

# Networked For Life

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By Grace Marvin

When service members are ready to move to civilian life, Tampa's business leaders make sure they don't also move away.

Kay Schwartz felt the call to serve early in her life. "When I was 18 my father asked me what I was going to do with my life," Schwartz said. "I responded with, 'Dad, I think I want to join the military.'" Like most veterans, when Schwartz enlisted in the Air Force she didn't think about life after her military service. "When I left the Air Force, I felt a lot of insecurity," she said. "I questioned what I was going to do with my life and how I was going to contribute." Schwartz was able to find a new purpose, and it was helping others realize theirs.

Today, she is an executive director of regional HR operations for USAA and an active volunteer with Operation Partnership, a veteran career transition program in Tampa.

*(Below) Spenceley talks with transitioning service members about how to build a professional network. Photo by the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce.*



Operation Partnership includes an annual three-day event that is a collaboration among the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce's Military Council, Emerging Leaders of Tampa Bay, Leadership Tampa Alumni and the chamber's Women of Influence

Committee.

“I have experienced a military transition just like everyone in Operation Partnership,” Schwartz said. “The program is designed to help transitioning military veterans connect with the business community so they can find meaningful work when they leave the military.”

For soldiers and veterans, the connections they make at Operation Partnership extend long after the event is over.

“Tampa does the connection and networking piece really well,” she said.

Reggie Godbolt met Schwartz in 2017, when he was planning his retirement from MacDill Air Force Base, where he was a squadron commander. She invited him to her office to talk about his transition.

“We talked a lot about his resume,” she recalled. “Senior leaders have a wide breadth of experience and can have difficulty putting it on paper.”

Godbolt credits Operation Partnership for his successful transition to a senior management position at Coca-Cola Beverages Florida.

“I would not be in my career today if it was not for the mentorship and relationships I gained,” Godbolt said. “Every call, every interview I got was from leveraging that network.”

Ed Spenceley, an Operation Partnership volunteer, said his own transition out of the Army was a time of uncertainty until a hiring manager took a chance on him 18 years ago.

“Someone with vision saw my resume and called me in for an interview,” said Spenceley, now a senior vice president at Bank of America. “She realized that I had a skill set that she was not going to find within the banking industry.”

Spenceley views Godbolt’s journey as the ultimate success story.

“It embodies getting rid of the fence line between MacDill and the civilian community,” he said. “[Operation Partnership is] not just a program. It creates relationships within the Tampa community.”

Schwartz said it’s one way the region is unique. “For a big city, Tampa is kind of a small town,” Schwartz said. “People look out for each other here.”

