



# THE HOOSIER VETERAN

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## WELCOME!

BY JOE DEVITO

This month, we celebrate and acknowledge the tremendous contributions of our Women Veterans to our storied military history. The courage, faith and intelligence of so many have bolstered our nation and we say thank you. As the Women of Indiana who are Veterans continue to pave the way for all Hoosiers we reflect on Women's History Month. As we honor our Women Veterans and service members the team at the IDVA remains committed to making Indiana the best place for all Veterans to Live, Work and Thrive! We welcome contributions and feedback to [outreach@dva.in.gov](mailto:outreach@dva.in.gov).

THE HOOSIER VETERAN  
NEWSLETTER

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# WOMAN VETERAN HITS HOME RUN FOR INDIANA'S INCARCERATED VETERANS

BY LAURA MCKEE

Growing up in a small town in Ohio with 11 siblings did not always mean open doors to opportunities as funds trickled in slowly and resources were stretched to last longer. But a little ingenuity, grit and determination can go a long way and for Kathy Griffin, executive director of Veterans Affairs at the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC), she begins her journey to education and career accomplishment in the U.S. Army. She follows in the footsteps of her father, a Korean War veteran, and of those others in her family who served in the U.S. military. While her father paved the way for her to become a Soldier, he also inspired her to blaze her own trails in life and reach her goals, breaking down barriers and achieving outstanding success.



A young Kathy Griffin, at the beginning of her career as a human resources Soldier in the U.S. Army. (Courtesy photo)



Of the many military branches to choose from, the Army was her number one choice. Griffin enlisted in 1977 and began a stellar military career spanning eight years on active duty and 23 years serving her country as a Soldier in the Reserve. Why did she choose the Army?

“Simple,” with her witty sense of humor Griffin adds, “I had two sisters in the Air Force and I didn’t want to be stationed with them.”

Sgt. 1st Class Kathy Griffin, serving as a first sergeant in the U.S. Army Reserve. (Courtesy photo)



Griffin's Military Occupational Specialty Code (MOS) was 42Alpha, commonly known as Human Resources. As a 42Alpha, Griffin was stationed in Kentucky, Indiana, Texas, Saudi Arabia, and Germany. The Army took her to fantastic places where she seized opportunities to learn and discover the wider world outside Ohio. While at her first duty station in Augsburg, Germany, she gained an appreciation for different cultures, while also realizing a talent for playing softball. She joined the post's softball team, playing all over Germany and competing against other military teams. She played softball for three years and only lost one game during that time.

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"The whole team was literally in shock [over the loss]. No one said a word for about 10 minutes. We really didn't know how to act, we did not know what we were supposed to do. We had more talent than any other team; this loss was not supposed to happen," she said. "The good thing is that it was a double elimination tournament and we went on to win it all."

After transitioning to the Reserve in 1984, Griffin focused on her strong desire to attend college by taking advantage of her eligibility under the military GI Bill. Many veterans will agree, making the switch from active duty to Reserve Soldier and full-time college student has its challenges. The last tour of Griffin's Reserve service, she found herself in a command position as first sergeant of a replacement company processing and training Soldiers to survive deployments in a combat zone. This command position will also give her great preparatory experience for her future working for the Indiana Department of Corrections.

As Griffin explains, "When I was searching for employment, the difficulty was finding a job that fit my skill set and my mentality that had developed while I was in the Army."

Working for the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) was not a long-term goal foremost in her mind. In fact, the employment opportunity was just that, an opportunity. Her four-year degree nearly finished, she saw a posting at school that the State of Indiana was hiring correctional officers. She jumped at the chance, applied and was hired. She soon realized being a correctional officer had more benefits than just earning money.

"I quickly realized that I liked what I was doing, I liked the feeling of helping people in this role as a corrections officer," said Griffin.

After much hard work, dedication and lost sleep, Griffin graduated in 1985 with a bachelor's degree from Indiana University while also working full-time at the Indianapolis Women's Work Release Center.

