The Color Guard from Naval Base Coronado was made up of Quartermaster Second Class Loren Macaranas, Aviation Boatswain’s Mate Second Class Shandalyn Knudson, Fire Controlman Second Class Karl Avanzado and Cryptologic Technician Second Class Blue Haviland.

Honoring Business Excellence Among Veteran Entrepreneurs

Profiles of Award Winners pages 24-39
List of Veteran-Owned Businesses pages 40-41
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The military and our veterans are to San Diego what oil has been to Texas – a precious resource that is key to our local economy.

That’s a blessing. But considering that we are No. 1 in veteran workforce population, wouldn’t it be great if San Diego could become No. 1 for veteran entrepreneurship as well? Our local economy would be far more robust.

That’s why I was so excited last year when I met the folks from The Rosie Network, a local nonprofit dedicated solely to helping veterans and spouses of military personnel start and grow their own companies. As we got talking about the issues, we realized we wanted to do something together that would both celebrate success among veteran entrepreneurs and assist the next wave of companies launched by veterans and military spouses.

That idea came to fruition on Oct. 25 with our first Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Conference and Awards. The conference went on most of the day, with excellent panel discussions, speakers and breakout sessions covering financing, branding, human resources, legal matters, and much more. It was wonderful to meet so many budding entrepreneurs who hope to parlay their military experience, discipline and know-how into private-sector success. The presenters were all terrific.

Our awards dinner closed out the day in grand fashion. It was truly an honor to recognize the accomplishments of 50 established veteran-owned businesses, veteran business executives in the private sector and advocates for veteran entrepreneurship.

I have been involved in business journal events around the country for more than 30 years, but I have never been more gratified or honored to celebrate a group of rising business stars. I hope you enjoy reading about them in this special section.

Our keynote speaker, veteran and successful hotelier Larry Broughton, showed the audience some sobering statistics: Entrepreneurship among veterans was many times higher after World War II and Korea than it has been in the post-9/11 era.

We have everything to gain by encouraging and supporting veterans, period, but especially so when it comes to starting businesses.

In addition to The Rosie Network, I want to thank the supporters who made the awards possible: Title sponsor Tri-City Medical Center; Cox Business; and Wells Fargo. These are organizations that, like us, want to see veteran-owned businesses thrive in San Diego.

It is with the deepest respect that I commend and thank all of our veterans, for your service, your sacrifices, and the contributions you are making and will make to the well-being of San Diego. Thank you for allowing us to cheer you on, celebrate your accomplishments, and to give you a boost any way possible. We salute our finalists and winners, and look forward to building on this first-year success.

Huntley Paton
President and Publisher
San Diego Business Journal

The San Diego Business Journal and The Rosie Network thank all the sponsors, presenters and participants who made our first Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Conference and Awards a success:

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It is an honor to support and celebrate our veterans as they become entrepreneurs and job-creators in the private sector. We salute you.

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Together we’ll go far
Ted Branch
Co-founder & President, Drone Aviator

Branch was named President of Drone Aviator, Inc. in February 2017. Drone Aviator develops and fields remote identification and tracking technology. A naval aviator and retired 3-star admiral, Branch flew fighter jets in combat and commanded top-performing teams at the squadron, ship, aircraft carrier, and carrier strike group levels. As the US Carl Vinson Strike Group commander, he led initial Navy/Marine Corps relief efforts following the Haiti earthquake.

He commanded the Atlantic Fleet Naval Air Force and his last assignment was Deputy Fleet Naval Air Force and his last assignment was Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, Chief of Naval Operations

Tom Ladegaard
Principal, Law Office of Thomas E. Ladegaard

Ladegaard recently started his own practice in San Marcos after 14 years as a business litigation attorney. He has litigated cases all over the county, including partnership/dissolution matters, consumer and banking, insurance coverage and contract matters. His practice focusing on helping startup businesses and small business owners.

Ladegaard is an entrepreneur at heart; he launched a company called Eternal Roots - Your Custom Documentary, where he interviews people to record and preserve their life stories, which evolved into a video production company for his business clients.

Brad Pagano
Co-founder & Managing director, San Diego Financial Literacy Center

Pagano founded the SDFLC to enhance the financial IQ of San Diego County residents by providing free educational seminars and workshops to youth, military (active, transitioning and veteran) and low-to-moderate income people. He is responsible for the development of the strategic partnership program, the administration of the corporate social responsibility platform, as well as the oversight of fundraising, events, public relations, and marketing of the program. He dedicates countless hours to assist thousands of people throughout the San Diego region.

Pagano previously worked in development for HomeStart Inc. and the March of Dimes.

Veterans and Military Entrepreneur Awards Finalists

Jim Akin
Touchstone Compliance, LLC

Aaron Arce
TargetChk

Mike Bilodeau
IO Environmental & Infrastructure, Inc.

Marlon Blue
BSE Security Service, Inc.

David Charbonnet
VIP NeuroRehabilitation Center

Mike Chiesl
The Mike Chiesl Group

Kevin Darroch
MachineTek

Ric Davy
Davy Architecture

Sean Durkin
Pacific Pizza

Char Ekonik
Coastal Rock Realty

John Farnam
Receptos

Matthew Fichtner
TakeFlight

Jim Fitzsimmons
SCORE Chapter 80140

Carlos Flores
Coronado Distribution Company, Inc.

