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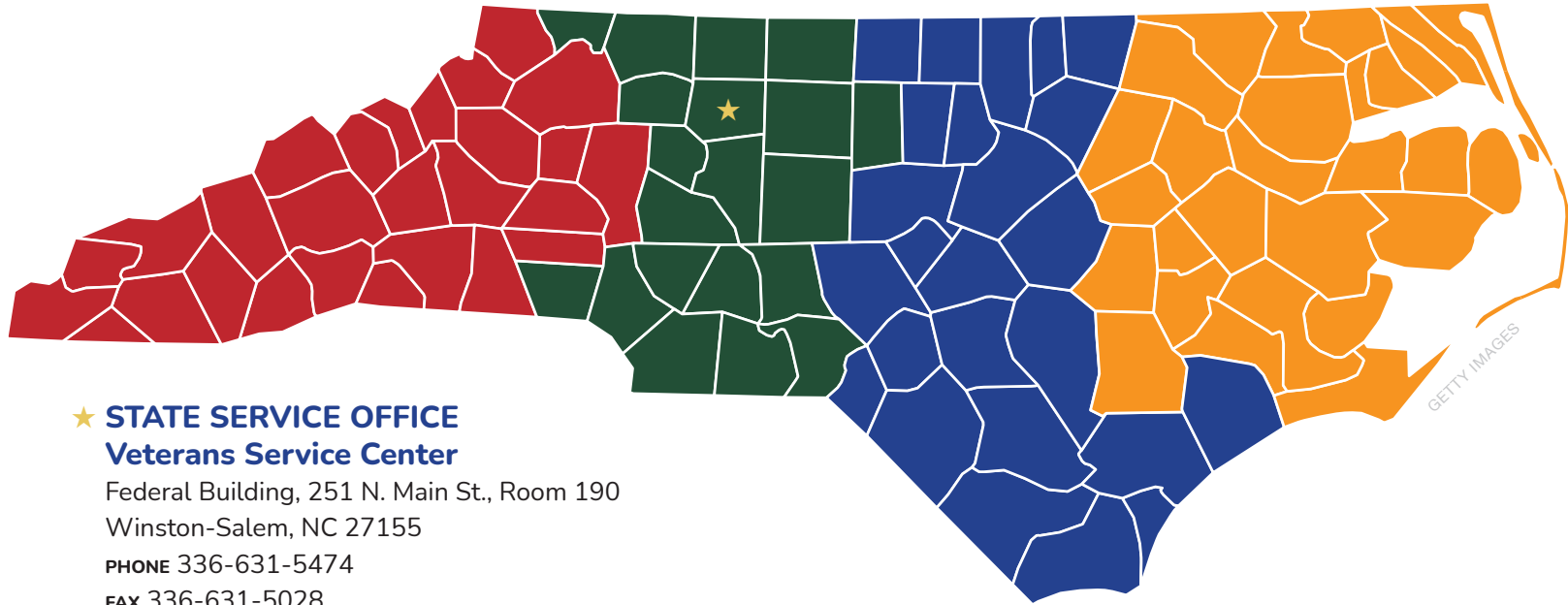
November 2024

North Carolina Veterans: Bridging Military to Civilian Life



*Funded by North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services -
Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services and the Governor's Institute*

State Veterans Service Centers



★ **STATE SERVICE OFFICE**
Veterans Service Center

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Winston-Salem, NC 27155
PHONE 336-631-5474
FAX 336-631-5028

REGION I **(Western NC)**

HICKORY

1985 Tate Blvd SE, Ste 113
Hickory, NC 28602
PHONE 919-664-1040
FAX 919-664-1041

CANTON

120 Main St
Canton NC 28716
PHONE 919-664-1095
FAX 919-664-1096

MORGANTON

305 East Union St, Ste A135
Morganton NC 28655
PHONE 919-664-1055
FAX 919-664-1056

REGION II **(Piedmont)**

CLEMMONS

3802 Clemmons Road, Ste C
Clemmons NC 27012
PHONE 919-664-1000
FAX 919-664-1001

CHARLOTTE

5500 Executive Center Dr,
Ste 132
Charlotte, NC 28212
PHONE 919-664-1080
FAX 919-664-1081

REGION III **(Central)**

GARNER

Hartwell Plaza
1027 Hwy 70 West, Ste 202
Garner NC 27529
PHONE 919-664-1160
FAX 919-664-1161

FAYETTEVILLE

225 Green St, Ste 903
Fayetteville, NC 28301
PHONE 919-664-1130
FAX 919-664-1131

WILMINGTON

3205 Randall Parkway,
Ste 102
Wilmington, NC 28403
PHONE 919-664-1065
FAX 919-664-1066

REGION IV **(Coastal)**

ELIZABETH CITY

1023 US 17 South, Ste 2
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
PHONE 919-664-1150
FAX 919-664-1151

KINSTON

1136 US Hwy 258 N, Ste 101
Kinston, NC 28504
PHONE 919-664-1030
FAX 919-664-1031

GREENVILLE

3740 S. Evans St, Ste A
Greenville, NC 27834
PHONE 919-664-1015
FAX 919-664-1016

WILSON

1901 Tarboro St SW, Ste 202
Wilson, NC 27893
PHONE 919-664-1185
FAX 919-664-1151

NC DHHS SECRETARY KODY KINSLEY

On behalf of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), I would like to express our unwavering commitment to the veterans of North Carolina. Our mission is to ensure that those who have served our nation receive the comprehensive care and resources they need to thrive.

North Carolina's Veterans face challenges that require a multifaceted approach to support. We strive to provide services tailored for each individual, including assistance with the transition to civilian life, education



and employment opportunities, better access to healthcare with enhanced mental health support, life enrichment programs, and more.

The success of these efforts relies heavily on the strength of our partnerships. We're proud to be part of the Governor's Working Group for Veterans, Service Members, and their Families, whose work in fostering collaboration among various

stakeholders and advocating for the needs of Veterans is truly commendable. Because of this partnership between federal and state governments, along with the contributions of local service providers and community groups, veterans in North Carolina benefit from a seamless integration of services the moment they return to civilian life.

As we move forward, NCDHHS remains committed to strengthening these partnerships and exploring new avenues for collaboration.

NC MHDDSUS DIRECTOR KELLY CROSBIE

As the daughter and granddaughter of veterans who saw active duty, ensuring specialized services to support the mental health and well-being of those who served our country is incredibly important to me. In my role as the Director of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services, I want to emphasize our continued commitment to improving the system of care for veterans and their families. They face unique challenges, from the impacts of service-related trauma



to the difficulties of transitioning to civilian life. That's why active service members and veterans are specifically named in my department's strategic plan as a population

requiring dedicated and unique attention. Our responsibility is to ensure that veterans and their family members receive the support they need to lead fulfilling and healthy lives.

Our division actively supports the state's service members, veterans and their families

through funding community resources. Among the programs we proudly support, include: NCServes, NC4Vets.org, Certified Peer Support Specilaist with Military Designation, Veterans Services of the Carolinas, Veterans Restoration Quarters, Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), Veteran Support Specialist Training, and the North Carolina National Guard Voucher Program.

Our veterans, service members, and their families have given so much to our nation; we aim to honor their service by providing them with the quality care and support they deserve.

NC DMVA SECRETARY GRIER MARTIN

At the North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, it's our mission to provide support, comprehensive services, and resources that our service members, veterans, and their families have earned.

Our Military Affairs Division staff coordinate with the installations in North Carolina to improve the quality of life for service members stationed throughout our state, and our Transition Services Division guides military members and their families who are leaving the military and have decided to make North



Carolina their permanent home, providing them with federal, state, and local contacts who can help make the move from active duty to

civilian easier. Our Veterans Affairs Division's efforts include assisting veterans file for their benefits, coordinating with veterans service organizations to provide outside resources to our veterans, and overseeing the state veterans' homes and cemeteries.

It's an honor to lead NC DMVA, and a great opportunity to reflect on my own experiences, including my previous military service and my role with the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force on Behavioral Health for the Military and Their Families. I am keenly aware of the challenges faced by our veterans and their families.

I am confident that together, we can continue to ensure that North Carolina is the most military and veteran-friendly state in the nation.



At NC4Vets, our mission is to connect service members, veterans, and their families with federal, state, and local resources to ensure access to services and supports that facilitate health and wellbeing. While we do not provide direct care, our commitment is to create the shortest path to the best services available, supporting those in military service and those returning from service to our country and ensuring that NC remains the nation's most veteran-friendly state.



BENEFITS



EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT



HEALTHCARE



HOUSING



**PERSONAL
SERVICES**



VA



**WOMEN'S
SERVICES**



GETTY IMAGES

VISIT US TODAY AT **NC4VETS.ORG**



L to R- Joel Brown, Dr. Christina L. Vair, Scot McCosh, CSM Greg Seymour

NC GOVERNOR'S WORKING GROUP MEETING OFFERS ADVICE, SOLUTIONS FOR TRANSITIONING VETERANS

By Rick Smith

FAYETTEVILLE – Veterans and leaders of various organizations serving vets gathered recently at a North Carolina Governor's Working Group of Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families meeting targeting challenges in transition to civilian life, and all ears throughout the afternoon was Grier Martin, secretary of N.C.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

"Let me know what you're hearing," Martin told attendees who traveled to the Tony Rand Student Center at Fayetteville Technical Community College near Fort Liberty. "I need to hear from y'all."

