

NVTI Podcast Series

AJC Highlights

Intro: Welcome to the National Veterans' Training Institute podcast series, where we discuss pressing issues affecting today's veterans.

Host: Welcome to today's NVTI podcast, AJC Highlights. I'm your host, Hannah, and we're thrilled to have the two recipients of the 2024 Mark Sanders Award with us today. Awarded annually at the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, or NASWA, Veterans Conference, the Mark Sanders Award recognizes a one-stop career center whose efforts to serve veterans go above and beyond the scope of mandatory service provision. The prestigious award is named in honor of Mark Sanders, who during his career with the California Employment Development Department, and in leadership positions with NASWA, was untiring in his efforts to promote excellence in services to disabled veterans.

In 2024, there were a number of exceptional nominees. We're here today with the two recipients of the award, Iowa*WORKS* Davenport American Job Center and Washington WorkSource Joint Base Lewis-McChord, or JBLM. WorkSource JBLM was nominated by the Washington State Employment Security Department and is the first certified inside-the-gate military base job center in the nation. In 2023, WorkSource JBLM revamped its ambassador program to engage on-base customers through community connections. A network of ambassadors was built, with each receiving a packet of information on WorkSource JBLM services. The Iowa*WORKS* Davenport office (American Job Center) was nominated by Iowa Workforce Development and is home to several efforts that boost veteran services including hosting, Transition Assistance Program, or TAP, classes for service members planning life after the military. These classes connect service members with available resources during their transition to civilian careers. Veteran guest speakers share their stories and local employers present information on available employment. Today we're going to speak with representatives from both amazing programs to find out how they've reached such successful outcomes and what advice they might have for you to do the same. First, to kick things off, will all

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of you take a moment to introduce yourselves? Tell us a little bit about where you're from and about your role and your work with veterans.

Shane: Hi, this is Shane Sawyer from the Davenport office. I am a recently retired Air Force veteran from the Special Operations community where I crewed on AC 130 Spectre gunships. I recently, when getting out of the Air Force, I spoke with my DVOP in my hometown of Burlington, Iowa and somehow rediscovered a purpose in people and found my way into veteran career planning for the state of Iowa. And my colleague James, one of the most, I would say influential and passionate veteran career planners I've ever worked with, will introduce himself now.

James: Wow, that's awesome. Hey, my name is James Stout. My current role is, I am the Home Base Iowa career planner, and we work with different events. I go to communities, work with economic boards and stuff like that to help veterans relocate to the state of Iowa. It's a great program and it gives me the opportunity to work with a lot of different people. It's one of my passions, after being in the military for like 17 years. It took me like 8 jobs to find the perfect job, but you know that's the process that we help people with.

Jamie: All right. Hello, Hannah. My name is Jamie Norton. I am our Director of Veteran Workforce Services here in Iowa, and I am a U.S. Army veteran myself. I have the privilege and honor of actually overseeing our Jobs for Veterans State program in the state of Iowa and our other employment program is the one that James just mentioned, Home Base Iowa, being a state initiative that started back in 2014. So, my role is simply to help try to lead the way, provide guidance and support to my great team around the state and then get out of their way and let them do the great work that they do on a daily basis. Thank you.

Sam: Hi, I'm Sam Mitchell and I'm the administrator for Joint Base Lewis-McChord WorkSource. We are the only inside-the-gate job center across the nation as Hannah

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mentioned. I also oversee the strategic direction for our Jobs for Veterans State Grant for the state of Washington, and I am an Air Force veteran.

Jo Ann: Hi everyone. My name is Jo Ann Enwall. I'm the supervisor at WorkSource JBLM and I oversee the day-to-day operations. I've been at WorkSource JBLM for about 6 years and started off as a career specialist. And then before that I was a counselor for the Transition Assistance Program for about two years. And I am also the spouse of a Marine Corps veteran.

Host: Thank you. Really, really appreciate the quick introductions to put this a little bit in context. Now, first off, Sam, I know you typically serve as the Mark Sanders Award Selection Committee Chair but recused yourself from that role this year because your state was nominated for an award, and congratulations won as well. Nonetheless, would you tell us a little bit about what the selection committee typically considers? It seems like it would be just an incredibly hard choice to me. Tell us a little bit about this award and how you all typically make final selections and why it's just so impressive that there were frankly 2 winners this year. Thank you.

