

NaVOBA Recognizes Founding Contributors with Prestigious Plank Owner Award

LEXINGTON, KY, UNITED STATES, April 23, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The National Veteran-Owned Business Association \(NaVOBA\)](https://www.einpresswire.com/news/2025/04/23/NaVOBA-Recognizes-Founding-Contributors-with-Prestigious-Plank-Owner-Award) is proud to announce the recipients of its prestigious [Plank Owner Award](#), an honor celebrating individuals who played a foundational role in building the organization's mission to advance economic opportunities for veteran entrepreneurs across the country.

Inspired by naval tradition, a “Plank Owner” is a title bestowed upon those who were present during the commissioning of a ship. NaVOBA has

adopted this legacy to recognize the pivotal leaders behind its organizational launch and growth—individuals whose dedication has helped establish a national platform for Veteran’s and Service-Disabled Veteran’s Business Enterprises® (VBEs/SDVBEs).



The 2025 NaVOBA Plank Owners:

“

“These individuals have been instrumental in building NaVOBA into a trusted national advocate for veteran-owned businesses.”

*NaVOBA President & CEO
Matthew Pavelek*

Mick Burkard is an experienced financial services leader with over 25 years in operational and sales environments, specializing in building relationships and driving business growth. Currently a Senior Procurement Relationship Manager at U.S. Bank, Mick has a background in strategic negotiations and team leadership. He is also a U.S. Air Force veteran, where he served as an Accounting and Finance Officer, leading teams and improving operational performance.

Nancy Conner is the Vice President of Certification at NaVOBA, where she focuses on confirming and verifying veteran-owned businesses. She is also the CEO of Nancy Conner Consulting, LLC, a

firm dedicated to helping corporations meet their supplier diversity goals. With expertise in supplier development, community outreach, and advocacy, Nancy plays a key role in enhancing small business partnerships and providing leadership in supplier diversity programs.

Linda Denny is the President and CEO of Linda Denny Consulting, a firm focused on business management development, executive coaching, and assisting businesses with WBENC Certification as Women's Business Enterprises. She has worked extensively in nonprofit organizational development and small business coaching. Previously, she served as President and CEO of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), where she grew corporate membership, expanded the organization's international presence, and played a significant role in shaping the Women-Owned Small Business program.

Dave Guerra is the President of Puente Technology, LLC, a service-disabled veteran-owned small business providing a broad range of services including construction management, general contracting, IT infrastructure project management, and facilities management. He served on NaVOBA's Board of Directors as a VBE seat.

Brian K. Hall is the Manager of Supplier Diversity & Advocacy and Small Business Liaison Officer at Shell Oil Company, where he leads efforts to build a more inclusive supply chain by empowering diverse suppliers to find their place in the energy industry. With over 25 years at Shell and a background in marketing and computer science, Brian is also a dedicated community leader, serving on several national supplier diversity boards—including NaVOBA. He served as NaVOBA's Secretary for many years.

Heather Herndon Wright is the Director of Supply Chain Diversity at Vistra Energy, where she leads national strategies to grow and integrate diverse and small businesses across the supply chain. A lifelong champion for supplier diversity, she's held leadership roles across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. She served as the founding Chair of NaVOBA's Board of Directors.

Georgia Marsh is Chief Development Officer for the Women's Business Development Center. Georgia leads the Development team's work to identify, cultivate, and sustain resources for the WBDC. Before joining the WBDC, the bulk of Georgia's career was spent in public sector executive and leadership positions at the state and federal levels. Georgia also worked in the private sector and has extensive entrepreneurial experience, including running a consulting firm that provided advisory services for government and not-for-profit entities. Georgia currently serves as a NaVOBA Board of Director on the Executive Committee.

Robin Pulford spent nearly 7 years as the Manager of Supplier Diversity at American Airlines, where she played a key role in fostering connections with veteran-owned businesses. Robin excels in building relationships, engaging stakeholders, and driving process improvements to achieve business goals. Her leadership and communication skills have contributed to the successful integration of diverse suppliers into the company's operations. She has also played a significant part in supporting NaVOBA, helping to advance veteran-owned businesses in the

corporate sector through various initiatives.