He pointed out that even though the United States isn't engaged currently in a major war

"We still have men and women in harm's way. We still have veterans in transition."

How many? A lot.

Some 200,000 transitions from military careers to civilian, attendees were told.

"I've got to be at my best" to provide veterans

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with help as they enter a new phase of their lives,” Martin added. “This is important work.”

How to assist? That was the subject of the event’s key event – a panel discussion regarding “Team Transitions – Exploring & Engaging Family and Community Supports for Veterans.”

Panel members included Dr. Christina L. Vair, psychologist and whole health program director at the Salisbury Veteran Affairs Medical Center; Command Sgt. Major Greg Seymour of the Ft. Liberty Garrison Command, and Scot McCosh, senior director of military and veterans programs at Fayetteville Tech. Joel Brown, an anchor and reporter at ABC11, served as moderator.

Command Sgt. Seymour is living evidence that many veterans transition to civilian world carrying permanent reminders of their military career.

“I’ve got more shrapnel in me than a grill,” he said with a smile.

Citing the demand for services, Brown called the transition pipeline “a big number” – especially in North Carolina which is home to more than 91,000 uniformed personnel, the fourth largest in the U.S. (Source: Visual Capitalist)

The meeting is supported by the Governor’s Institute, the NC Department of Health and Human Services and NCServes.

Key questions among veterans include:

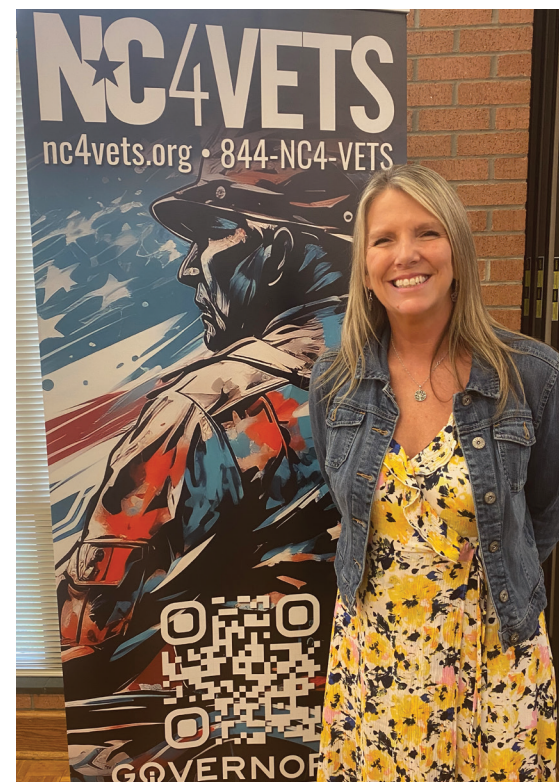
- “I need a check.”
- “I need a place.”
- “I need a purpose.”

In fact a list provided by NCServes (ncserves.org) that works with veterans across all 100 N.C. counties shows the extensive menu of what it works with veterans to provide:

- Clothing



- Housing
- Household Goods
- Employment
- Education
- Legal
- Financial Assistance
- Social Enrichment and Recreation
- VA Benefits
- Health Care (physical and mental health)
- Family Support
- Food Security
- Transportation
- Money Management
- Utilities Payment Assistance, and more



Top: Secretary Grier Martin
Above: Crystal Miller

‘WHOLE HEALTH’

“Our warfighters are very important,” said Command Sgt. Major Seymour. Programs need to help the veterans as they transition in order to provide more than paths to jobs and careers. Their “health, fitness, spiritual and mental needs must be met as well,” he stressed. “Translating military skills to civilian service” is crucial for a successful transition.

Dr. Vair picked up on that broad need, describing what she called a “whole health” approach. It includes “mind, body, spirit.” The VA offers what it calls a “Passport to Whole Health” which “provides resources to help [staff] change the conversation with patients in ways that can improve their outcomes.” (<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/passport/index.asp>)

To assist veterans seeking to further their education and launch new careers, McCosh said Fayetteville Tech wants to provide a “friendly place.” Veterans should not be ashamed to acknowledge that “I’m struggling.”

“Every experience is unique,” he added. The college wants to provide an “ecosystem” through which veterans can “shop around” for what’s best to meet their needs and those of their families.

And not all veterans can cope successfully to a new life. According to the latest Veterans Administration data 6,000 veterans committed suicide in 2021, 184 in North Carolina. (https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp)

Noting that September was suicide prevention month, Dr. Vair said “each one of us has an obligation” to watch for warning signs, especially since veterans are “trained not to be vulnerable.”

“If I don’t say something,” added the command Sgt. Major of veterans, “you are at risk.”

“Let’s find a resource” for help, added

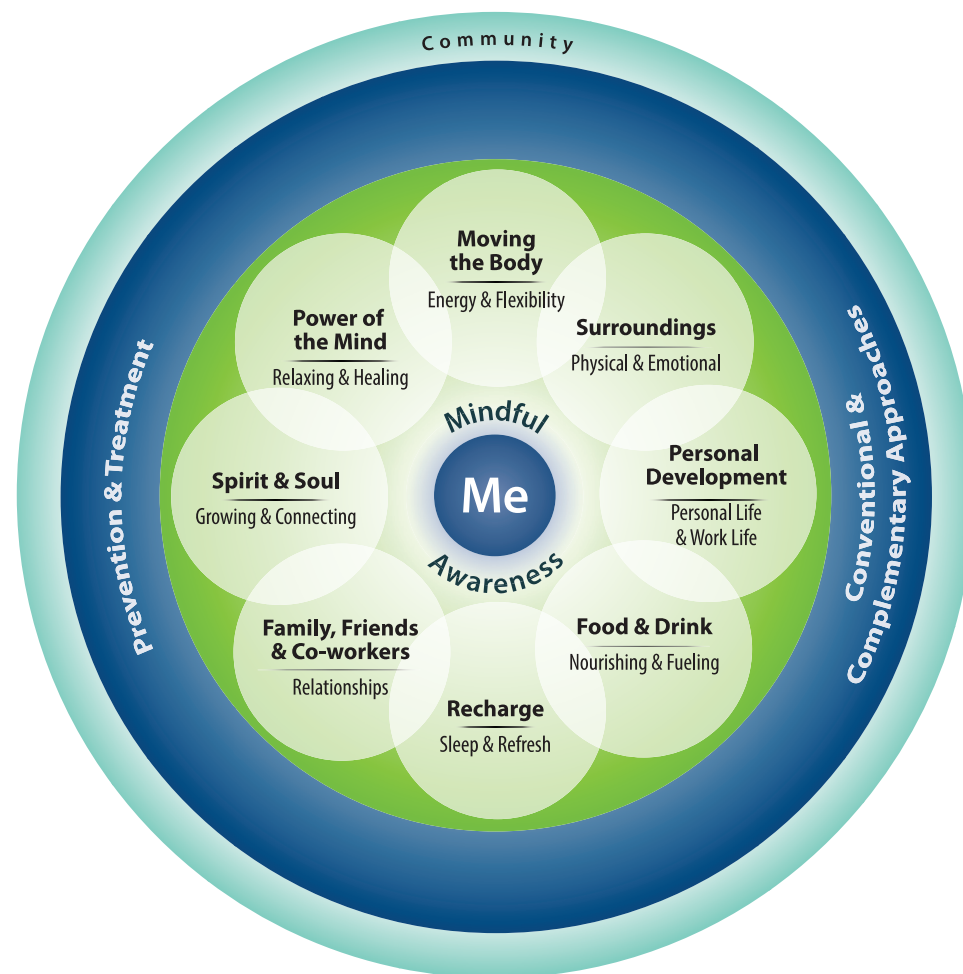
McCosh.

JOB AND CAREER HUNTING CHALLENGES

To help veterans find employment, Seymour said the Army alone “offers well over 200 programs.” And the private sector is responding such as a Fayetteville area Starbucks that offers special incentives for “Gold Star” families – those that have suffered the death of a member.

Internships such as those offered by the N.C. Biotechnology Center through NC and industry apprenticeships plus fellowships are becoming more widely available, Seymour and McCosh noted.

Courses in the growing field of cybersecurity are just one option for veterans at Fayetteville Tech, McCosh added.



www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/index.asp

NCWorks (veterans.ncworks.gov) and BioWork (ncbionetwork.org/biowork) are other sources for jobs.

But veterans face a “fire hose of information” about opportunities. A challenge is “how do we do better at job sharing,” McCosh said.

Crystal Miller, Veterans Support Supervisor of the Veterans Services Division for Mecklenburg County Government, a veteran who transitioned from the military a decade ago, said “transitioning now is very different.” Service providers have to adapt and keep adapting in a different world, she explained. And she sees positive signs.