Sam: Sure. Thanks, Hannah. And yeah, so the award has been around since 1990. So, for about 33 years, this prestigious award has existed and has been recognizing states for exceptional service to veterans, particularly veterans who have significant barriers to employment. It is a very competitive award, as Hannah said, this year we had 9 submissions, very impressive submissions from across states. And it's important to know that that the award recognizes an entire American Job Center, so that's all programs, all partners and how they serve veterans and what they do and that the achievements because it is so competitive, have to be above and beyond.

So, what we're really looking for as a subcommittee, and we have members from across states, several states are represented on our board. What we're looking for is things that go beyond what's required of the work that we do. So, it's not just keeping up with what

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the Veterans Program Letters say. What the other Department of Labor and federal and state guidelines say but finding ways to innovate and to go above and beyond in the way we serve veterans. So that's what the award's all about. And it's very significant this year, I think, that we had two selections. I think that that just goes to show how difficult the task of making those selections is for the folks that are doing that. So, my hats off to our entire subcommittee that that does that work because those are some pretty heated conversations, and we leave no stone unturned as we go through these packages so.

As you said, Hannah, fortunately, our state was one in consideration this year and there was one other state that that was recused, the state of Tennessee. that was also a nominee. So that's standard process for us. We want to make sure that this process is as fair as possible and that we take out any possibility for perceived or real discrimination in the judging process. So that's kind of it in a nutshell.

Host: Thank you so much. Yeah, and I know NASWA takes the selection process super, super seriously, and I would not want to be on the selection committee because I don't know how you all do it, quite frankly, it would be really hard. Now, briefly, we do want to start getting into to just how and why the recipients were selected but briefly, we'd love to know a little bit more about your career centers. Where are you located? What does your service population look like? Day in the life of your American Job Center look like? What special populations do you most frequently serve? Just kind of a high-level overview of your day-to-day work. Washington, would you mind going first for us here?

Jo Ann: Yeah, of course. So, like you and Sam had mentioned earlier, we are the very first and only certified American Job Center that's located within the gates of a military installation, and so that means that our primary population that we serve is transitioning service members, but we also serve military spouses, other dependents like children of service members or family members of service members as well as veterans. So, we are in this really unique position where we are able to provide more upstream services

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to really help set up our customers for success when they do transition out to the civilian sector instead of having to be a little more reactionary when they are veterans.

We also have a co-location site over at American Lake and it's our state's only job center that's located on a VA medical campus and so we do have two DVOPs out there and they primarily serve veterans who are enrolled in VA housing and other programs, many of whom are experiencing both employment and life barriers.

And then a day in the life of our staff, we are really like we're really busy. We're doing mostly one-on-one appointments with our customers and then we also have our front desk where we are providing a lot of intake services, doing basic assessments to identify customer needs, get them out to our partners for referrals, get them scheduled for appointments. So, we are pretty busy.

Host: Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow. Yeah, I would say so. That is amazing. Thank you so much. IowaWORKS, what about you all? What's kind of a day in the life for your staff, for you all?

James: So, you know, for the Davenport Office, it's we have a great opportunity here. So, we are located, you know, on a good transportation route. But we're also located not far from our Iowa National Guard. We are also right next to what's called the Rock Island Arsenal. So along with First Army. So, there's a lot of transitioning soldiers. We got some spouses and then we have the community with the veterans and stuff like that. So, we have that close connection with all of them. But what we like about it is, is we have, you know, the capability of helping them and traveling also to their locations to provide services, to provide workshops and stuff like that.

One of the biggest things we pride ourselves on is, you know, helping them with their resume and getting it translated for applying for jobs on the like civilian side, doing the mock interviews. That's really important because you know, a lot of these soldiers and

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stuff like that when they get out, you know, they probably never went to an interview before in their life. So, one of the things we kind of pride ourselves on is that mock interview or that panel interview and stuff like that. What we like about our center right now is we do have like a veteran center set up. We actually call it the TOC, Tactical Operations Center. It's pretty, pretty cool. So, we have 13 computers set up. It gives them a spot to go to get off, away from everyone, and then they can work on their resume and stuff like that. And then you know that that separation helps them concentrate and not worry about stuff like that. So, it's still that when they come in, you know, with the priority of service. So, it's pretty unique.