Alex Galicia
BPI Plumbing

Vicki Garcia
Marketing Impressions

Winslow Garnier
Garnier Group and Associates, LLC

Amber Gough
Talent Fusion Point, LLC

Flossie Hall
Healthy Momma

Kathy Hansen
Industrial Grind Coffee

Lars Herman
Herman Construction Group, Inc.

Brittney Hogan
Virago Fitness

Wilson Ibarra
Jackie Smith

Team Whomesales.com

Keller Williams Realty

Michael Johnson
Premier Mechanical Group, Inc.

Paul Kitchin
Atlas Executive Consulting, LLC

Richard Koeneke
Robbins Arroyo LLP

Dan Lathus
RISK Opportunities Inc.

Alan Lerchbacher
Naval Coating, Inc.

Terry Little
Bear Roots Brewing Co.

William Lyons
Griffin Funding

Abel Martinez
Xavier Rodriguez

Faveo, LLC

Damon Moore
Blue Nose IT Solutions, Inc.

Joe Musselman
The Honor Foundation

Justin Nahama
Trotman Sanders LLP

Stephoni Norton
Dickinson Farm

Michael O’Leary
Senta Clinic

Jonathan Parot
Cushman & Wakefield

Richard Pascoe
Apricus Biosciences, Inc.

Teri Robling
PKL Services, Inc.

Ryan Ruchel
Brayson

Ben Ryan
Tourmaline Properties

Ty Smith
Vigilance Risk Solutions, LLC

Morgan Smith
WorthPointe

David Strobel
Space Micro, Inc.

Paul Thomas
Julian Hard Cider

Elizabeth Valenzuela Banker
Shore Solutions

Eric Venn-Watson
Epitracker, Inc.

Mark Wernig
Dowling & Yahkne, LLC

Janis Whitaker
Veteran Career Transition Assistance Program

Jeffrey Yefsky
5x Technology
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Injured SEAL Finds Fulfillment in Rebuilding Rehab Center

By JOHN COX

David Charbonnet would have been justified saying no when in 2014 he was asked – begged – to become president of Mira Mesa’s VIP NeuroRehabilitation Center. He was doing well enough investing in real estate that he didn’t need a job. He also had zero management experience outside of his work as a U.S. Navy SEAL Team member.

Charbonnet admits he wasn’t sure the job was for him. But he couldn’t say no. “I felt that there was a need for it, and if I didn’t do it, nobody else was going to,” said the 32-year-old winner of the San Diego Business Journal’s 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Award in the Nonprofit Organization category.

Charbonnet had been a patient at VIP since shortly after a 2011 recreational skydiving accident at Otay Lake. The accident left him paralyzed below the waist.

The rehabilitation center was failing financially. Some patients weren’t keeping up with their end of handshake agreements to pay, and the physician who opened the doors in 2009 could no longer bankroll the high equipment costs. The spinal cord injury specialist, Dr. Bradley Marcus, helped turn the operation into a nonprofit in 2012. But now was ready to walk away.

Charbonnet soon realized he couldn’t handle VIP’s administrative tasks. He asked his wife, Janet, if she would leave her career in real estate leasing to join him at the office. Of course, there was no room for either of them in the budget, so like him, she would have to forgo a salary.

David engaged customers and built bridges with San Diego County disability-focused companies like Living Spinal and Golden Boys Mobility. Janet took on the accounting, payroll and grant-writing.

Last year, the nonprofit attracted more than $25,000 in grants and contributions for its scholarship program covering rehabilitation costs for low-income VIP patients and military veterans.

VIP is now at what David calls a “tipping point.” With its clinic running at full capacity, it’s ready to increase its staff of two physical therapists, three part-time technicians and three trainers.

That kind of expansion is going to require more of him and others. “We’re hoping the more well known we get, and the more people believe in us, the more people are going to approve their grant funding toward us,” he said.

Janet credits VIP’s turnaround with her husband’s “unique ability to be genuine with every person he meets, and put a smile on their face.” She said this helped greatly in the early years, when he needed to reassure staff about the challenges ahead.

A patient and board member at VIP, Dana Moore II, said in a letter of recommendation that David encourages his employees, friends, family and clients to “strive for a better life through persistence and endurance.”

Since meeting David in early 2014, Moore said, he has felt motivated by him to do what he can to recover abilities and improve his condition. Part of this inspiration has come from watching David’s own progress.

Watching day to day how hard he would work with all the nerve pain that I know he goes through from his injury, gave me no excuses not to strive to work as hard as he does,” Moore wrote.

“You could tell by the look on his face when he had been up all night from pain and the current pain running through his entire body, yet he would still come through those doors and get to work.”

Best Advocate for Military Entrepreneurship

Attorney Puts Transitioning Veterans On Business Path

BY JOHN COX

Retired Marine Jim Fitzsimmons had just signed on with SCORE, the national business advising organization, when a coincidence occurred that, through him, changed the lives of countless local military members.