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Victorious Augsburg Women's All-Star Softball team that took the 1978 USAREC community level title. Pictured (from left to right) are: (back row) Julie Rogers, Doris Bonnie Shepard, Leona Thornton, Auta Main, Kathy Griffin, Paul Bennett (Coach), (front row) Beth Johnson, Stephanie Seitz, Sally Speer, Georgia Figueroa, Viola Hoffmann, Jackie Moate. (Photo by B. Gudeman)

Kathy's U.S. Army championship softball team.  
(Courtesy photo)



Playing in the Army softball league in Germany in the late 1970s. (Courtesy photo)

Griffin applied herself as a correctional officer there and saw many opportunities to advance within the department.

IDOC Executive Director of Staff Development and Training Nancy Riley agrees, "There are numerous opportunities within the Indiana Department of Corrections that staff members can apply to be a part of, from the DOC Supervisory program, which is a required program, to the Leadership Academy and the Experienced and Emerging Leaders (EEL) Program," she said. "We also offer two Women in Leadership programs. While promotions are never a guarantee, many staff who have completed these programs have received promotions, excelled in their fields, and exhibited professional growth."

From Army 42Alpha to correctional officer and then continuing as warden of the largest prison in Indiana, Miami Correctional, Griffin received the attention of leadership within the IDOC. She was hand-picked to fill a new position and in 2017, became the IDOC's first Executive Director of Veterans Affairs. With approximately 1800 incarcerated veterans throughout the state, Griffin assists these veterans with the resources and support available to them while they serve their sentences in Indiana prisons.

The Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) has now partnered with Griffin, deploying county veterans service officers, district service officers, and the women veteran coordinator to reach out to incarcerated veterans in Indiana with the tools they need to be successful after incarceration.

Griffin is leading the nation with her program, as Indiana is the only state with a position like Griffin's that serves incarcerated veterans. She intends to help other states establish roles for helping incarcerated veterans by providing expertise and experience in a range of veteran issues surrounding being imprisoned, serving a sentence and life after incarceration.

"To my knowledge Indiana Department of Corrections has led the way in this area," she said. "In my inquiries I have not found any states with such position."

Kathy Griffin has been a Soldier, a student, a correctional officer and a prison warden. She has traveled the U.S. and the world, and now she brings that wealth of knowledge and experience to serving as Indiana's first director for programs for incarcerated veterans. She is truly a barrier breaker, a trailblazer and a remarkable woman veteran. This month, the IDVA honors all the women of Indiana who are veterans. You, like Kathy, make it possible for young girls to believe they can achieve extraordinary heights with a lot of hard work, a little courage and a dab of that tenacious spirit that is the hallmark of every woman veteran.

*Thank  
You*



# Women Veterans

IN TECHNOLOGY



**"I LOVE EDUCATION AND ENJOY INSTRUCTING OTHERS, WHICH I BELIEVE MAKES ME FEEL MORE CONFIDENT IN MY ABILITIES."**

Summer Kerekes, U.S. Army veteran

According to the Pew Research Center, between the years 1973 to 2010, the number of active-duty enlisted women in the military grew from approximately 42,000 to 167,000. And currently, women make up ten percent of our current veteran population.

Transitioning to a meaningful career after serving in the military can be a challenge. With the demand for jobs in tech, many veterans are turning towards coding and technology bootcamps to skill up into their new career. The Veteran's Administration allows the GI Bill to cover tech bootcamps, and a new VA program called VET TEC specifically encourages veterans who have already utilized their GI Bill benefits to have another funding mechanism to cover, specifically, these bootcamps.

The following are profiles of a few of these amazing Hoosier veterans who have successfully skilled up into tech careers.