Host: That is really unique. Both of your offices sound like they have some very unique setups and a really fantastic reach to separating service members. That is, is very, very powerful. I'm so glad to hear that, and really what we want to get into next is some of what makes you all really, really unique.

I mean we know, for instance, we know IowaWORKS Davenport routinely goes above and beyond. Providing exceptional customer service to veterans through personalized plans and fostering local connections to meet the needs of each family. We know that veteran networking events like Vet Nets have enabled transitioning service members, veterans, and their spouses to access essential resources, secure employment and connect with educational opportunities and engage with local government representatives.

We know that in 2023 Washington's WorkSource JBLM piloted a digital literacy workshop for veterans with employment barriers, and we know the curriculum empowered technology challenged veterans to use online tools, processes, and resources to secure employment, and that the program, originally begun as a pilot has grown to include a wider variety of offerings and now offers national certifications.

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I mean, that's just the most cursory things that you all do, but they're just amazing statements that just scratch the surface of what you've accomplished. We want to hear some more about what led to the receipt of the Mark Sanders Award for both of your offices. What were the results, the accomplishments and the ultimate impact of the work that led to your nominations and the ultimate award. In this case, can we get lowa works to jump in first here?

Shane: Yes, yes, I'd love to. What would we like to talk about first? Would you guys like to hear about the professional networking events for veterans? TAP program? I can kind of lead off with a little bit of both.

Host: Bring it on. Yes, do it.

Shane: That sounds good. OK, well, so here in Davenport. I'd like to say that our office receiving the Mark Sanders Award, as I said, and at NASWA, it's a bit of a mirror in my in my opinion it's a mirror that reflects on the wonderful resources that we already have in this community. It just requires a bit of partnership and just plugging in where the work is already getting done. I have to say I'm deeply thankful for the men and women at our American Job Center that truly put priority of service at the forefront of their daily activities. It just makes our job a little bit easier and that's just not a sugary statement to make it sound sweet. The proof is in the pudding, if you will, and that pudding is the result of our TAP classes.

We host Transition Assistance Classes quarterly. We see a TAP cohort of approximately 25 people in attendance usually. I believe last year and don't quote me and I think we saw approximately 93 transitioning service members and their spouses. We host that in a dedicated TAP classroom and so that provides computers for each person. It provides audio visual capability for presenters, and it's just that personal workspace for them in addition to our veterans' resource room or TOC as we like to call it. It provides them a place to learn and grow and then come over here and ask

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questions. And what I think is fantastic about hosting TAP class at an American Job Center, is it gives them the opportunity to break away from their day-to-day routine. I always give the example that when I was in the military, I had two cell phones, my personal cell phone tied to the family, and my professional cell phone tied to the commander. And many of these people have their military responsibilities, so they need that freedom to be able to break free from their normal day-to-day activities and just focus on their transition assistance classes.

Secondly, and equally as important, it gives them an opportunity to be immersed with that conduit of resources that we, we aren't just an unemployment office, we are workforce development. We are the resources in this community with all the businesses. And so these guys get access. Hey, I'd like to talk to this company. What DoD SkillBridge programs do we have? And we get to offer that up there. The other half of that and please tell me if I'm talking too long is we get to host some professional networking events for veterans. I found that when I left the military, I lost my tribe. I lost my sense of purpose. In doing so. I felt like I lost my identity. And as a veteran career planner, my goal is to help veterans find a passion, unlock purpose driven living so that they know who they are and part of that is trying to rediscover that tribe again. And what I found is here in the Quad Cities thanks to the efforts of their founder, Brian Miller, former Lieutenant Colonel at the Rock Island Arsenal's First Army. He was already hosting professional networking events. So I just plugged in. And he said, I'd like to give this away for free. Let's make this grow. So a year ago today, we probably had one professional network, the Quad City Veterans Network, where veterans would be able to come get together with other veterans, look for jobs, get connected to resources such as myself, such as James, such as VA resources, talk to their state and local elected officials, benefit from some generous media coverage and some educational resources. But then we grew it and gave it away to other American Job Centers. And now we have I want to say five more across the state, so that at any given month, hundreds of veterans, hundreds of employers and resource providers are gaining contact with one another, getting connected and sharing those resources to become successful today.