Shortly after he came aboard as a business counselor in 2013, SCORE and the U.S. Small Business Administration rolled out in San Diego Boots 2 Business, a two-day seminar geared toward enlisted personnel and junior officers transitioning to entrepreneurship.

Fitzsimmons jumped in with both boots. He started teaching the seminars, making regular visits to local military bases and sharing with students the benefit of his roughly 30 years as a small business lawyer, and his experience now as a small business owner. Soon he was coordinating the local program.

Since then, Fitzsimmons has conducted an estimated 70-plus Boots 2 Business training courses. In 2016 alone, courses he coordinates and presents reached more than 600 individuals.


“Jim works tirelessly every month to make sure this program functions and is valuable to participants,” local SCORE CEO Sally Broll said in a note supporting Fitzsimmons for the honor. She added his ratings by students are consistently high, and that he earns immense thanks from program participants.

The Boots 2 Business program makes good use of all three of Fitzsimmon’s careers. The first was with the U.S. Marine Corps. He knows the sometimes steep challenges veterans face as they prepare to reenter civilian business life.

His second career was that of a small-business lawyer. By the time he retired, the firm he started was renting 4,500 feet at a prestigious address in downtown San Diego.

He sees his third and continuing career as an entrepreneur coach serving attorneys, veterans and small business owners. “Perspective comes with experience,” he website states.

The company he started, Fitzsimmons Coaching, works with veterans, but not only veterans. The business applies what he terms “Fitzsimmons Methodology,” a heavily analytical approach encompassing a holistic view of the client’s business, from operations to marketing.

His idea is to “work with a client on where they and their business are, where they want to be, and what we need to do to get them there,” his website states. “This includes extensive analysis and identification of client issues, operational issues and marketing.”

While he could not be reached for comment on this story, his website tells the story of his unique mix of military, legal and business experience. It speaks of developing systems for handling the most pressing business matters, reducing isolation and boosting productivity. He also offers direct help with employee issues, business plans and marketing.

Greg Bowcott, assistant district director of SCORE’s Southern California region, said in an email Fitzsimmons embraced the Boots 2 Business program quickly and enthusiastically. By summer 2013, Fitzsimmons had taken responsibility for running the entire program in San Diego.

“We are proud to have Jim as a member of our chapter and believe this award from the SDBJ is well deserved,” he wrote.

Fitzsimmons served with Marine Reconnaissance in combat duty in Vietnam. These days he continues to donate his time as a counselor and mentor with SCORE.

He also presents at legal seminars, and has served as moot court judge for the University of San Diego and California Western School of Law. He still serves as coach of the Vista High School Moot Court Team. Additionally, he presents at multifamily housing crime-prevention programs in several cities.

By JOHN COX

Jim Fitzsimmons leads the Boots 2 Business program for SCORE, a volunteer mentoring organization.
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Mike Chiesl knows how hard it can be for military spouses. They’re the ones running the household, dealing with the kids’ schedules and striving in the midst of it all to build a career than can be carried from one deployment to the next.

For them the retired marine offers a solution: Come learn real estate at his real estate company. Get a check every time a referral buys or sells property.

He sees this as his part in helping military families make the most of their opportunities. It’s partly why Chiesl, owner-broker of The Mike Chiesl Group, is winner of the San Diego Business Journal’s 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Award in the Small Company category.

“What I find is (training and working with military spouses) gets us in front of more of the people that need to be served in the military, but it also generates an opportunity for our military spouses to create some income from home,” Chiesl said.

His beneficent professional ambition isn’t limited to spousal employment, though it’s a big focus. He’s also driven to teach good financial sense to service members.

Chiesl, age 38, said he has seen too many Camp Pendleton marines take their checks straight to the car dealer and buy a brand new Camaro.

What they should be doing, as he now teaches squadrons around San Diego County, is to make full use of a VA loan. That’s the home mortgage borrowing option guaranteed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

“If you look at the average state of armed forces, the VA loan is the most powerful financial tool in the marketplace,” he said. “And one in 10 veterans use it in their lifetime.”

He said his students get financial basics and instructions on doing real estate the way he considers most advantageous.

Chiesl grew up in Texas dreaming he’d play football at one of the state’s big universities. But he didn’t make the cut, he said: “It was either an Ivy League or Naval Academy.”

The U.S. Naval Academy won out because his grandfather and hero was a B-17 navigator shot down over German-occupied France then taken as a prisoner of war. Upon graduation from the academy, though, Chiesl switched and went with the U.S. Marine Corps. After a period at Quantico Station in Virginia, he was stationed at Camp Pendleton as a communications officer.

Then came the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Within two weeks of his arrival at Camp Pendleton, Chiesl was assigned to go to Iraq.

During his first deployment commanding an 80-vehicle convoy headed for Fallujah, Chiesl says he got to see the best and worst humanity has to offer. “Lots of really fun, interesting stories,” he said, recalling that initial deployment as “definitely a wild one.”

After his second deployment he left the Marines. He mentored in real estate in Los Angeles before choosing the San Diego area to open a brokerage. He and a business partner grew the office to 50 employees in 10 years, then sold it to his broker.