Bede Ramcharan is a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel, decorated Airborne Ranger, and accomplished healthcare and policy leader who now serves as President and CEO of Indatatech, a global supply chain solutions company. A tireless advocate for veterans, he has founded multiple organizations supporting veteran health, entrepreneurship, and federal contracting success, earning national recognition—including the Gordan H. Mansfield Veterans Advocate Award and NaVOBA's Minority Vetpreneur of the Year. He served on NaVOBA's Board of Directors as a VBE seat.

Julie Rakes is the Senior Manager of Supplier Diversity at Capital One, where she drives strategies to increase the inclusion of diverse suppliers and supports innovative programs like Catapult to help businesses scale. With over 20 years at Capital One, she brings deep experience in communications, investor relations, and diversity strategy, and currently serves on NaVOBA's Board of Directors Governance Committee.

Staci L. Redmon is the President and CEO of Strategy and Management Services, Inc. (SAMS), an award-winning company providing scalable technology and management solutions. A U.S. Army veteran with over 30 years of leadership experience, she's been recognized nationally—including NaVOBA's Woman Vetpreneur of the Year—and is deeply committed to giving back through her nonprofit, SAMS Cares, which supports veterans and their families across the country. She served on NaVOBA's Board of Directors as a VBE seat.

Patrick D. Sanders is Director and Senior Attorney at American Airlines, where he leads the team managing nearly \$1 billion in public contracts and oversees compliance with global anticorruption and anti-human trafficking laws. A former U.S. Air Force officer and seasoned attorney with over 17 years of experience, Patrick was the airline's first government contracts attorney and architected its enterprise-wide compliance program. Patrick served on NaVOBA's Board of Directors.

Lori Simmons is the Vice President and Chief Growth Officer at Armed Forces Insurance, having served in various executive roles since 2016. She has a strong background in digital marketing, media relations, and integrated marketing strategies. Lori is also the executive director of the Armed Forces Insurance Military Spouse of the Year program, where she helps recognize military spouses for their contributions to both military and civilian communities.

Tabatha Watson, Supplier Diversity Program Manager, Supply Chain Management at Wells Fargo has demonstrated outstanding leadership in helping veteran-owned businesses thrive, earning NaVOBA's 2019 Corporate Veteran's Champion award for her dedication to ensuring veteran entrepreneurs succeed in corporate supply chains. As a Supplier Diversity Program Manager at Wells Fargo, Tabatha has been instrumental in supporting veteran-owned businesses and securing direct contracts for them. She is also an active member of NaVOBA's Board of Directors, where she chairs the Technology Committee, contributing significantly to the organization's

growth and strategy.

Pastor Jay Sheldon Wesley has over 25 years of experience in global employment, procurement, supplier diversity, and supply chain optimization. As the Global Corporate Supplier Engagement Manager at Lumen Technologies, he leads initiatives to expand opportunities for diverse suppliers, including minority, women, veteran, and disabled-owned businesses. He has developed award-winning supplier diversity programs and is skilled in contract management, cost analysis, and project management. Pastor Wesley plays a key role in fostering relationships with diverse supplier communities and aligning business objectives with procurement goals.

Kyle Whitmire is an Assistant Vice President at AT&T, focusing on financial analysis, technology transformation, and data solutions. He has led initiatives to optimize financial systems, integrate advanced technologies, and streamline operations. Kyle excels in managing cross-functional teams and implementing strategic projects that drive significant cost reductions and operational improvements. Kyle served as NaVOBA's first Treasurer on its Board of Directors.

Matthew Pavelek, NaVOBA President & CEO, reflects on the impact of the Plank Owners: "These individuals have been instrumental in building NaVOBA into a trusted national advocate for veteran-owned businesses," Pavelek said. "Their vision and unwavering dedication created the foundation for our mission, ensuring its legacy endures for generations to come. The Plank Owner trophy serves as a lasting symbol of their influence—representing not just gratitude, but a piece of NaVOBA's very foundation."

For more on the Plank Owner Award and NaVOBA's initiatives, visit:

www.navoba.org/plankowners

About NaVOBA:

The National Veteran-Owned Business Association is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to creating corporate contracting opportunities for veteran-owned businesses through certification, advocacy, outreach, recognition, and education. Its Certified VBE and SDVBE programs establish a trusted gold standard for sourcing veteran-owned suppliers across the U.S.

Marketing Team

NaVOBA

+1 724-362-8622

[email us here](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/803178098>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