“We are going forward,” she said but cautioned there are “a lot more discussions we need to have.”

AIR FORCE VETERAN BUILDS ‘AMAZING BIZ’ TO BRING CUTTING EDGE TECH TO CLIENTS

By Rick Smith

When serial venture capital investor Scot Wingo was asked about veteran-led companies emerging with powerful stories to tell he quickly settled on Marlene Andersch, CEO of Raleigh-based rockITdata.

“She’s Air Force and has built an amazing biz called rockITdata,” said Wingo, cofounder and former CEO of ChannelAdvisor, a global ecommerce company he later sold and went on to become CEO of Triangle car maintenance company Get Spiffy. Wingo stepped down as CEO recently but is extremely active in startups as an investor and as a compiler of regional startup data. “I was just chatting with her the other day.”

How big is the rockITdata story? Earlier this year the Women Presidents Organization (WPO) recognized the 50 Fastest Growing Women-Owned/Led Companies ranking, and rockITdata ranked seventh.

(website: <https://rockitdata.com/ranked-7-on-50-fastest-growing-women-led-companies/>)

The company, which launched in 2018 and has grown to more than 100 employees, also ranked No. 339 on the Inc. magazine 5000 list based on a nearly 1,300 percent revenue growth over the past three years. The Small Business Administration reported rockITdata achieved \$6 million in revenue in 2021. A SBA Paycheck Protection Program loan helped it survive the 2020-1 pandemic, noted the SBA.

Andersch, who was born in Guam and is a “service-disabled veteran,” goes by Marlie. She served in the first Gulf War in 2001

where she developed a love for high tech, earned a degree in business administration at Campbell University, and built an extensive resume including stints at IBM, Salesforce and PricewaterhouseCoopers. She went on to found rockITdata, carving a niche to provide a variety of services focusing on artificial intelligence, consulting and solutions geared to data as well as machine learning. Andersch also helped grow her business career by participating in the military veteran-focused Bunker Labs’s Veterans In Residence and CEOcircle.

rockITdata is recognized as a certified veteran, minority and woman-owned small business with more than 150 employees – and it is in hiring mode with multiple openings. In June of this year it raised more than \$700,000 from investors.

“rockITdata is partnered with leading cloud, data and AI-forward technologies. With their technologies and the rockITway, we provide an extraordinary impact by doing the right thing by our clients, company, and coworkers,” the company says at its website.

Building and managing call centers is a key focus of rockITdata.

“I love this stuff,” Andersch explains via LinkedIn. “Our team continues to innovate and leverage the power of AI to improve and change the future.”

At her LinkedIn site, a Cisco executive offers high praise for Andersch. Wrote Paul Tilley, a global account manager:

“I’ve had the pleasure of working with Marlene several times as a business partner.

Marlene is fantastic at developing client and partner relationships and it’s no surprise why when you see her in action.”

“Incredibly dedicated to the success of her customers, she is the rare sales professional that can both manage the details while keeping her eye on the big picture.”

So who is Andersch, how did her Air Force career help kickstart her interest in technology and becoming an entrepreneur, and what advice does she provide to veterans looking for new careers? In a Q&A with The Business Journal, she talks about those points – and more.

Tell me about your company, its focus, what differentiates it from competitors.

rockITdata is a professional services company that leverages data analytics and artificial intelligence to drive organizational success. Our expertise lies in management consulting, strategic planning, and technology development.

We empower clients to leverage data to make informed decisions, improve performance, and drive cohesive action. Our expert consultants guide organizations to implement efficient systems and use modern technologies while reducing technical debt.

We focus on the rockITway. The rockITway is to create “extraordinary impact by doing the right thing by our clients, company, and coworkers,” aligning to core values while always pushing themselves to think differently.

Tell me a bit about you and why the focus

of your venture reflects your interest, ambitions and skills.

As an Air Force Veteran with over three decades of IT experience, my journey in technology has been driven by a competitive spirit and unwavering core values. This combination propelled me from ascending the corporate ranks at various technology firms to ultimately founding and leading rockITdata as its CEO.

The transition from working in the corporate world to creating my own company reflects my drive to innovate and lead on my own terms. At rockITdata, I've leveraged my experience to create a company that not only delivers cutting-edge IT solutions but also embodies the values of our guiding principles.

Please tell me about your military career and why you chose to transition out of the military. Importantly, how was the military helpful to you in making the transition?

My journey began with a simple desire: to see the world through military service. This led me to join the Air Force, where I served during the first Gulf War in an operational support role. The experience was transformative, but in ways I hadn't anticipated.

Initially, my plan post-military was to pursue a degree in medicine. However, life had different plans. During my service, I had unknowingly cultivated a passion for technology. The Air Force, had planted seeds that would later bloom into a full-fledged career.

As I transitioned out of the military, I discovered that my experience had equipped me with a unique set of technological skills and insights. What started as a means to support operations during wartime had created a passion I never knew existed. This unexpected turn led me away from medicine and towards a career in IT. It fueled my love for the tech industry and ultimately led to the creation of rockITdata.



“Initially, my plan post-military was to pursue a degree in medicine. However, life had different plans. During my service, I had unknowingly cultivated a passion for technology. The Air Force, had planted seeds that would later bloom into a full-fledged career.”

MARLENE ANDERSCH
CEO, rockITdata

How did your military service benefit you in launching an entrepreneurial career?

Military service instilled discipline and resilience, which was instrumental in launching rockITdata.

This unexpected journey from the military to tech shows us that life can take surprising turns. It reminds us that the skills and experiences we learn, even if we didn't plan for them, can help us find new paths and discover things we never thought we'd love.

What military skills in particular have been most helpful in aiding your career?

Transitioning from military service to a civilian career can be challenging but many skills are formed from service (some you only realize after you become a civilian).

For example, in the military, we learn to march in step and do the same arm movements. It might seem silly, but it helps us work together as a team. We learn to listen, follow orders, and work together, which are skills that are useful in any job. The fundamentals of leadership and teamwork.

Have you put an emphasis on recruiting and hiring veterans? If so, why.

We believe that veterans possess unique skills and experiences that make them valuable assets to our team. That's why we prioritize recruiting and hiring veterans. To further support the veteran community, we've created an intern program designed to provide opportunities for veterans and their spouses in the tech industry.

What advice do you offer to veterans looking to transition - what are key points they should stress to make a successful transition?

My advice to veterans transitioning to civilian life is to keep an open mind, network like crazy, get involved in your community, and discover your passion. Your service to our

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country is invaluable, and we're grateful for your dedication. Remember, the skills you've developed in the military are highly transferable and can open doors to new opportunities.

How does it benefit you to be a military veteran in North Carolina? Is this state friendly to vets, offering opportunities perhaps not found elsewhere?

North Carolina is a great place for veterans. With lots of military bases and programs like Skillbridge, it can really help you adjust to civilian life. There are tons of programs

and internships just for veterans. If you're interested in a company and don't see a veteran program, just give them a call.

SBA HONORS ANSCHER FOR VETS PROGRAM

In fact, RockITdata's commitment to veterans earned it an award and a salute from the SBA two years ago.

"Andersch developed a Rookie Program at rockITdata to provide veterans and military spouses technical skillsets to equip them for flexible careers," the SBA reported.

"The cohort provides training and hands-on experience in the fast-paced and growing

industry of Salesforce and AWS technologies and was recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as a 2022 Platinum HIRE Vets Medallion Award Recipient. The award recognizes an organization's commitment to recruiting, employing, and retaining veterans."

Said SBA executive Steve Dixel: "Marlie and her company have experienced tremendous growth through the pursuit of prime opportunities and subcontract teaming. I'm proud of the role her local Small Business Development Center played in helping her start her business as well as the SBA COVID-19 relief program that helped sustain rockITdata and its employees during the pandemic."

VETERANS OFTEN MAKE FOR GOOD INVESTMENTS

By Rick Smith

For nearly three decades now Navy veteran David Jones has been making quite a name for himself in the venture capital industry. Jones, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, now is General Partner at Triangle-based Bull City Ventures and maintains a role with Southern Capitol Ventures.

Jones talked about why he believes veterans launching startups have qualities that ignite interest among potential investors.

Given your own background as a military veteran, what factors and qualities do you find important among vets as entrepreneurs. Why are you interested in backing startups established by veterans?

At Bull City Venture Partners, we don't have any mandate around veterans, but as a veteran myself, I know the qualities/characteristics of the veteran community and they match very closely to the typical qualities of a startup entrepreneur - never give up, resilience, trust, confidence, integrity, and leadership. We have had the fortune of backing a handful of veteran entrepreneurs in the past and are always on the lookout for more.

What advice would you offer to veterans who are transitioning to the private sector



DAVID JONES

and are looking to launch a business - or already have idea(s) and are seeking mentors/investors?

There are so many great programs now for veterans transitioning to the private sector.

