

Meritorious Foundation Launches Veterans Fishing Mentorship Program in Tampa Bay Featuring Lt. Governor Jay Collins

A mentorship series pairing transitioning veterans with local executives on all-expense-paid fishing charters across Tampa Bay and beyond.

TAMPA, FL, UNITED STATES, June 22, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Meritorious Foundation](#) will host the launch of its newest program, [Veterans, Fishing & Cigars](#), on June 25, 2026 at Team House Tampa, bringing together Tampa Bay's military, defense, veteran, and business communities for an evening focused on transition, mentorship, and long-term professional connection.

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Fishing turns strangers into teammates, creating natural opportunities for veterans to connect, mentor, and support one another—one cast, conversation, and shared experience at a time.”

Ryan Loya, Marine Corps Veteran, Co-Founder, Meritorious Foundation

Florida Lt. Governor Jay Collins, a highly decorated U.S. Army Special Forces combat veteran, will deliver remarks during the event, which marks the official kickoff of Veterans, Fishing & Cigars and its 20-charter mentorship series. The series is designed to connect transitioning service members with local executives through structured mentor matching aligned to the professional experience

and goals of each participant.

The initiative pairs three active-duty or transitioning service members with three business executives on all-expense-paid fishing charters starting in the Tampa Bay area. In its inaugural year, the program will directly engage approximately 120 veterans through 20 charters, including active-duty special operations veterans within the USSOCOM community. The series will expand in 2027 to serve veterans at military bases across the state of Florida.

The launch event is free to attend and includes an open bar networking reception, dinner, and program with remarks from Lt. Governor Jay Collins, followed by a cigar lounge experience.

During his transition from the Marine Corps, Ryan Loya, Co-Founder of the Meritorious Foundation, experienced firsthand the difficulty and volatility of transitioning into civilian life and

found that some of the most meaningful connection and clarity came through time spent in outdoor environments, including fishing.

“On the water, participants are physically engaged in the experience, tying a lure, casting a rod, and actively fishing while they talk,” said Ryan Loya. “That physical activity lowers pressure, creates comfort, and opens up real conversation. The added camaraderie of fellow veterans makes conversations happen naturally. This is where mentorship starts.”

The Meritorious Foundation is a national nonprofit based in St. Petersburg, Florida, connecting thousands of veterans annually through virtual industry events and outdoor networking experiences designed to expand access to opportunity across the military community.



Captain Ryan Loya, Marine Corps Veteran and Co-Founder, Meritorious Foundation, Fishes in Tampa Bay, FL

EVENT DETAILS

Date: Thursday, June 25, 2026

Time: 5:30 PM – 8:00 PM

Location: Team House Tampa, 6207 S Dale Mabry Hwy, Tampa, FL 33611

Admission: Free and open to the military and defense community and invited guests

REGISTRATION AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Veteransfishingandcigars.com

ABOUT MERITORIOUS FOUNDATION:

Born from lived experience when the co-founder transitioned out of the Marine Corps, the Meritorious Foundation was created to address the gap in meaningful post-service connection. It now supports transitioning veterans and military-connected professionals through a relationships-first model centered on mentorship, networking, and opportunity access delivered through in-person experiences, structured mentorship events, and virtual programming. Over the past three years, the Foundation has connected thousands of attendees with organizations across technology, defense, and government contracting through its virtual programming, while its flagship experiential initiatives have sponsored 400+ veterans across eight states through curated outdoor networking experiences.

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