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Host: First, not talking too much. That was so inspiring and exciting. I love that. That was fantastic and in fact I will say is there anything else around the successes that you've had, the accomplishments that led to this award that you yourself or anyone else at IowaWORKS would like to share? Anything else before we move over to Washington?

Shane: Yeah, absolutely. And it's hard to remember everything on the fly, but I'd like James to talk a bit about a bit of a passion project of his, which is the Quad City Success Fair. It's been going on, I want to say 8 years running, and it's our largest job fair that we hold in I would say the bi-state region and most recently, I know this didn't go into consideration for the award, but I got to give a proper shout out to James for pulling off, and our job center, for pulling off an excellent event. We saw over 400 people in attendance, over 120 veterans. My caseload got a little bit heavier as a result, but we were able to get people access to resources, jobs and provide them a bit of a relief. James, do you want to talk about last year?

James: So, you know we started this adventure at a little armory that was here in Davenport. In fact. We have like 30 employers. We basically called it a success fair, and it got just completely packed in there. Then we did it again in the in this little armory, which was part of the Iowa National Guard, which was a great connection for them because then the spouses, not only spouses, but we always forget about the children too, the high school kids, the kids going to college and stuff like that. So, then we eventually moved it to one of the universities to where it grew to like 100 employers. It was crazy insane, but people just loved it, and as Shane said, this current year decided to move it to an area that was a little bit more accessible for people who had a disability or maybe some travel issues and stuff like that to make it more accessible. So yeah, we had over 400 people. We had 85 businesses there that all showed up. In fact, we had three or four businesses that were standing there asking if they could be part of it. But you know, when you go to events like this and over the last eight years, you can just

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feel it, the intensity it's like being, you know, holding on to a like a power cord, it's just it's just one of those amazing things to hear people talking, the communication and you know, there were job offers right there on the spot for some of our former TAP people that attended for part of the transition assistance program. So that's, well, that's even special for Shane and myself to actually see that and experience it.

Shane: Now I had a success story or two. So from this event last year we decided to have a little fun. We got on the radio, on live, on live radio and started introducing veterans, you know, first name, and you know, they allowed us to do so, but it was kind of fun. We introduced them by their first name and what kind of job they were looking for. And I kind of treated it like an auction because the area is, it's just it's just large and it's hard to shelve from one room to the next. But I had employers in the spirit of healthy competition vying for that veteran's attention and actually an employer in the Quad Cities area ended up coming to IowaWORKS looking for a veteran. I believe. Another one was the mayor of Davenport. He is a former Army Ranger and a longtime supporter of the Vet Nets and the Success Fair. He attended the Success Fair and one of my transitioning service members was in attendance and spoke with her and got her a phone call to somebody at Trinity, I believe, the hospital, and to which she's working there today and enjoying her job. I'd say this award has been a culmination of the wonderful vehicles, the wonderful partnerships that we just happen to be so fortunate to just jump on to and say, "Hey, where's the work being done and how can we help?"

Host: That's great. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for sharing all of that. And you know, I love hearing that you all moved it to a more accessible location as well to really consider that feature. What great consideration. Washington don't you hate going second? No, and I don't mean that at all, because I know you all have had some amazing successes. And I just want to hear, you know, what led to your award. And unless I'm mistaken, this is actually Washington's second time being nominated and selected for the Mark Sanders Award and I would love to hear some of the activities that led to this nomination and award for Washington State. So, if you'll fill us in, please.

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Sam: Certainly. Thanks, Hannah. And it is indeed our second time winning this award. We also won it in 2018. So, we're pretty proud of our two glass structures in our window here. So, I think I can sum up what led to us receiving this award in three categories. The first being innovation, also finding needs and being able to find voids and being able to react to those, and lastly strong partnerships. Some of the innovation that we saw in this year in 2023 was in the area of outreach. We're always looking for ways that we as a partnership can get the message out to the folks that that can benefit from our services, particularly on the, on the base here. So, we've done some creative marketing, and you mentioned Hannah, the ambassador packets, so I won't talk much about that other than to say that we use our customers as force multipliers. They are our salespeople. They're the people who are the best testimonials to the work that's done here. And that's kind of the gist behind the ambassador packets. But we also do a lot of posting on social media. We have our own social media site on Facebook. And we have posting rights to 8 other sites that focus on military families, whether it's veterans, whether it's service members, whether it's military spouses, each of those sites hits a targeted population that we are primed to serve here at WorkSource JBLM. And in that effort, we hit about 23,000 members across those sites. So that, that's just one example of the great innovation that goes on here within the partnership.