Skillbridge, a host of great studios and accelerators focused on veteran founders, and many more that I would highly encourage transitioning military to take advantage of. The skillset veterans haven't exercised while in the military is seeing everyday for-profit business decisions, knowing where to invest dollars, and how to hire - they always pick up on these very quickly, but always helps to have guidance from mentors/investors to help speed up the learning curve. Reaching out to other veterans in fields/sectors they want to be in is always a great way to start.

What resources do you recommend veterans check out?

Skillbridge - this one is a must look at - allows transitioning military to essentially intern with private sector companies while still on active duty and getting paid.

Others:

- DAV (Disabled American Veterans) Patriot Bootcamp - a great accelerator for veterans.
- Bunker Labs
- PenFed Veteran Entrepreneur Program
- Privateers - accelerator for transitioning SOF

And so many more I should mention:

Bunker Labs is an excellent resource. Blake Hogan was a cofounder and the CEO and built it to national scale. It was recently merged into the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) and has several programs, one to note is their CEO Circle - a year-long program of mentorship kind of YPO (Young Presidents Organization) or EO (Entrepreneurial Organization) for veterans. I have worked with the Bunker Labs folks in many of their locations and cannot say enough great things about what they do.

How active has your firm been in making investments in veteran owned firms?

Again, we do NOT have a mandate but have been fortunate to invest in a handful of veteran founders/co-founders who have been very successful and are still executing every day. Locally, Spiffy's co-founder, Karl Murphy, is a veteran Army officer we invested in.

NCSERVES OFFERS ‘THE HOLY GRAIL FOR SOCIAL WORK’ TO OUR STATE’S VETERANS

By Rick Smith

A growing number of veterans across the entirety of North Carolina’s 100 counties are finding a variety of assistance – from job leads to government benefits, even financial assistance provided by non-government organizations – through NCServes (<https://www.ncserves.org/>).

A forthcoming report will document that organization, which turns 10 in December, has provided services to 40,000 veterans. That’s up from 7,000 in its second year, says Brandon Wilson, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who is the Chief Operating Officer at Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry (ABCCM).

“It is a community initiative to connect veterans to services that may work for [them] ... The good thing about the network is it connects veterans to services and resources. We help facilitate solutions to their needs.”

Through word of mouth and by hosting meetings across North Carolina, NCServes has worked aggressively to make sure veterans know they offer a place to turn for help – from jobs to healthcare.

“If you look statewide, housing is always in the top 3 of needs,” Wilson explains. “Every single week we get calls for emergency housing, affordable housing and more.” Other priorities for assistance include employment, financial literacy and Veterans Affairs benefits,” he adds.

As the increasing numbers of veterans and families served shows, there are plenty of fans.

“The #NCSERVES platform is what I envisioned Social Work to be like,” wrote Air Force Veteran Christy Shortridge at Wilson’s LinkedIn site.

Added Marine Corp veteran Richelle Jara: “The Best Resource I have had in my transition was my school, University of North Carolina Asheville. Their Health Counseling Center has supported my journey and success.”

NCServes describes itself as “a coordinated network of public, private and non-profit organizations” that is “dedicated to ensuring that veterans and their families receive timely and appropriate support...”

Based on his own experience after leaving the Marines as a staff sergeant in 2013, Wilson knows veterans transitioning out of the service often do need help. And he wants to be part of the solution.

“I, like many other veterans struggled in transition,” he explains. “Military changes the way you look at a life.” After landing a part-time job in assisting veterans finding ways to save for a home he says it “prompted me on setting out on a path to help others who served their country.”

THE HOLY GRAIL

With a technology that capitalizes on machine learning and analytics, Wilson says NCServes offers veterans what he called “concurrent” rather than “consecutive” services. This platform gathers information from multiple sources and also speeds up the ability to find solutions.



“Success isn’t merely a destination; it’s a journey defined by the strategies we craft for our clients, the challenges we embrace, and the partnerships we build along the way.”

BRANDON WILSON
Chief Operating Officer,
Asheville Buncombe Community
Christian Ministry

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“We may eliminate the need to call three or four providers that not be able to help,” he adds. The system is used from veterans’ entry to resolution and feedback, according to technology developer United Us.

The resulting compressive capabilities has led to “the holy grail for social work,” points out Jeffrey Smith, vice president of Veterans Programs at Aviso, LLC, which works with NCServes. The platform “built by veterans for veterans” is “game changing” with its capabilities from “providing a common intake” of data and sources to using “predictive analytics” for analysis of medical records across state and federal criteria, such as Medicaid.

THE SECRET TECHNOLOGY SAUCE

Its secret sauce for delivering services is a technology platform developed by Unite Us (uniteus.com) with assistance from the Walmart Foundation and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University.

The platform “allows for seamless communication and collaboration among service providers, enabling them to efficiently connect clients with the resources they require,” NCServes says. That technology has been adopted as part of the state of North Carolina for its NCCARE360 program.

Mandy Cohen, former secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, welcomed the incorporation of the NCServes platform into NCCARE360 in 2020, saying: “This is the nation’s first statewide platform that bridges healthcare and human services. The development of NC CARE 360 [was] pioneered through NCServes, the care and coordination network used for veterans and their families.”

Delivering what it calls “whole-person care,” Unite Us built a 21st Century joining platform that utilizes advanced machine learning and predictive analytics to change the face

of healthcare provisioning as we know it ... Encompassing over one million services, we have the most robust platform, largest community network, and award-winning experience that sets us apart.”

For example, United Us announced in May 2024 “real-time Medicaid member eligibility verification” that it says will “increase enrollment and streamline reimbursement for social care.”

Enabling what’s called “whole health” appeals to Mecklenburg County government, an executive says.

“NCServes provides a way to look at more than just offering our expertise in Veterans Administration Benefits navigation,” writes Crystal Miller, Veterans Services Supervisor for Community Services at Mecklenburg County Government in the 10-year report. “We have been able to learn and understand what it means to serve the whole health of a veteran and their family.”

NCSERVES IN ACTION

Two case studies cited by NCServes point to ways the organization can help, from helping veterans fighting post-traumatic stress syndrome to those seeking financial assistance:

- “Struggling with PTSD it was hard to work, as well as being a single father. He needed immediate assistance to ensure that they would not become homeless. and to address his mental health challenges.”

And:

- “NCServes promptly filled out multiple financial assistance applications on behalf of the Veteran, as well as sent application and contact information to the Veteran to utilize. Along with this- referrals were made for Job Search/Placement, to connect the Veteran with his local VSO (Veteran Service Officer) for VA claims assistance, and local food and clothing

NCServes at a glance:

ncserves.org

Mission: Offer care coordination and accountable service delivery that spans communities, regions and even the country.

Services & care offered: Housing and shelter, employment, financial assistance, mental health, physical health, food assistance, clothing and household goods and more ...

resources were sent to alleviate the stress of these challenging times.”

Miller, the veterans services supervisor at Mecklenburg County, notes the first NCServes network was created there by Veterans Bridge Home and that it has provided financial support to NCServes since 2016. “We have been able to collaborate and communicate on levels that we could have never imagined before,” she says in the NCServes report.

“We are proud to be part of a system that provides wrap around services to those who gave so much to our country, to be able to say that we can change lives because of the access to resources we have through NCServes and all our network partners who have chosen to be a part of our system of care.”

With the platform technology, Wilson says NCServes’ “veterans-focused effort has transformed doing all these things” in providing services and “creating impact, all while improving the way we deliver these services.”

Personally, he adds:

“I love what I do building teams and communities to help people live up to the potential God has providing him. It’s a good balance.”

To learn more about how NCServes works see page 23.

Empowering Veterans through Mental Health Training: A Lifeline for Our Heroes

For many veterans returning to civilian life, mental health support is critical. The Governor's Institute's MilVet Academy offers two programs to address these needs: Mental Health First Aid Training (MHFA) and the Veteran Support Specialist (VSS) program. Both initiatives provide essential skills and support systems for veterans, their families, and those who serve them.

Mental Health First Aid Training: A Community Solution

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training teaches participants to identify, understand, and respond to mental health and substance use challenges. It is designed for community members without a mental health background, allowing them to provide support until professional help is available. Brad Wrenn, Program Manager for Military and Veterans Education, compares it to traditional First Aid: "It equips people with the tools to keep someone safe until they can connect with professional assistance."

MHFA plays a vital role in increasing awareness and early intervention, particularly among veterans and their families. Many service members return home with challenges like PTSD, anxiety, and substance use disorders. Jennifer Melton, Compliance Officer for Veterans Services of the Carolinas, says, "The training helps community members connect those in need to appropriate care."

Helping Veterans Through MHFA

Veterans face unique challenges that require specialized mental health support. According to Alex O'Neil, Program Manager for MHFA



and Communications, "The key purpose of MHFA is to teach participants how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness or substance use disorder." The Governor's Institute offers free MHFA classes to the public in North Carolina to build community resilience and support veterans.

The Importance of Mental Health Training

The MHFA and VSS programs are lifelines for veterans and their families. MHFA fills the gap between the onset of a mental health issue and the availability of professional care. As Brad Wrenn says, "MHFA is designed for regular people, and you do not need a background in mental health care to benefit from it." Both programs also address the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the military community, improving awareness and encouraging early intervention.