Now, employing 10 at his offices in Carlsbad, with half of his staff veterans, Chiesl prides himself on high-touch customer service that’s “super pro-veteran.” He estimates half or more of his business is with active or former military.

Amber Gough, owner of San Diego-based executive recruitment firm Talent Fusion Points, and a client of Chiesl, said Chiesl trains and coaches military spouses in a lasting way that gives them a leg-up in their professional lives, wherever on the map they end up.

“His efforts really center around continuing to give back to the veteran community,” she said.
Naval Vet Sees Construction Work as Extension of His Service

By EMMET PIERCE

Lars Herman, president of Herman Construction Group Inc., has been honored as best entrepreneur, medium company, with a 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Award.

Herman, 35, said he was proud to receive the honor Oct. 25 at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine.

“It was fantastic,” he said. “This is a military town. There are a ton of incredible veterans out there doing incredible things. It’s very humbling. There were a lot of good names and good businesses on that list” of nominees.

Transition to Civilian Life

After graduating from the Naval Academy in 2004, Herman served in the Navy for five years, rising to the rank of lieutenant in the Civil Engineering Corps. He resigned his commission in June 2009 and began operating his construction company in Escondido. He has grown Herman Construction from a two-employee operation into a busy firm with more than 50 workers.

Over the past eight years his company has completed or been awarded more than 100 federal general construction and design-build projects throughout the U.S. “We’ve done probably over $100 million since inception,” Herman said. “We’re on a number of multiyear contracts.”

The company provides construction services to such numerous government entities, including the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, the National Reorganization Office, and the Department of Homeland Security. It also serves the private sector.

A Natural Extension

Herman says running his company is a natural extension of his military service.

“It’s what I knew,” he said. “I knew how the government purchased things. It was easy for me to get my foot in the door.

Just because we don’t wear a uniform anymore doesn’t mean that we don’t want to serve. I deal very closely with active-duty members by performing work on bases.”

Herman’s company has become an expert in the renovation, repair, and upgrade of research facilities, laboratories, examination rooms, patient interview rooms, and staff offices within hospitals. A major focus has been the renovation of health-care facilities and hospitals serving veterans.

Earlier this year, Herman was named small business person of the year by the Small Business Association (SBA) California. He finished as second runner-up nationally among 51 nominees for the award.

Herman is a member of the Associated General Contractors (AGC) National Small Business Council, as well as the AGC of San Diego, which meets to discuss the policies and procedures of the various government agencies.

The entrepreneur is an active member of the SmartBidNet Advisory Board. Herman assists and advises this group in organizing the electronic bidding of government contracts.

Community Focused

Herman and his company are active in civic affairs, supporting peace officers, construction trades, the YMCA and an orphanage in Mexico. He serves as a member of the San Diego Honorary Sheriff Association.

“Men in uniform who deal with tough stuff, we need to honor them,” he said. “Their jobs are not easy. I like giving back.”

Herman has served as a forum chair and moderator for Entrepreneurs’ Organization (EO), a global peer-to-peer network for leading entrepreneurs. He and his wife Jenna have three children.

The businessman said his wife and his employees are responsible for his success.

“None of this would have been possible without an amazing supporting spouse and incredible employees,” he said. “It’s not just about me.”
Efficiency Brings Expansion for Naval Ship Painting Co.

By EMMET PIERCE

Alan Lerchbacker, the president and CEO of Naval Coating Inc. (NCI), has been honored as best entrepreneur in the large company category of the 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Awards.

Lerchbacker said he was pleased to be surrounded by numerous colleagues from San Diego County’s business and military communities when he received the award on Oct. 25 at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine.

“We were super excited,” he said. “I knew 30 or 40 percent of the people who were there in the room.”

Lerchbacker’s company paints and preserves the Navy’s Pacific Fleet. The veteran served in the Navy for 26 years before starting his career in the private sector. He has been described as leader who is adept at finding cost efficiencies and growing business.

Lerchbacker acquired his company in San Diego in January 2016. It currently employs 144 people, many of whom are veterans. The veteran’s management strategy has reduced monthly operating costs from as high as $1.5 million to an average of $800,000. This has been accomplished by renegotiating vendor relationships and finding innovative ways to conserve resources.

Part of Lerchbacker’s strategy has been the development of a proprietary enterprise resource planning (ERP) and project management system, which enables employees to manage hours, supplies, tools and maintenance in real time. This helps optimize reorder and maintenance schedules.

“That is how we are able to see that we are optimizing and utilizing people in all the right areas at the right time,” he explained. “It is really critical that our people get to the right place at the right time.”

Building A Business

Lerchbacker has used customer engagement to establish deeper business relationships. One project has lead to another, he explained.

“It’s like hockey,” he said. “You score that first goal and others will follow.”

His company has bid on numerous state and local projects to refurbish and enhance water treatment facilities, storage tanks, public buildings, and other infrastructure. NCI’s first commercial job will be the renovation of a recreation center for the City of San Diego.

Lerchbacker noted that he has collaborated with other coating and defense subcontractors to develop partnerships.