The second category that I mentioned is being able to find needs and voids, and I think Operation Military Culture, which we launched in 2023, was probably one of the bigger needs that we were recognizing and we knew that the level of services and the level of familiarization with our populations, with the military family population was pretty solid here because, because that's what we do day in and day out. But we saw a need to help the folks outside the gates that maybe haven't had the experience and the exposure that our team has had, and our partners have, with dealing with these populations and the level of comfort maybe isn't quite where it could be. So, we launched this Operation Military Culture as an immersion program really. We bring in folks for up to 12 days in 90-day period and they get to go through a whole realm of

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different opportunities. They get to meet the partners. They get to go through some of the training that the military folks go through. They get to work our front desk, our intake and get to hear the stories firsthand. They get to shadow our WorkSource specialists, as they provide services directly to our customers. So, through that they get an opportunity to actually experience it and to walk back into their job outside the gate in one of our many job centers and to walk in more comfortable with serving this population. So, it's been a great initiative, it's growing. We've presented it at a number of different venues, including the NASWA Veterans Conference this year. And it's really taken off and we see it as a program again if it goes back to that innovation as well. We see it as a program that could be replicated with any population. Yes, we do it with the military family, but it could be any population that we serve in our centers. So, I think that was a need and it was something that we filled, and we also do a, we have a very strong customer feedback system here. We take to heart what our customers say. We survey hundreds of customers each year and we look at what they say because we know with that what we see is from our perspective, what they see is from a little different angle. They're the ones receiving the services. So, it's important to us that we react to that. So that's another way that we find needs and we fill those needs.

And lastly, and probably the most important, at least in my mind, is our strong partnerships. I'd be remiss not to mention the other folks besides the state workforce agency that make up our partnership here and that's our career team, which is our Workforce, Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title One partner, our Department of Social and Health Services, Goodwill Industries, the USO military service to education program, our State Department of Veterans Affairs program called Work Acts, and also Operation Military Families. So, all of these programs come together to provide wrap around services, and we've got a couple logos here that I think really tell our story. And one of those is "No hats, no logos." So, each of our partners is trained to understand the basics of one another's missions and to be able to brief on the resources and the services that are offered by the entire partnership, so whether that be child support services, internships, apprenticeships, interview preparation, job search strategies,

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labor market, veterans benefits, the list goes on and on of the wrap-around services that are provided here and each of our partners understand who does that and when we do a handoff of a veteran that needs more than one of the services or more than one of the organizations that comprise our partnership, they're getting a valued handoff. They're getting a handoff that's meaningful because we all understand what one another does.

And the last motto that I like to talk about is “No wrong door”, so it doesn't matter if that customer comes in through the door of our USO office, our State Department of Veterans Affairs, or any of our other partners, they're going to get the full realm of what they need because we have a partnership that understands one another's abilities of one another's services, so I think really again, in a nutshell, it's the innovation, the fact that we have a team, we have a partnership that is always looking for ways to improve what we do and is doing it with a very open mind, being able to find needs and voids, always looking from our customers perspective at what we could be doing better. And lastly, the strong partnerships, I think partnerships are what make this up. I think partnerships are what set this center apart from maybe some other very, very, very solid centers in our state. And I think the, the, the level of partnering that goes on is just phenomenal. And so, I think that's that kind of sums up what I think set us apart in receiving the award in 2023.

Host: Man, what a great answer. Thank you so much. No, wrong door. I love that. If we could all have that approach, I think that would make a huge difference in services all around. That was, that was fantastic. Thank you so much. That was, that was really wonderful. I think we've done a lot of talk about successes and what set you up for success and why you've been successful and that's what we're here to talk about. I mean that's that is why we're here. But that can paint a really rosy picture and that can make somebody listening to this think, “Well, that's great. They've been successful, but I can never do that.” So, I'm going to reflect a little bit and just think about what are some of the challenges that you've experienced and how have you overcome them? So just a moment of reflection. So what are some of the unique challenges, perhaps, that you

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have experienced and what did you do to overcome those? To overcome those and push forward nonetheless and receive this award?