Veteran Support Specialist Program: Peer Support for Veterans

The Veteran Support Specialist (VSS) program empowers those who serve veterans and military families. The VSS program helps participants navigate the complex system of care veterans may need, addressing issues like military sexual trauma, PTSD, and transitioning to civilian life. Junell McCall, Education and Training Manager, emphasizes peer support: "The program provides veterans in transition with a peer, coach, or mentor who has 'been there.'"

Get Involved and Make a Difference

The Governor's Institute encourages individuals and organizations to support veterans by participating in MHFA and the VSS program. "The best way to support MHFA is to sign up for training and encourage others to do the same," says O'Neil. For more information, visit milvetacademy.org. Together, we can build a community where veterans feel supported and valued, and where mental health challenges are met with care and understanding.

In the words of Junell McCall, "Our learners know the mil/vet population faces unique challenges and have the desire to go the extra mile to help." Whether through MHFA or VSS, the Governor's Institute is committed to making a difference—one veteran, one family, and one community at a time. As Alex O'Neil puts it, "By giving people the skills to recognize and respond to mental health challenges, we are building a stronger, more supportive community for veterans and their families."

KEY INSIGHTS ABOUT THE GOVERNOR'S INSTITUTE'S VETERANS SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

Mehul Mankad, MD

Adjunct Assistant Professor,
Duke Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences;
Chief Medical Officer, NovumHealth

Q: When did the Veteran Support Specialist (VSS) Program start and what was the driver for its existence?

A: The program began in June of 2015 to address the needs of Veterans in North Carolina. 1 in 13 people in NC is a Veteran or is on Active Duty in the armed forces. Due to this large population, NC wants to be recognized as a Veteran-friendly state. To accomplish this, it is necessary for individuals to receive training on how to effectively work with Veterans, so we created the program.

Q: What content was necessary to include in the training?

A: We found that there was a lack of technical skills to serve the needs of Veterans as well as interpersonal and interview skills to work with them. So, we knew it was necessary to include those skills because some individuals who were working with Veterans lacked the hard knowledge about problems faced by Veterans. Some of those problems included homelessness, addiction, PTSD, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. In addition to adding those topics to the curriculum, it was also necessary to add topics such as interpersonal skills and motivational interviewing, to name a few.

Michael E. McGuire, LCSW, LCAS, LMFT, CCS, MINT Member

Director, Substance Use & Addictions Specialist
Program; Clinical Associate Professor, School of Social
Work, UNC Chapel Hill

Q: I understand that Motivational Interviewing (MI) was part of the training in the program. What is it and how does it work?

A: MI is a particular way of talking with people about change and growth to strengthen their own motivation and commitment. As providers, we create an environment where our clients are empowered to effect change in their lives.

There are 2 primary mechanisms: technical and relational. The technical mechanism is comprised of the sequencing of open-ended questions, affirmations, and reflections. The relational mechanism is comprised of the deliberate integration of partnership, acceptance, compassion, and empowerment.

Q: Is there anything else about MI that you would like to mention?

A: Yes, thank you. The use of MI has been demonstrated to help the person being helped and the helper. Studies find, as I have experienced firsthand, that providers using motivational interviewing experience an increase in job satisfaction and a decrease in job burnout. In a time of mounting expectations of our workforce, offering providers a way of approaching their work that puts some wind back into their sails is a true win-win-win for client, provider, and the organization.

Dr. Christina L. Vair

Licensed Clinical Psychologist,
Salisbury VA Health Care System

Disclaimer: Any views expressed are the personal views of Dr. Vair, and do not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or US Government.

Q: You have provided training on MI for the Veteran Service Specialist (VSS) Program. How does it benefit the VSS Program?

A: The utilization of MI allows the person utilizing the approach to ask questions that will allow the individual receiving assistance to explore and potentially resolve the ambivalence that often comes along with attempts to make life changes. Change can be difficult, even when it is for the better. By training a VSS to use MI, they learn skills that can assist Veterans to talk about their values as well as see the possible connections between their values and making a behavior change. This approach can also help build an individual's motivation toward realistic goals or plans.

Q: Do you have any success stories to share about participants from the VSS program who have utilized the strategies that you taught on MI?

A: What I will offer is that many of the individuals who come through the VSS training offer reflections on how Motivational Interviewing, as an approach, helps them help Veterans make informed decisions that are aligned with the Veterans' values and priorities. There have been a few examples shared of how taking this approach has helped to empower Veterans. One such example includes helping Veterans to follow through on completing the necessary steps to obtain health care and other benefits. Another example is when the use of the training helped Veterans to make choices to invest in their own health and well-being.

JD Demers

Actor, DemersTalent

Q: What impacts have your skits surrounding Veterans with PTSD had on the VSS Program and the participants?

A: The skits have reinforced the training in the program using real world situations. Being an actor, I know that reenacting a scene can deliver more dramatic effects than just explaining a situation to someone. It can cause a person to connect what they just learned to what they are seeing via the skit. Seeing a dramatic presentation during training helps the VSS to be better prepared with a mindfulness approach and teaches them how to talk to and posture themselves in an office if they encounter a Veteran who is angry. The impacts have been powerful for participants as well. Some of the comments from participants stated, "I felt like was part of the experience," and "This was better than a handout."

Q: Will you walk me through how you demonstrated de-escalation techniques in your skit with real world experiences.

A: Yes, first I had to draw upon my time spent in the military as a Veteran and my experiences from spending time with other Veterans. This allowed me to view and mimic how they experienced the world around them after having the intensity of war and military training. Many Veterans find that returning to civilian life is challenging. Thus, their interactions with a VSS can be one of escalating anger and frustration. My interactions with Veterans allow me, as a professional actor to use what I see and hear to depict that in the form of a dramatization. Then, the trainer will use de-escalation techniques on the character that I am playing to de-escalate the situation. Eventually, my character, the angry Veteran, responds positively to the best practices used from the de-escalation techniques. The situation becomes less intense, and the provider continues to provide services to the Veteran.

Kayreen Gucciardo, MEd, MHA

Veterans Services Coordinator,
Division of Mental Health,
Developmental Disabilities and
Substance Use Services

Q: What are 2 critical topics that service members should be aware of prior to separating from the military?

A: Service members should be aware of their Post 9/11 GI Bill Education Benefits, and the best time to apply for VA Disability and Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD). Service members who have completed at least 6 years of service and agree to serve an additional four years after the transfer are eligible for the post-911 GI Bill Education Benefits. If they choose to transfer their benefits, they should transfer them to their dependents before they leave the military. It is very important for them to make the transfer while they are still on active duty or in the Selected Reserve because they will not be allowed to make the transfer once they leave the service. Once the transfer is complete, their dependents can start using the benefits.

If a Veteran needs to apply for VA Disability and BDD, it is beneficial to apply 6 months prior to their date of discharge so that they can receive benefits on the day of their discharge. If they wait any longer to apply, their application may be placed at the bottom of the list and their benefits will be delayed.

Q: How can a Veteran connect with a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) or Veteran Support Specialist (VSS) to receive assistance?

A: Veterans can visit the VA website (va.gov), call the VA hotline at 1-800-827-1000, or use the eBenefits Portal. It is recommended to connect with a Veterans Support Specialist at least 12 months prior to their date of separation. If a Veteran does not connect with a VSO before they leave the military, they should contact a VSO immediately after they separate from the military.

ON THE MOVE TO BIOTECH: A GATEWAY TO A LIFE SCIENCE CAREER

By Rick Smith

Veterans, service members who are transitioning out of the armed forces and spouses transitioning to a new career may not have thought about a job in biotechnology, but they have friends in high places at a biopharmaceutical manufacturing career opportunities program from the North Carolina Biotech Center and the state's community colleges supported BioNetwork program.

Some major companies are already throwing their weight behind efforts to recruit veterans. Among them: Pfizer, CSL Seqirus, and Amgen. Students completing a certification program could join the state's growing biopharma sector which employs more than 32,000 people at more than 100 facilities.

Entry level salaries range from \$45,000 to \$70,000.

Called MOVE – Military Outreach and Veterans Engagement – the program secured more than \$800,000 in federal funding earlier this year. BioNetwork is designed to teach students, including veterans, “the foundational skills you need to begin a career as a process technician [and others] for a biotechnology, pharmaceutical, or chemical manufacturing company.”

Job opportunities include process technicians, warehouse associates, calibration technicians, maintenance technicians, and others. After completing a training course comes opportunities to secure internships at private companies.

Why are companies seeking veterans and



Photo by Rick Smith

Jacob Key (left) and Bruce Coleman of the N.C. Biotechnology Center staff attended a recent NCGWG meeting in Fayetteville where they briefed attendees about the Military Outreach and Veterans Engagement (MOVE) program.

spouses for such jobs?