“We have partnered with one of our previous competitors to win work in the Northwest,” he said. “We will be opening an office in the Seattle area in January or February of next year.”

Becoming A Mentor

The entrepreneur’s experience in the ship repair industry has enabled him to mentor his own workers and industry partners. He serves as a leader at his American Legion post and within the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association.

At the alumni association, he helps sponsor scholarship interviews and mock job interviews for veterans who are transitioning to civilian life. NCI is a sponsor for the National Veteran Transition Services Inc. program.

The entrepreneur said finding ways to help veterans has become one of his passions.

“I am working with three guys who all want to go to the Naval Academy,” he said. “I am working on getting them into the next class. I am working with 12 or 13 officers and enlisted men who are leaving the Navy, to find what is next for them.”

He credits his wife Amy with supporting his efforts. He noted that his daughter Suzie now works with him. His son Scott is an entrepreneur in Cleveland.

Congratulations Richard Koeneke
Finalist in the 2017 Veteran and Military Entrepreneur Awards

Robbins Arroyo LLP congratulates its Chief Operating Officer, retired U.S. Marine Corps Colonel Richard Koeneke, on being chosen as a finalist in the 2017 Veteran and Military Entrepreneur Awards.

This prestigious honor recognizes Mr. Koeneke’s exceptional leadership and guidance to the firm and San Diego community. Parlaying his 26 years of military experience, Mr. Koeneke has infused the firm with vigor and guides the firm’s culture of unity and entrepreneurship. As he heads toward his nine year anniversary, Mr. Koeneke continues to serve the firm with the same enthusiasm and drive as the day he started, and has successfully applied his legal insight and business acumen to help transform Robbins Arroyo LLP into the firm it is today.

Robbins Arroyo LLP proudly supports the military and veterans. Please join our excitement in congratulating Richard Koeneke.
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Economic Trends 2018 | Tuesday, January 9, 2018

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rh Robert Half
Translating Research on Dolphin Health to Human Conditions

By KEVIN GEMMELL

It’s common for physicians to study a particular discipline because they were inspired or impacted by someone close to them. But that’s not the case with Dr. Eric Venn-Watson, co-founder of Epitracker Inc., who is working with the U.S. Naval dolphin population to study a wide range of diseases from age-associated ailments to neurodegenerative afflictions. He does it because he can. And because he should.

“What inspires me is the opportunity,” said Venn-Watson. “We can treat some of the biggest, most devastating diseases. Cardiovascular metabolic syndrome affects one out of every three people in the world. We have this opportunity to treat diseases that are very difficult to treat. Because we have it, it’s an imperative – a moral obligation to see if we can treat the biggest diseases out there.”

Venn-Watson, 44, and Epitracker Inc., were recently honored at the 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Conference & Awards for best entrepreneur startup category.

The 20-year Navy veteran – who saw combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan – teamed up with his wife Stephanie to start Epitracker. She serves as the chief executive officer. As the director of the U.S. Navy Marine Mammal Program’s clinical research program, she’s been privy to dolphin research that stretches back about 60 years. Armed with that knowledge, the Venn-Watsons decided it was time to apply what they know and formed Epitracker.

“I started going to some of her meetings and, oh my gosh, what they were doing was amazing,” Venn-Watson said. “Let’s see if we can take some of those discoveries that improved dolphin health and translate those to humans.”

So the couple spent most of 2017 getting their house in order.

Best Executive, Public Company

Army Vet Makes Successful Transition to Life Science CEO

By KEVIN GEMMELL

It’s been a hectic but ultimately successful and fulfilling year for Richard Pascoe, CEO of Apricus Biosciences Inc. (Nasdaq: APRI). For starters, helped over assets and drug is a commercialization partner for Vitaros in Latin America and parts of Asia and Europe.

“Our business model is drug development with our top-sold drug, Vitaros, in Switzerland and Ferring Pharmaceuticals. The an on-demand topical cream for the treat- of erectile dysfunction. The deal, in excess of $12 million, comes on the heels of an already existing commercial relationship between Ferring and April-

It’s a condition that is triggered by auto-immune diseases like Scleroderma or Lupus, where people lose circulation in their extremities – typically the hands or fingers.

Over the past year they have secured five granted intellectual property patents, have nine more pending and have raised approximately $1.2 million in seed money. On top of that, it was shaping the structure of the company. That includes data crunching, forming a business advisory board, a board of di-

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And yet with all of that on his plate, he still finds time for his true passion, which is helping veterans. He’s spent the bulk of his adult life serving in and out of uniform. He’s an Army combat veteran and served as a commissioned officer with the 24th Infantry Division. He also continued with the National Guard following his initial commitment. Along with West Point classmates, he founded the Johnny Mac Soldiers Fund, which is named in honor of classmate, Col. John McHugh who was killed in action in Afghanistan.

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Healthy Momma Carves Out Meaningful Career On Her Terms

By KEVIN GEMMELL

Flossie Hall has bypassed medical school to launch her meal-prep company.

When speaking with Flossie Hall, it’s easy to get caught up in her air of “anything is possible.” Her message is simple: If I can do it, so can you.