James: This is James. Hey, some of the things you know, this is something I really, truly believe. Sorry, Jamie. But Jamie's been doing a phenomenal job, you know, managing everything. But he's been there and seen all this. I think this would be, you know, something that you know, Jamie could cover over because he's been there with all the different programs with all the different AJCs and stuff like that.

Jamie: James, you put me on the spot. Thank you. I think what James is saying is that I've been in a position, you know, we were, we've been structured differently here in Iowa previously. So, prior to that bad word, COVID. the pandemic, all of our Jobs for Veterans State Grant staff, they used to report up through their local management teams. Our Home Base Iowa team was separated off and actually was a lot smaller at that time, but you know, in a different division all by itself.

And I think the challenge of what we saw post the pandemic was the, was just the lack of communicating out whether it's, you know, new guidelines in place with the Veterans Program Letters, just new processes that we internally needed to do, to provide the best services as possible to our veterans, work with businesses as well, and that was a challenge because we just saw it as it's hard to communicate out those types of things the way we were structured and the way we, I think. overcame that challenge is by restructuring, as of March of 2023. when we brought all of our veteran program teams together under one bureau, our Office of Veteran Workforce Services. And so that included our Jobs for Veterans State Grant team, our Home Base Iowa team, and it is it has just made things a lot easier from that perspective where our team members can collaborate. Now it's a lot virtual. We have met in person a couple of times, which is a great way for the team for teambuilding. But we do meet on a regular basis virtually. It's a great avenue for them to share best practices, obstacles they're facing. If I from the leadership standpoint, need to communicate things out, I can do it without having to go

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through other channels to communicate those things and we can operate more effectively.

So, I think that's kind of what James was saying, and that's how we kind of overcame it and have rearranged or reorganized in Iowa. And I think it's led to a lot of success in allowing us to do innovative things like Sam mentioned before that that's what this award is all about. Being innovative, going above and beyond, and our team members in Iowa do a wonderful job of doing that across the board. So, I couldn't be prouder of our team here in Iowa.

Host: That was a great example. Good job putting Jamie on the spot. That was fantastic. Thank you. How about you all, Washington? What, what kind of unique challenges might you all had to overcome that you can share with our listeners?

Sam: Thank you, Hannah. And I think this is a good instance when it's nice to go second because it gives you a second to think about it. So, thank you, Iowa, thank you. Jamie. I think our goal here and I think the kind of the gist of the Mark Sanders Award is that our state, as Iowa has seen, the challenges become opportunities for success. So, I think our challenges and our successes are very closely tied together and we have a few, we have a few challenges. There are some things that are unique to what we do that create sometimes barriers, and one of those is that we we're small teams, there are a number of partners here, but each of those partners has a very small team that provides those wraparound services I mentioned earlier and certain pieces of what we do, and in particular business services, are things that tend to get fragmented. That tend to nobody has enough resources individually to work with the number of businesses that are looking for the talent that comes out of a military base. So, what we've done is we've pulled together all the partners and said, "Hey, we can do this better as a team, let's create a forum. Let's create a way to synergize the efforts to deconflict between events that are happening among the among the partners and to come together and march in the same direction alongside each other to do a much better job."

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So, we've got partners that attend this event. They'll attend monthly and they come from not only within the partnership, under the umbrella of WorkSource JBLM, but also within from some of our partners outside the gate, like the bigger job center in Pierce County that sits just outside the gate here in Tacoma, WA. So together, we've kind of come up with plans to take a village and create a much better strategy for engaging the business community and connecting them with the amazing talent that comes out of the military base here.