“Biopharmaceutical manufacturing uses living cells to create products such as vaccines and therapeutic proteins,” NCBIOTECH explains. “Workers learn to grow and culture bacteria, yeast, or animal cells. It’s all about keeping the cells happy by feeding them nutrients and helping them make the final product. These batches, typically contained in large stainless steel or plastic vessels, must be monitored constantly before proceeding to separation and purification steps. It’s a 24/7 process requiring teamwork, attention to detail, and following approved operating procedures. Does this sound familiar to your military experience?”

MOVE, which is led by two retired U.S.

Army senior enlisted, is part of that biotech industry effort with a focus on internships. Dr. Bruce Coleman (PhD), a former sergeant is U.S Special Forces, serves as Outreach Coordinator and Jacob Key, a longtime N.C. National Guard member, is program manager.

The two attended a recent NC Governor’s Working Group meeting for Veterans, Service Members and Their Families in Fayetteville and talked with Triangle Business Journal about the program. In a follow-up Q&A. Key talked at length about MOVE and why veterans should be interested.

MOVE is not new but “an expansion strategy to the program occurred in February 2024 due to receiving a federal award of \$825,000,” Key explained. “NCBiotech received a

federal award on February 1, 2024, from the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.”

Why are each of you interested in this program - what's it mean to you?

This program is personal to both Bruce Coleman and me. Both of us retired from the Army as senior enlisted leaders. Therefore, we understand the challenge of transitioning to the civilian sector. Furthermore, we clearly understand and appreciate the purpose behind the sector for saving and improving lives. This resonates with the military community as we all hope to make a difference.

Please provide an overview of the MOVE program, its key points of emphasis.

Created as a pilot program in 2019, the Military Outreach and Veterans Engagement (MOVE) program serves in partnership with military installations, life sciences manufacturing companies and community college training partners to build a highly-skilled talent pipeline. Select NC Community Colleges prepare transitioning service members, veterans and military spouses for careers in life sciences, teaching students foundational skills of the sector through the BioWork course.

Industry partners such as CSL Seqirus, Pfizer, Amgen (and other companies soon to be announced) serve for providing on-the-job Training (OJT) internships to transitioning service members.

The final goal is for program participants to land exceptional careers or further their education for the NC life sciences sector.

Why is the program targeting military veterans?

The military community has many transferable skills as it relates to the sector, such as attention to detail, working in a controlled environment, teamwork, integrity, following standard operating procedures, and more.

MOVE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Web site: ncbiotech.org/military-programs

PROGRAM DETAILS

- Internship duration up to 16 weeks
- Three types of internships
- On-the-job training
- BioNetwork certificate program
- On-the-job training + BioWork
- Companies are less than 50 miles from Fort Bragg
- BioWork is offered at local NC Community Colleges
- Job placement assistance
- Post-transition follow-up

DESIRED SKILLS

- Follow written procedures
- Record data
- Attention to detail
- Computer operation
- Materials management
- Mechanical aptitude
- Troubleshooting
- Teamwork
- Written communication
- Verbal communication

ROLES FOR ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING INTERNSHIPS

- Fermentation
- Cell culture
- Recovery and purification
- Aseptic filling
- Packaging
- Warehouse operations
- Logistics
- Calibration
- Maintenance
- Safety

(Source: NCBiotech)

Additionally, NC has a high volume of veterans. Therefore, MOVE serves to connect veterans through established career pathways to meet the workforce needs of the NC life sciences.

I understand no biotech experience is required. Why is that?

MOVE has established career pathways that begin at the entry level. We leverage our current partnerships within the NC Community College network to teach veterans foundational skills for the sector. Therefore, no science background is required.

How many internships have been awarded since securing the new funding? How many people have completed the initial course?

Since receiving the award on February 1, 2024, 34 internships have been awarded. Only nine have completed thus far, with the remaining 25 in the training pipeline or waiting to begin training.

What companies have awarded internships - and are you reaching out to others? If so, please identify some of these firms.

Active internship partners: Pfizer, CSL Seqirus, and Amgen. Yes, we are growing our industry partnerships immensely. The MOVE program aligns with companies that are thriving to ensure our veterans land a career after their training.

The NC biotech economy continues to grow. Can you give me an update on the number of jobs and compensation?

Per the Window on the Workplace 2023 survey results, an additional 5,500 new biopharma manufacturing jobs by the end of 2026. It may be best to consult with the hiring companies. However, we believe that for entry-level roles, annual salary ranges from \$45,000 to \$70,000.

What are the career opportunities?

The BioWork course prepares graduates for process technician roles. However, the MOVE program also focuses on warehouse associates, calibration technicians, maintenance technicians, and more.

NORTH CAROLINA’S RURAL RISE INITIATIVE HELPS TRIGGER RECORD NUMBERS OF NEW BUSINESSES

By Rick Smith

Nearly 200,000 new businesses – a record – launched in North Carolina in the year following the 2020 pandemic. That total was nearly matched in 2022 and 2023, and earlier this year the Secretary of State’s Office announced 2024 launches were on track to reach a new high.

To date, more than 21,000 businesses have “self-identified” as being veteran owned, according to state data.

Called the RISE Initiative, the program is designed to provide “Resources for Innovators, Start-Ups, and Entrepreneurs.”

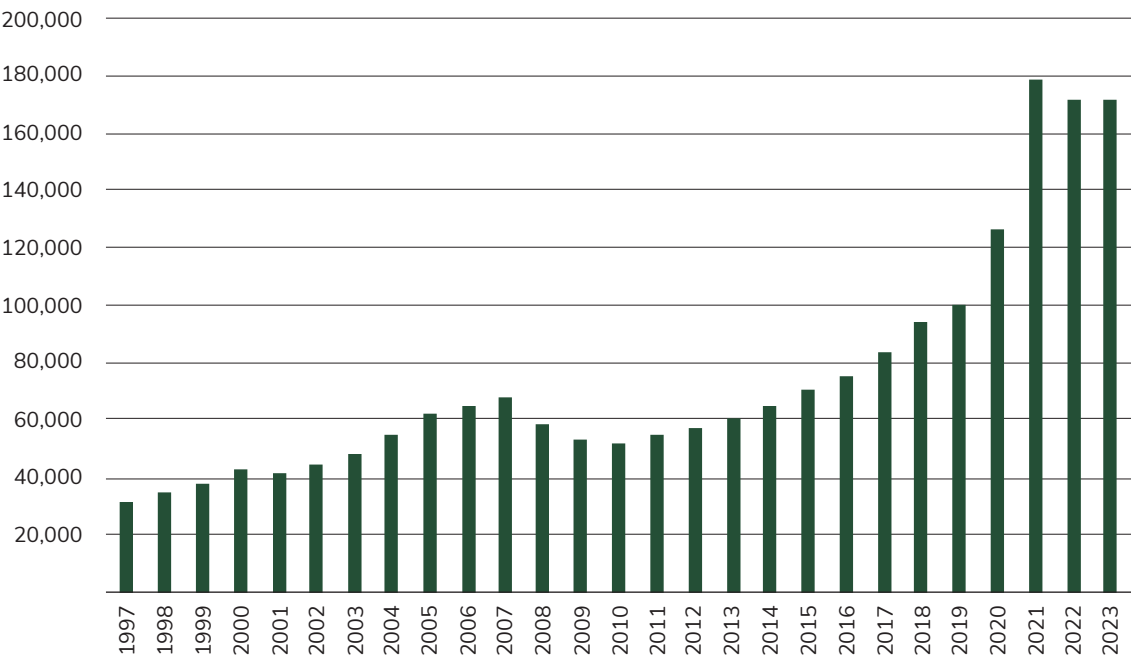
Providing more impetus for new business growth is the Rural Rise Initiative, which as the name implies targets rural areas.

Elaine Marshall takes pride in the growth those programs are driving.

“My top priority when I first took office in 1997 was to ensure the agency was meeting the crucial demands of citizens conducting business in our state, and that continues to be my top priority today,” said Marshall earlier this year. “Innovation and the positive impact of small businesses on our state is alive and well. The Secretary of State’s Office has opened the doors on more than 2 million new businesses across North Carolina since 1997. That’s 2 million dreams for business owners, countless jobs created, and incredible growth charted for North Carolina’s economy. Those dreams also build families and communities”

The rising tide of new business numbers is

New Business Creations



www.sosnc.gov/imaging/dime/20240930/1b_76753002_2823c55e5d344ea786da8ca93d4caace.pdf

five times the number of new businesses launched in 1997.

Triangle Business Journal reached out to Marshall’s office to talk specifically about the Rural RISE program.

- **What are the most important parts of the RISE initiative? Why is it a priority for the Secretary of State?**

The Secretary of State’s Office established the Rural RISE (Resources for Innovators, Start-Ups, and Entrepreneurs) NC initiative to facilitate new businesses getting quick access to a wide range of available free and low-cost professional resources to help them succeed and prosper. The initiative began in

rural counties as an effort to help reduce the rural-urban economic divide.

“What we frequently see are folks opening new businesses who have impressive expertise in what their business does, but very little expertise in how to run a business,” Marshall said.

“We know veterans bring a wealth of leadership skills to the business community – Rural RISE NC can facilitate connecting them with the resources they need to grow their local economies and communities.”