And in just two years, she has helped build Healthy Momma—her company which prepares fresh, healthy meals and affordable meals into a thriving business that generates more than $150,000 in revenue per month.

The Navy wife and mother of four was recently honored at the 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Conference & Awards for best company owned by a military spouse.

Once a prime candidate for medical school, Hall holds an EMT license, an A.A. in Science, a B.S. in Psychology and a B.S. in Biology. She graduated with honors from the University of Michigan.

But the combination of her husband’s deployments (he works in Naval Special Warfare) and raising four children was too much of a burden to pile on medical school. She had started to meal prep to lose weight after pregnancies, so turning that into a business seemed like a natural next step.

“I feel like it’s far more gratifying than if I were a doctor,” Hall said. “As a doctor, there are a lot of political restraints and guidelines. Now I feel like I’m helping people on my own terms.”

While her business caters to pretty much any type of individual or family, it’s her work with the military community that has earned her richly-deserved praise. Having served more than 500,000 meals in just two years, Hall has managed to get off of diabetes medication and get a great comfort to families with newborn babies or those in time of loss.

“It’s not just military, but police officers, also,” she said. “If there’s a fallen hero in our community, we’re the first to reach out.”

And that sometimes means giving away her food, which she’s happy to do.

“If I say I’m not going to be like every other company out there and charge $15 per meal because I want this to be accessible to people who need it the most, then I’m going to do that,” she said. “I’m not doing this to be a multi-millionaire. I’m doing this to reach people and help people.”

While the company saw tremendous growth in 2016, Hall said 2017 was all about getting her house in order. With so much growth, she actually had to scale back in 2017 to “correct some mistakes.” But she embraces the grind of motherhood and being an entrepreneur while having a spouse who is active military.

“I’m exhausted, but I’ve always had overachiever syndrome,” she said. “Even before I started the company, I worked, and had four kids, and my husband was gone and I was trying to get to med school. I’m used to the grind of everything.”

“Entrepreneurship is just another kind of grit. I’m not in the rat race of getting into medical school anymore. I’m in the rat race of doing something bigger than that.”

Best Executive, Private Company

Engineering Firm Finds National Opportunity at VA Hospitals

By EMMET PIERCE

Michael Johnson, the owner of Premier Mechanical Group Inc. (PMG), has been honored as best executive of a privately held company in the 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Awards.

“I was blown away, ecstatic, very humbled and grateful,” Johnson said of the award, which was presented Oct. 25 at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine. “We are being recognized for the good work we do. Veterans aren’t being forgotten in San Diego.”

Johnson founded PMG in Escondido in 2012. His company delivered engineering service and support to 42 Veterans Administration hospitals in 2016 alone.

The San Marcos resident described PMG as “a small engineering firm” with offices in Escondido, Atlanta, El Paso, Texas, Fayetteville, N.C., and Memphis, Tenn.

“We’ve gone around the U.S. providing engineering support for VA hospitals,” he said. “That is how we started out. Now we do engineering services and construction work. Not only do we inspect buildings and equipment, we build buildings also. Ninety-eight percent of our work comes from outside San Diego County.”

The future for the company looks bright, he stressed. “We are a new company,” Johnson said. “The future is unlimited. Who knows? We are here to service and support our customers.”

Johnson’s professional experience includes three years as the director of engineering with the U.S. Government Bureau of Medicine at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. He is also a mechanical engineering repair officer who served in the Navy’s submarine force for 25 years. He has more than 28 years of experience in engineering and capital construction projects.

Throughout his Navy career, Johnson participated in deployment tours to both Southwest Asia and the Middle East. He was involved in the war in Kuwait and received several honors for his service. They included the Southwest Asia Service Medal with Bronze Star, the Kuwait Liberation Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and a battle award ribbon.

Injured in Combat

Johnson suffered a serious war injury during his service. After recovering, he continued to perform as a naval officer, retiring after 25 years of service. His experience includes three years as the director of engineering with the U.S. Government Bureau of Medicine at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

Johnson is the father of three grown sons. When he’s not busy with PMG, he volunteers to help maintain the Good News Missionary Baptist Church in San Diego and the homes of some of its members. He also supports various civic programs that provide food to individuals and families in need.

“He is just a very smart individual,” said award nominator Travis Grienepstrock, who works in human resources and accounting for PMG. “He is giving, not just with the church but with his employees. He hates to see people struggle. He always sees the good in people.”

Johnson has been known to offer jobs to people he meets who are in need of a helping hand, Grienepstrock said.

“He mentors them and gets them back on their feet,” he said. “To me he is a hero. He is always doing good deeds. He is very private, very quiet man. People aren’t aware of what he does for others.”