Another of our challenges has been marketing. We're dealing with a population that's transitory by nature. The military is transitory. People come and go. A good example of that is we see about five to seven thousand folks that separate out of this base alone each year. So, with that five to seven thousand more folks come in. And as we've mentioned throughout this talk, we are unique. There aren't job centers inside the gates of every base across our nation, sadly. Hopefully someday there will be. So that brings challenges or something that nobody knows exists, so we're forever having to educate our populations on what we do and how we can be a benefit to them and their families. And that's we talked a little bit about some of the that you know our digital marketing strategy and our ambassador packets. That's kind of how we're dealing with that right now, but we're always looking for other options. Communities to get out to our population, whether it be outreach, whether it be other ways of reaching them, getting into their living rooms, not physically or literally, but virtually being able to let them know that we're here for them.

And then the last one I'd like to mention is just getting military talent into our state agency. These we recognize the state government and federal government are a natural transition point for many of our military folks that provides the level of training, the level of structure, the level of camaraderie that they've become accustomed to in the military. So, to find success in that area, we've partnered with our veterans, our state veterans' employee resources group. So that's basically the acquisition professionals from across all of our state agencies across the state and we've welcomed them

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through our doors to do hiring events. We've welcomed them through our doors to do panels, to talk a little bit about what state agencies do and why it's a good choice for folks coming out of the military. So, we've, we've got our challenges, but we've also found ways to turn those challenges into successes.

Host: It sounds like it, yeah, absolutely and great examples yet again. Definitely. Thank you so much. We're winding down on the podcast, but I want to make sure that we take time here near the end for the advice section. You know what would be your primary advice to somebody who works in an American Job Center and says I want to do that. I want to be that successful. I want to, I want to win that award someday. But really, let's be serious. I want to serve eligible veterans. I want to serve eligible spouses; says I want to be that successful for the veterans in my community. How do I do that? What advice would you give to them? You know, where do they start? How do they build those connections? What are the ways that they can build those collaborative relationships successfully? I know we can't exhaustively talk through, but what are some things that you would advise that are the fundamentals? Of hey, these are the things that I would say are the must-dos if you want to reach success because I know that's going to be some of the things that our listeners most want to hear. What, what would be your advice?

Jamie: So, I'm taking it from a little bit from the viewpoint of the just the leadership and the role that I'm in specifically. And so, and as Sam mentioned earlier too, like I think what they found successful was you know, identifying those gaps, those things, those services that could be missing in, in the specific area, I think that's a great place for someone to start with, finding those specific needs, the gaps and services. And then a lot of the talk has been about building those partnerships, you know, and finding those partnerships, those key partners like Shane said, the folks out there doing the work, getting connected with those partners. But what I would like to say is sometimes it just takes, you know, the folks at the top just giving their team members the tools and the opportunities to succeed and then also to fail too. So, you know, letting them go out

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there some and push some of the boundaries, try new things. This award is about being innovative and creative and you have to try some things that that might end up not working, but then that maybe that just means you have to try something else.

Being patient. Perseverance can be crucial as well. I know, speaking for James, who was pretty instrumental in in getting the TAP workshop hosted there in Davenport. It took him some while to work with the Arsenal if I remember correctly and really build that relationship make it very strong. It took time and commitment on his behalf to show our commitment to providing excellent services. And before they were, you know, wanted to or be were willing to move and start hosting the workshop in the Davenport Office there and then from an agency standpoint, you know, being that creative idea, trying to come up with different ways. One of the things we've done in Iowa is become really involved with the Department of Defense SkillBridge program. So that's been a new innovation. I wouldn't say innovation, but because other states are doing the similar thing. But we as a state agency have now been approved to be a third-party administrator provider. So just another way for us to work with transitioning service members and encourage them to come to Iowa and working with employers here to build new pipelines and bring in that talented military community that we know exists and everybody's fighting to get their hands on. Thank you.

Host: I knew that building relationships was going to come up, but Jamie, I love that permission to fail from leadership and take some risks and chances. What a fantastic addition to this conversation.

Shane: Hey, Hannah.

Host: Wow. Yeah. Jump on in. Yeah.

Shane: Hey, I'd like to add into that if I may.

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Host: Please do yes please.