From the Rural RISE Web page (sosnc.gov/RISE) entrepreneurs can access county-specific resources.

WHERE TO SEARCH FOR RESOURCES:

https://www.sosnc.gov/rural_rise

- To see a **SPECIFIC** type of resource, select your county and a resource type
- To see **ALL RESOURCES** available to you, select your county and leave resource type blank
- If **YOUR COUNTY IS NOT LISTED**, select **ALL COUNTIES** and a resource type

According to the SBA, veteran-owned businesses make up about 8% of North Carolina's small businesses. More than 21,000 filers with the Secretary of State's Business Registration Division have self-identified as veteran-owned businesses.

- **Why are veterans a key part of this program? How many have participated to date, and what are you seeing in terms of results?**

The Secretary of State's Rural RISE NC Initiative is making it easier for veterans and all entrepreneurs to find the business resources they need to lift up local economies.

The defense sector has an enormous impact on North Carolina's economy, but even more than that active duty service members and veterans are an integral part of communities across our state. Veterans bring the skills to succeed and lead as small business owners who are making hometown economies strong from Murphy to Manteo.

- **To date, what results are being generated by the program? Are you encouraged by what you are seeing?**

Rural RISE NC grew out of the historic increase in new business creations across North Carolina that began in mid-2020. Surveys that followed that initial surge in

new business creations delved into what kind of assistance new businesses needed and what established businesses wish they had known when they first set up shop.

"North Carolina's economy is one of the strongest in the United States, but not everyone is sharing in that success," said Marshall. "Our historical data shows we have a small window of time to help our new business creators, so it's crucial we take steps early to help assure they are connected to the business resources giving them the best opportunities for success."

Approximately 25% of North Carolina businesses close within three years, compared to the national closure rate of 33%. Within seven years, 50.2% of North Carolina businesses cease to operate, compared to the national rate of 52.9%.

New economic research resulting from a first-of-its-kind collaboration between the Secretary of State's Office and Fayetteville State University faculty found that a small increase in the rate of North Carolina businesses reaching self-sufficiency could create tens of thousands of additional jobs for North Carolinians and inject an estimated \$1.5 to \$2 billion into the state's economy. The report found that adopting policies and initiatives to help just 5% of "aspirational" businesses become self-sufficient would create 24,550 new jobs each year across North Carolina.

- **Where do veterans go to get more information and apply?**

Rural RISE highlights resources available to veteran-owned businesses from organizations such as the Office of Veterans Business Development, the National Veteran Small Business Coalition, the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Business Outreach Center, the North Carolina Military Business Center (NCMBC), and the North Carolina Veterans Business Association (NC VetBiz).

WHAT RURAL RISE INITIATIVE HAS MEANT TO VETERAN ENTREPRENEURS:

"While I'm an established business owner, I still need to access business resources. Rural RISE NC offers an easy way to locate those resources to help ensure that my business continues to succeed."

- Brian Vinciguerra, US Marine Corps Veteran and Owner, Cracked It! Escape Games

"As a U.S. Army veteran and a business owner, I am grateful for the invaluable support Rural RISE NC provides. They quickly connected me to resources within the state when recently seeking funding for structural improvements for my hotel. Their network and guidance make it easy to access the support I need to grow and sustain my business."

- Ellen Brabo, US Army Veteran and Owner, The Ell Hotel

"As the CEO of a staffing company, I know how important it is to make strong, reliable, and lasting business connections. Rural RISE NC does just that. I know I can turn to the program at any time and get what I need."

- Cowanda Bazile, US Navy Veteran and Franchise Owner, Express Employment

WHAT BEING A VETERAN MEANS TO ME: NORTH CAROLINIANS SHARE THEIR MEMORIES

Four executives deeply involved in programs for veterans share their thoughts about their military service and the meaning of Veterans Day.

TIM DRISCOLL

Director, North Carolina's NCServes program; Assistant Director and Network Relations Coordinator at Veterans Services of the Carolinas

Being a Veteran means you are accountable to your peers at a higher level than most realize. In almost every instance in today's society, Veterans are looked to in times of fear, crisis, or panic as a calm and safe presence.

Civilians in almost every profession do not understand the comradery that Veterans experience in their lifetime, while most Veterans experience it and spend the majority of their lives after service looking to replicate it.

Being a Veteran means you're never alone, despite feeling so at times, we must open our field of view to see the greater community we have joined after service. In every community in America, there is someone who is Veteran connected or a Veteran themselves.

We as Veterans must remain accountable to ourselves, check-in on other Veterans, and become involved in the communities we live in. Always remember, being a Veteran, means your circle, and your purpose has



changed, not disappeared.

We have a duty to ensure every Veteran we encounter in our lives, feels accepted, and we must never forget to share every resource within these communities we are working to be a more productive part of.

I was a Corporal in the Marines. After four years of service including a combat deployment to Afghanistan in 2010 where I participated in the battle of Marjah along with other major offensives. In my current role I am the Director of North Carolina's NCServes program.

The NCServes program assists thousands

of Veterans and their families annually by utilizing an electronic network of over 3,000 federal, state, local and national non-profit resources and agencies to refer and educate Veterans on what they qualify for.

Traits I acquired during my time in the Marine Corps enabled me to not only become employed but rise to the highest level within my program. Ensuring you are on time, with the right gear (work complete), willing to work in a team environment, and remaining motivated to the organizational mission and purpose is what allowed me to reach the level I am today.

About Tim:

Tim is a Combat Marine Veteran who served in Afghanistan. He is Director of NCServes. Prior to his time at VSC Tim served as the Lead Care Coordinator with NCServes Coastal and Lead Case Manager for the NC Relief Fund for East Carolina Human Services Agency. Tim is a Post Officer for his local VFW Post 9133, a member of the Onslow County Council of Veterans Service Officers, and he coordinates Onslow County's Veterans Stand Down event annually. Tim graduated with his bachelor's degree in social work from the University of North Carolina Wilmington in 2022.

CRYSTAL MILLER

Veterans Services Supervisor,
Community Support Services-Vet

I joined the North Carolina National Guard 505th Engineer Battalion in North Wilkesboro, NC in 1996. I was fortunate enough to travel to South America, Moldova, and the Marshall Islands on missions supporting those countries infrastructures by constructing schools and medical clinics. These inspired personal growth in so many ways.

On April 15, 2005, as I sat cutting letters for bulletin boards at Millers Creek Elementary School where I was a third-grade teacher's assistant, I was called to the break room to take a call. On the call was my unit's clerk echoing the words, "Crystal, we are deploying, and we need you to report 1 May for State Active Duty to prepare the unit". My whole body filled with a chill, a fear, a nervous excitement, anticipation, and overwhelming sickness all at the same time as the words, I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend...went through my head and it was time to stand by them.

I deployed on active duty in July 2005 then left for Iraq in October 2005 and came back to the U.S in October 2006. I am an Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom Veteran with a Combat Action Badge. I left the unit in 2007.

I come from a family of veterans and work with veterans today. My experience helps me to relate, connect and engage veterans as I continue to serve long after my own service ended.

To be a veteran is to have a great love, pride, and respect for your country. For me, it is to believe that I live in the best country in the world and though I no longer serve, I will always serve. To be a veteran is to have achieved growth as a human being, to have seen and been sacrifice. It is to have learned to be selfless in my protection of



my brothers and sisters in this thing called life because without each other we were nothing. To be a veteran is to have bore the burden to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against ALL enemies, foreign and domestic; that I bear true faith and allegiance to the same... and that does not go away when you leave the service. To be a veteran is to know you said you would sacrifice your life if called to do so...so that others shall continue to enjoy the freedom of religion, speech, and the press, the rights of assembly and petition. Just in case anyone else has forgotten...I said I would die so you could have these things, my service will not allow me to forget and as a veteran these are my most precious and valued assets. To be a veteran is to smile with honor every time I see my flag flying in the wind and to remember all

those who gave their all so I can still live.

One of my assignments in Iraq, I was the Team Lead for a road repair crew, we would scout IED craters during the day then go out at night and scan them for unexploded devices and clear them of course, then shape up the edges, fill them up with rebar, pour concrete in them, spray paint them, stamp our engineer castle on them (so the friendly's would know it was us) and set a team on them until they dried.

Purpose: The enemy kept using their old holes to plant new devices that continued to hammer our troops on the highways so they would blow them up and we would fill them up day after day.

About Crystal:

As a Veteran Services Supervisor at Mecklenburg County Community Support Services/Veteran Services, I lead a team of dedicated professionals who provide assistance and advocacy to veterans and their families in accessing federal, state, and local benefits. I have over 10 years of experience in managing field operations, training, and customer service for veterans affairs agencies at the state and county level. I am also accredited with the US Department of Veterans Affairs, which enables me to represent and advise veterans on their claims and appeals.

I am passionate about serving veterans and improving their quality of life. I collaborate with various partners and stakeholders, such as the NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Governor's Institute, NC Governor's Working Group and the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide, to address the needs and challenges of the veteran community. I strive to enhance our outreach, employment, and suicide prevention efforts, and to ensure that every veteran knows that we are here to support them. I believe that we must do better no matter how good we think we are, because we owe it to those who have sacrificed to ensure our freedoms.

