WASHINGTON NAVY YARD, WASHINGTON, D.C. — Five NAVAIR employees were recognized for their work recruiting, hiring and retaining wounded warriors at the Wounded Warrior Hiring and Support Summit here May 9.

Tania Dawson, Sonny Fann, Joy Hill, Suzanne Perry and Janna Roberts received letters of commendation from Robert L. Woods, acting assistant secretary of the Navy for manpower and reserve affairs, detailing their dedication and professionalism.

“The success of NAVAIR’s Wounded Warrior Program is due to their expertise, resourcefulness, passion and devotion,” said Steve Cricchi, assistant commander for corporate operations and total force, who spoke at the support summit. “A common thread among these individuals is their care, both professionally and personally, for each person in the program. They provided outreach, trained knowledgeable and passionate recruiters, and trained newly assigned personnel in support of the Department of the Navy’s wounded warrior hiring and support initiative.”

Dawson and Fann established NAVAIR's Wounded Warrior Program in 2010. Since then,
NAVAIR has brought on board close to 3,000 disabled veterans.

“Recruiting for wounded warriors is not your traditional style of recruiting,” Dawson, NAVAIR’s former recruitment program manager, explained. “It requires more compassion, patience and dedicated assistance, both physically and mentally, depending on the type of candidate you are assisting.”

Fann, a Vietnam War veteran, knows firsthand the type of support wounded warriors need as they transition to civilian life.

“When I returned from Vietnam in 1973, we were not well received or supported,” he reflected. “The expectations at that time were to not talk about our experiences or issues and just ‘suck it up’ if we wanted to continue a military career. The cost of that to the returning veterans of Vietnam, and society as a whole, was extensive in suicide rates, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce rates, crime. This was an experience that lasted a lifetime, and certainly, our returning post-9/11 warriors should never have the same experience.”

Perry comes from a family with a tradition of military service — her father served in the Air Force for more than two decades — which she said has framed her respect and appreciation for veterans.

“I find supporting the veteran and wounded warrior program a means to give back to those who have given so much,” Perry, the command’s recruitment program manager, said. “I have a passion and excitement for helping people, and what better way than to help our nation’s heroes reintegrate into the civilian workforce and give them meaningful careers? Through their stories and experiences, it highlights the high valued and quality candidates that they are. They have a great deal to contribute.”

Fann, who joined the Wounded Warrior Program as part of a job rotation, said he finds personal fulfillment helping to lower the suicide rate among veterans.

“We have provided them hope and opportunity for a successful career, a sense of value and self-esteem, which translates to something to live for,” he said.

NAVAIR senior leaders and hiring managers joined attendees from both the federal and private sectors to share best practices on how to recruit, hire, train and retain service-disabled veterans successfully. Hosted by the Department of the Navy, the summit had a theme of “Hiring Our Nation’s Heroes.” This was the annual summit’s eighth year, with previous summits conducted around the country in San Diego; Raleigh, North Carolina; San Antonio; Tampa, Florida; and Seattle.

The eighth annual summit’s intent was to bring together government, military and industry employers who are committed to hiring and supporting veterans and wounded warriors. The Wounded Warrior Hiring and Support Summit is sponsored by Assistant Secretary of the
NAVAIR employees recognized at national wounded warrior summit

Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs and co-hosted by NAVAIR, Naval Sea Systems Command and Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command.

While this is the summit’s last year, the NAVAIR wounded warrior team plans to continue to fight stereotypes about wounded and ill veterans.

“It is not enough to recruit wounded warriors,” Fann said. “We have to recognize their challenges and fears as they transition to the workforce and provide adequate resources to assist them, especially during the first year of transition. The real success of the NAVAIR Wounded Warrior Program over the years was achieved through the performance of the placed wounded warriors and the attributes and life experiences they all bring to the table that contribute to success of NAVAIR's mission.”

NAVAIR offers several programs and resources for veterans. The Active Duty Intern Program, for example, trains wounded warriors to excel in entry-level positions as they exit their military careers and is available at all NAVAIR sites with partnerships across all services.