Shane: Awesome, everything Jamie said was spot on and James and I are very fortunate to have the leadership team at IowaWORKS that allows us to fail, fail forward or succeed all on our own, but give us the support and the direction along the way. But one of the keys to our success and I and then I, I want to leave a little something out there at the end here is, one of the keys to our success is that relationships matter, just like Jamie said, when we partner with people in the community, you know, we don't just show up. I don't just drop a business card and say, call me if you need me, I'm the new veteran career planner. I try to meet them where they are and partner with them along the way. So, if they're doing an event, I'd like to partner with you. If they are, if they have an initiative that's important to them, that's going to help veterans with significant barriers to employment, I'd like to tag on as well.

And as far as TAP programs go and Veterans Network, the blueprint is simple and we'd like to give it away for free. So, if anybody in the listening area would like an opportunity to set up their own professional networking event for veterans, they could go online on LinkedIn and follow the Quad City Veterans Network. They can find them on Facebook as well. You can also find the Muscatine Veterans Network, my own personal Vet Net in my own area, can find us on LinkedIn, Facebook. We'll be standing up. We're doing a little bit of a restructuring at the time, or you can give us a call here at our American Job Center and reach out to us. Shane.Sawyer@iwd.iowa.gov. We would love to connect with you, consult with you and help you. I want to make this competition a little bit difficult for us next year because I plan on submitting another package along with the state. I'm just kidding. But anyway, we're happy to share best practices and give it away to anyone who's interested in helping veterans secure that better future.

Host: I love it. The competition just got stiff. What else? How about anybody from Washington? Any big advice, anything that that you think that you would say to somebody coming into this that you would say, hey, this would be this thing I would say to do, the big advice, the big take away.

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Jo Ann: Yeah. Well, it's hard to follow up with what Jamie said because he took the words right out of my mouth. But what really stands out for me anyways with the criteria of the Mark Sanders Award is the portion about going above and beyond. And so, for our office, that's really about thinking outside of our normal everyday duties and kind of expectations, and really, being creative and like everybody has said and how we address and solve the challenges that we face. A really good example for our office that Sam spoke about earlier is the Operation Military Culture training program, which really started as a way of helping us to alleviate a staffing shortage and bringing some staff from other offices into our office. But it turned into a much bigger thing, for, to have a larger impact for our other WorkSource offices and as well as for our military affiliated customers who are seeking services at those offices.

So really my biggest advice would be to be creative, especially when working through challenges and thinking outside of the box. But with that, like Jamie had said, don't be afraid to try new things and to fail. I think most of our greatest successes that we've had in our office didn't quite work out at first, and there was a lot of like, "Is this going to work at all?" But that took a lot of evaluation. It took, you know, customer feedback. It took staff feedback, maybe multiple adaptations before those things really took off and became a success. So really stick with it, even if it seems like it's going to be an uphill battle because at the end of the day it's going to have a large impact, and I think that's really ingrained within the culture in our office and that would be my biggest advice.

Host: Love all the fail forward, you guys know I do, that I'm all about that. This has been a great conversation. I think that has all been fantastic advice. It's very obvious why you all were nominated, also why you all were selected for this prestigious award. It's been magnificent to talk to you today. I could do this for the rest of the day very easily, and I know I would hear wonderful information and learn tons of new stuff. Before we do close out to the day. I just want to make sure I give everybody a chance. Are there any last things to leave our listeners with before we close out for the day? I just want to make

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sure before we end the podcast, if there's any last words that you all want to make sure our listeners hear that I give you that last chance.

Sam: Hey, Hannah, this is Sam. I'll chime in real quick. I just wanted to extend a congratulations to Iowa for co-receiving the award with us this year. It was an amazing year. There were some very, very strong competitors in that stack. And even though I didn't participate in the selection process, I got to see it all and Iowa's doing some amazing work out there and they should be very proud.

Jamie: I'll just add. Thank you, Sam, and congratulations to your state of Washington as well. And thank you to Hannah and the team for putting this podcast together.

Host: All, thank you all so much. Just a fantastic conversation and congratulations to all of those who were nominated for the award. Much like Sam said, it's hard to be nominated. It is incredibly hard to win. So, congratulations to IowaWORKS and to Washington State's Workforce Center. Thank you all of you for joining us today for the podcast. To our listeners, if you would like more information about serving veterans, please visit NVTI.org to access resources such as this podcast. We are also constantly adding new materials, so check back often, and of course, we invite you to continue the conversation at the Making Careers Happen for Veterans: Community Of Practice. Thank you all so much for joining us today.

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