By NIKI LAI

Michael Johnson, the owner of Premier Mechanical Group in 2012. The company has grown from its foundation of servicing VA Hospitals.
**Veteran-Owned Businesses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Gross revenue (millions)</th>
<th># of employees: Full-time Part-time Companywide</th>
<th>% veteran-owned Certified veteran-owned? Service-disabled veteran-owned?</th>
<th>Majority owner(s)</th>
<th>Company description</th>
<th>Local executive(s)</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Naval Coating Inc.</td>
<td>341 E Street, San Diego 92102</td>
<td><a href="http://www.navalcouating.com">www.navalcouating.com</a></td>
<td>$15,520</td>
<td>150/0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Alan Lenzbacker</td>
<td>A CA DMSE premier abrasive blasting, painting &amp; preservation company for the U.S. Navy</td>
<td>Dan McColgan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quality Controlled Manufacturing Inc.</td>
<td>9430 Abraham Way, Santa Ana 92701</td>
<td><a href="http://www.qualitycm.com">www.qualitycm.com</a></td>
<td>$11,515</td>
<td>89/4/93</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Bob Grande</td>
<td>Precision machining of general to very complex components for Aerospace, O&amp;O &amp; other industries</td>
<td>Bob Grande Rick Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Collins Plumbing</td>
<td>8130 Constitution St., La Mesa 91942</td>
<td><a href="http://www.collinsplumbing.com">www.collinsplumbing.com</a></td>
<td>$12,496</td>
<td>70/0/70</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Richard R. Collins</td>
<td>Construction plumbing contractor</td>
<td>Steve Manziola Rob Schneider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Herman Construction Group Inc.</td>
<td>2060 Winderidge Place, Suite A, Escondido 92029</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hermanconstruction.com">www.hermanconstruction.com</a></td>
<td>$5,412</td>
<td>48/5/48</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Joe Araya</td>
<td>Water &amp; fire damage restoration work as preferred vendors for insurance work</td>
<td>Juan Araya Steven Carlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Servpro North Vista/San Marcos</td>
<td>2870 S. Santa Fe Ave., San Marcos 92069</td>
<td><a href="http://www.servpronorthvistasanmarcos.com">www.servpronorthvistasanmarcos.com</a></td>
<td>$4,346</td>
<td>48/12/48</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Lars Herman &amp; Steve Smith</td>
<td>Provides construction services to the federal government &amp; military</td>
<td>Lars Herman Steve Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Innofflight Inc.</td>
<td>9930 Pacific Heights Blvd., Suite 256, San Diego 92121</td>
<td><a href="http://www.innofflight.com">www.innofflight.com</a></td>
<td>$11,515</td>
<td>29/34/29</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Joe Araya</td>
<td>Dedicated to innovative responsive electronics solutions for secure operations in extreme settings</td>
<td>Jeffrey Janick</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Diamond Pacific Construction Inc.</td>
<td>6021 Amapola Ave., La Mesa 91942</td>
<td><a href="http://www.diamondpacificinc.com">www.diamondpacificinc.com</a></td>
<td>$2,211</td>
<td>26/21/26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Gregg M. Torwick</td>
<td>General demolition contractor, CSLB A.B.C. 1-C-61 208</td>
<td>Gregg Torwick ERA Dynasty</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>BPI Plumbing</td>
<td>1021 Bay Blvd., Suite S, Chula Vista 91911</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bpiplumbing.com">www.bpiplumbing.com</a></td>
<td>$3,954</td>
<td>23/24</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Alex Garcia</td>
<td>Plumbing contractor, service &amp; repair, 24/7 on call, new construction &amp; tenant improvement</td>
<td>Alex Garcia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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<th># of employees: Full-time Part-time Companywide</th>
<th>% veteran-owned Certified veteran-owned? Service-disabled veteran-owned?</th>
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<th>Company description</th>
<th>Local executive(s)</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Diego &amp; Son Printing Inc.</td>
<td>2104 National Ave., San Diego 92113</td>
<td><a href="http://www.diegosprint.com">www.diegosprint.com</a></td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>14/14</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Nicholas Aguilara</td>
<td>Commercial printer</td>
<td>Clara Aguilara</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Novum Group Inc.</td>
<td>3207 Greyhawk Court, Suite 110, Carlsbad 92010</td>
<td><a href="http://www.novumgroup.com">www.novumgroup.com</a></td>
<td>$1,180</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Eric Armstrong</td>
<td>Executive search firm specializing in finance</td>
<td>Eric Armstrong</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>5x Technology LLC</td>
<td>3160 Camino Del Rio N., San Diego 92108</td>
<td><a href="http://www.5xtechnology.com">www.5xtechnology.com</a></td>
<td>$1,180</td>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Jeffrey Yefsky</td>
<td>IT solutions firm providing business intelligence services, training &amp; software nationwide</td>
<td>Jeffrey Yefsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Engineered Mechanical Services Inc.</td>
<td>2130 Chabolla Court, Suite 111, Escondido 92029</td>
<td><a href="http://www.emsi-socal.com">www.emsi-socal.com</a></td>
<td>$1,180</td>
<td>8/2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Tom Reichert</td>
<td>Mechanical solutions for specialty environments requiring specific temp., humidity &amp; HVAC service</td>
<td>Tom Reichert</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rooter-Man Plumbers of San Diego</td>
<td>13741 Danielson St., Suite H, Poway 92064</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rooterman.com">www.rooterman.com</a></td>
<td>$1,180</td>
<td>8/2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Eric Brockmire</td>
<td>Provides plumbing &amp; drain cleaning services</td>
<td>Eric Brockmire</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ceramic Tile Supply Inc.</td>
<td>3310 Via De La Valle, Suite E, Oceanside 92058</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ceramictilesupply.com">www.ceramictilesupply.com</a></td>
<td>$0.845</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Michael Moen</td>
<td>Retail/wholesale ceramic tile, natural stone, glass &amp; metal tile, &amp; all installation materials</td>
<td>Michael Moen</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>A+ Landscapes</td>
<td>505 Enterprise St., Escondido 92029</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aplus-landscapes.com">www.aplus-landscapes.com</a></td>
<td>$0.845</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Randy Hernandez</td>
<td>Install pavers, concrete, flagstone, masonry, turf.</td>
<td>Randy Hernandez</td>
</tr>
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## Veteran-Owned Businesses

