at River’s Edge Catering and Conference Center during the 2018 National Mentoring Celebration and Mentor of the Year Award event Jan. 30, 2018. (U.S. Navy photo.)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Be a commander, not a demander.

That was the advice that author and former fighter pilot Rob “Waldo” Waldman gave Jan. 30 at River’s Edge Catering and Conference Center during the 2018 National Mentoring Celebration and Mentor of the Year Award event, which recognized NAVAIR’s 2017 Mentor of the Year Award winners.

As guest speaker, Waldman discussed the role mentoring plays in leadership and career development. Generously peppering his remarks with aviation metaphors and bumper-ready aphorisms, he shared episodes from his own career as an Air Force pilot and commander, and reminded his audience that teachable moments often arise as a result of one’s own poor decisions.

He recalled once harshly admonishing a hard-working but out-of-shape young sergeant to get on a workout regimen and lose weight. Two weeks later, the sergeant turned up in the hospital. Waldman realized his tough talk, though well-intentioned, wasn’t the guidance the
man needed.

Had he been more attentive to his subordinate’s needs and taken time to mentor him and ask about his life, events might have turned out differently.

“If you want to build loyal people in your squadrons who you can count on when you say ‘commit, commit,’ then you’ve got to show compassion and care,” Waldman urged his audience. “The commanders who I flew with, the ones I truly respected, were the ones who went out of their way to connect with me.”

On hand to lead the ceremony that day was Steve Cricchi, assistant commander for corporate operations and total force, who offered remarks, congratulated the nominees and directed the announcement of the winners across the NAVAIR sites. In his opening remarks, he noted the event’s theme: Make mentoring work for you.

“On the surface, maybe that sounds a little selfish, but the relationship you have with your mentee and vice versa is one of trust and shared experience and getting folks to reach their potential,” he said. “And that is about you.”

Cricchi recalled a time in his career when he faced a choice between sticking with his position as engineer, which he was satisfied with, or taking a chance on a management role. On the counsel of his mentor, Cricchi pursued the leadership position, and he hasn’t looked back.

“My message to all the folks here who have been a mentee at some point is to reach out to your mentor and say thank you for what they’ve done for you and your career,” Cricchi said. “And that’s what we’re doing here today.”

### Honoring NAVAIR’s mentors

With the ceremony broadcast via video teleconferencing across NAVAIR’s sites around the country, Cricchi called on representatives at each site to announce their nominees and their winner of NAVAIR’s 2017 Mentor of the Year Award, before then going on to name Patuxent River’s winner, Harris B. Cooper Jr., workforce development lead at Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers.

Among the qualities attributed to the winners were outstanding performance and expertise and commitment to the warfighter. In the course of their duties, winners routinely offered their time and guidance to increase the knowledge and skills of young professionals and prepare them for future opportunities.

Cooper and the following eight winners were selected from a total of 47 nominees from across the NAVAIR sites; they received letters of appreciation signed by Vice Adm. Paul Grosklags for their exemplary character and contributions:
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- Fleet Readiness Center East, Cherry Point, North Carolina: Kristine Roberts.
- Fleet Readiness Center Southeast, Jacksonville, Florida: Donald A. Dunlap.
- Fleet Readiness Center Southwest, North Island, California: Peter Muse.
- Naval Air Technical Data and Engineering Service Center, San Diego, California: Jonathan Mangilit.
- Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, China Lake, California: Lee Hardt.
- Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, Point Mugu, California: Toufue Chang.
- Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division Lakehurst, New Jersey: Keith Jordan.
- Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division, Orlando, Florida: Roxy Campos.

NAVAIR's Mentoring Program, established in 2007, offers speed and group mentoring, training, a playbook and an online tool, iMentor, to help match mentors with mentees. Currently, more than 5,000 mentors and more than 7,000 mentees are registered in iMentor.

Harris Cooper, workforce development lead at Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers, left, receives a letter of appreciation from Garry Newton, Naval Air Systems Command deputy commander, right. Cooper was named the NAVAIR 2017 Mentor of the Year for Patuxent River during NAVAIR's National Mentoring Month event at Naval Air Station Patuxent River Jan. 30, 2018. (U.S. Navy photo.)
Steve Cricchi, assistant commander for corporate operations and total force, who offers opening remarks during NAVAIR's National Mentoring Month event at Naval Air Station Patuxent River Jan. 30, 2018. (U.S. Navy photo.)