WHAT BEING A VETERAN MEANS TO ME CONTINUED

PAUL BERRY

Triangle Network Senior Director,
Veterans Bridge Home

“After serving 30 years in the United States Marine Corps, Veterans Day has a special meaning to me. It is such a great honor to serve alongside those who at one point in their life wrote a blank check to this country for the amount up to and including their life. Veterans Day is an opportunity for all Americans to thank those living veterans for their selfless service and sacrifice.

I currently work for Veterans Bridge Home. I was drawn to this work because I wanted to use my knowledge and experience to give back to the veterans of North Carolina.

I am honored and humbled to serve those who have given so much for this great nation.

About Paul:

Berry joined Veterans Bridge Home in October 2020. Prior to Veterans Bridge Home, Paul worked for the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs where he served as the Military Installations Coordinator.

Paul also worked for the USO of North Carolina where he served as the NCServes Central Carolina Network Director.

Paul served in the United States Marine Corps for 30 years, retiring as a Command Sergeant Major. He was stationed in several locations around the world that include Ghana, South Korea, Poland, Morocco, Somalia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Paul earned the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star (2 awards), combat action ribbon and many more individual and unit awards.

Paul currently serves as a member of the North Carolina Governor’s Challenge to



Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families and the Wake County Veterans Suicide Awareness and Firearms Education working group.

Paul also assists in coordinating the efforts of the six Community Veterans Engagement Boards in North Carolina.

SIOBHAN R. NORRIS

Veterans Services Division Director
Wake County Government
Department of Housing Affordability
& Community Revitalization

Being a veteran means carrying the values of service, sacrifice, and resilience instilled during my time in the U.S. Army Military Police Corps.

My journey in the military gave me the privilege of upholding a legacy that spans generations within my family, from my grandfather’s service as a decorated WWII Marine, to my father, a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran, and to my own experiences in uniform. As a veteran, I see

my role as an advocate not only for those who served but also for their families, who carry the weight of service in their own unique ways.

In my role as Director for Wake County Veteran Services, I am honored to lead efforts that directly impact over 55,000 veterans in our community, helping them access the benefits they’ve earned and addressing critical issues like veteran homelessness and suicide prevention.

This commitment is a personal calling. It is driven by my belief that veterans deserve dignity, respect, and unwavering support, not just for their sacrifices in service but for their contributions to our society.

To me, being a veteran is not just about



having served; it is about continuing to serve others, ensuring that no one who wore the uniform is left behind.

About Siobhan:

Norris serves as the Director for Wake County Veteran Services. In this role, she serves as the county's subject matter expert on matters related to the military and veteran community while also advocating for 55,000+ veterans that call Wake County their home. She leads two major teams: 1) a team of county veteran service officers who help connect veterans and their

families to benefits earned through military service; and 2) a homeless prevention and crisis management team that works to end veteran homelessness in Wake County.

Prior to her transition to county government, Ms. Norris served in higher education for nearly a decade, holding positions such as the Associate Vice Chancellor for Military Affairs at Fayetteville State University, the Military Liaison to the University of North Carolina System President, and the Military Liaison at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. During her higher educational

tenure, she is credited with facilitating numerous strategic partnerships that led to a variety of successes to include but not limited to: UNCW being ranked as #1 in the state of North Carolina by Military Times; increased military student enrollment within the UNC System by 57%; commissioned a published peer reviewed report on military connected students attending Historic Black Colleges and Universities, supported the implementation of free tuition for military connected students at Fayetteville State University while also leading the HBCU to be named a Purple Heart University.

How NCServes Works

VETERAN



Step 1: VSO REFERRAL AND SUPPORT INITIATION

A Veteran visits their local Veterans Service Organization (VSO) seeking assistance. The VSO, recognizing the Veteran's needs promptly refers them to NCServes Care Coordinators, who step in to provide comprehensive support and personalized care.

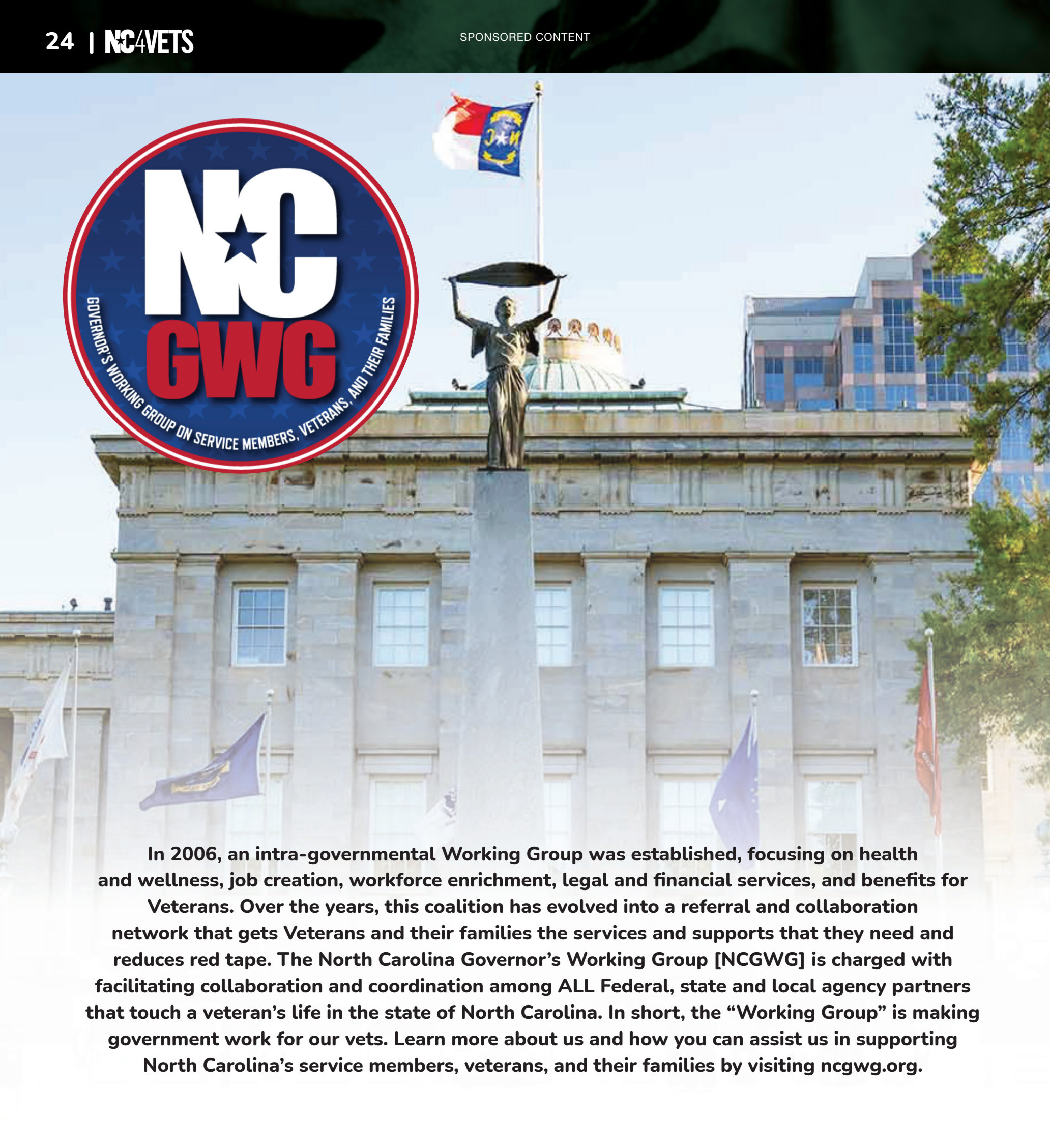
Step 2: NCSERVES ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL

Care Coordinators at NCServes Coordination Center conduct a thorough biopsychosocial assessment to identify any additional or co-occurring needs. Once these needs are recognized, and with the Veteran or family member's consent the Care Coordinator sends an electronic referral to a community resource, ensuring the individual is connected to the services best suited to address their specific needs."

Step 3: PROVIDER ENGAGEMENT INITIATING SERVICE

Upon receiving referrals, typically within one business day, community providers promptly accept the referral and initiate the process of delivering services to the Veteran or their family member.

For more information visit www.ncserves.org



In 2006, an intra-governmental Working Group was established, focusing on health and wellness, job creation, workforce enrichment, legal and financial services, and benefits for Veterans. Over the years, this coalition has evolved into a referral and collaboration network that gets Veterans and their families the services and supports that they need and reduces red tape. The North Carolina Governor's Working Group [NCGWG] is charged with facilitating collaboration and coordination among ALL Federal, state and local agency partners that touch a veteran's life in the state of North Carolina. In short, the "Working Group" is making government work for our vets. Learn more about us and how you can assist us in supporting North Carolina's service members, veterans, and their families by visiting ncgwg.org.