** Ranked by number of full-time employees as of September 1, 2017 **

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<th>Company Address</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Full-time employees</th>
<th>Part-time employees</th>
<th>% veteran-owned</th>
<th>Certified veteran-owned?</th>
<th>Service-disabled veteran-owned?</th>
<th>Majority owner(s)</th>
<th>Company description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lorimar Group</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lorimargroup.com">www.lorimargroup.com</a></td>
<td>619-749-9399</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Full-service communications company that offers mission critical comm.</td>
<td>Mike Johnson</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>San Diego Hauling Hunks</td>
<td><a href="http://www.janieremovalsandiego.com">www.janieremovalsandiego.com</a></td>
<td>619-507-4172</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Hauls junk, demo sheds, cleans old garages/storage units, helps with emptying flood pools/trucks</td>
<td>Robert Brooke Estridge</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bowman Consultants Inc.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bowman06.com">www.bowman06.com</a></td>
<td>619-261-0186</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Provides expert construction consultation from concept to completion for the private sector</td>
<td>Ian Bowman</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Phoenix Water Management LLC</td>
<td><a href="http://www.phoenixwater.net">www.phoenixwater.net</a></td>
<td>619-987-0557</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Provider of industrial water treatment, energy &amp; water saving services</td>
<td>Michael J Conner</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Risen Oil/Martin Risen Sales Co.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.winzerusa.com">www.winzerusa.com</a></td>
<td>619-855-7575</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Fleet maintenance supplies &amp; oil products</td>
<td>Martin Risen</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Certified veteran-owned?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner(s)</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lars Herman</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Maniglia</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Johnson</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Brockmire</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael J Conner</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Risen</td>
<td>1986</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Local executive(s)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner(s)</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eric Brockmire</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael J Conner</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Risen</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CoveredCA.com/ForSmallBusiness | 844.332.8384

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**SAVINGS FOR YOUR BUSINESS. OPTIONS FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES.**
People took in advice and exchanged ideas at the first Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Conference and Awards on Oct. 25 at The Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine.

The conference was presented by The Rosie Network, which supports military families through entrepreneurial programs and services.

More than 240 people were on hand to hear the keynote from Larry Broughton, founder of Broughton Hotels during the awards program in the evening.

One of the highlights of the awards program was the recognition of a real life Rosie the Riveter, Ida Tagliaferri of Rancho Bernardo, one of about three million women who joined the workforce during WWII.

The Awards title Sponsor was Tri-City Medical Center; gold sponsors were Cox Business and Wells Fargo. The Conference sponsors were USAA, Bank of America and CDC Small Business Finance.
1. Vic Martin of Shelter to Soldier and a service dog
2. Ida Tagliaferri, an original “Rosie the Riveter” during World War II and a Rancho Bernardo resident, and her daughter Elaine Tagliaferri
3. Keynote speaker Larry Broughton of Broughton Hotels
4. Jim Akin of Touchstone Compliance LLC, Mike Naylor of PKL Services Inc. and David Bakkeby of Target CW
5. Beth Holland of conference presenter The Rosie Network
6. Brian Lee of Presenting Sponsor Wells Fargo
7. Kathy Hansen of Industrial Grind Coffee and Ray Flores of the County of San Diego
8. Alex Marlay of WealthWave and Ty Smith of Vigilance Risk Solutions
10. Althea Coetzee Leslie of the Small Business Administration
11. Tom Garcia of USO San Diego and David Bennett of title sponsor Tri-City Medical Center
12. Jerry Sanders of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
13. Disa Dearie of Dearie’s Delectables and Maurice Wilson of National Veterans Transition Services
16. Huntley Paton, President and Publisher, San Diego Business Journal
17. Anita Lightfoot and Supervisor Bill Horn of the County of San Diego
18. David Dearsie of conference sponsor USAA
19. Susan Couch of conference sponsor Bank of America, City Council Member Chris Cate and Laura Dodd of of America
20. Brandy Williams of Rapid Solutions CPR + AED and Dr. Heather Lewis
21. Stacey Lindsey and RADMR Yancy Lindsey of Navy Region Southwest
22. Marnie Peterson and Mo Camacho of presenting sponsor Cox Business

Photos by Bob Thompson, Fotowerks. Additional photos from the event are at the following link: http://Fotowerks.san.smugmug.com.