After graduating from Pike High School, Christi Wynter attended to Penn State for a few years and reached a point where she needed a break. She was less than two semesters away from graduating and felt that her courses in information sciences and technology were not adequately preparing her for a career. What she was really interested in was cybersecurity but needed a break from college. Her brother was in the Army that that time and encouraged her to enlist in either the Navy or Air Force. Wynter opted for the Navy.

"I was interested in cybersecurity and my classes at Penn State were theory-based and not at all practical in application," says Wynter, who was less than three semesters away from graduation. "While in the Navy, I earned a degree in business administration while stationed in Connecticut and my education in cybersecurity would happen maybe one day soon."

While serving in the U.S. Navy, Wynter was a Nuclear Electronics Technician for the almost thirteen years she served. She monitored and performed required maintenance on nuclear instruments on her Carrier. This job requires the highest degrees of accuracy and attention to detail. She supervised a team of 20 and processed sailors in and out of NNPTC.

Click [HERE](#) to read the full story.

MEET

# amber mertens

U.S. Navy veteran  
2002-2006, Cryptologic Technician Interpretive:  
Arabic



Why did you join the military? Any particular inspirations/aspirations?

- I went to college for a few years after high school, but had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. My parents met in the military and always joked that I should also join but I never took it seriously. Then I woke up one morning and decided to visit the local recruiting office. It was a spontaneous decision, and I don't think anybody thought I would actually enlist!

Can you describe what your job duties were like? What did you do as part of your daily activities?

- As an Arabic linguist, I translated and transcribed audio and written communications. I worked with members of all branches while on shore and with sailors from other countries while deployed. Linguists do not typically stay attached to one ship for an entire deployment so I was able to work on three U.S. Navy ships and two Royal Navy ships.

Do you have a favorite or memorable location you were stationed/deployed? Why was this a favorite or memorable place?

- My language school was in Monterey, Calif. While it is not the most exciting place I visited, it has some of my favorite memories. The weather was perfect, the food was incredible, and nothing beats an early Sunday morning drive down the coast to Big Sur for a rooftop breakfast overlooking the ocean.

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What was your experience like transitioning from the military back to civilian life? Did you encounter challenges or issues emotionally, financially, or otherwise?

- While I had a strong support system and maintained long-distance friendships with people who were still serving, the loss of the military family was difficult. Despite having people close to me, I still felt alone. It took me awhile to remember that I am now in charge of my own life.

Did your military experience and or skills help you or hinder you from work, relationships, or personal growth? If so, how?

- I did not want to use my translating skills when I got out of the Navy, but it helped me complete my undergraduate degree. I knew I was growing as a person while I was in the Navy, but I didn't realize how much I was growing emotionally and spiritually until I looked back years later and saw the transformation. The Navy and the people I met while serving helped shape my worldview today.

Do you have any advice for young women joining now?

- You can learn so much from the people you meet in the military. Keep your mind and heart open but don't forget to have a great time.

Anything else you would like to add you feel is important for people to know about you as a woman veteran?

- I encourage women veterans to maintain contact with other women I encourage women veterans to maintain contact with other women veterans. There aren't many of us out there and we are a unique kind of family. Very few people understand the experience of being a woman veteran, so we need to support each other.

# ROLL CALL!



The Indiana Veterans Home is officially COVID-free! All staff and residents have tested negative and our last positive resident has finished their recovery and quarantine period.

The Indiana Veterans Memorial Cemetery is open for visitors. Please follow all COVID-19 guidelines:



- Wear a mask in all buildings.
- Maintain 6 feet social space.

We understand and appreciate your contribution to keeping everyone safe to enjoy their visit.

Click [HERE](#) to see the webpage.





# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## COVID-19 Veteran Vaccinations Begin

**What:** COVID-19 vaccinations for Veterans

**Who is eligible:** \*UPDATE\* March 1 - Effective immediately, we are now offering the COVID-19 vaccination to enrolled Veteran patients age 18+ at the Indianapolis VA Medical Center. Veteran Health Indiana had been offering the vaccination to our highest risk Veteran population since January 2021, per CDC risk stratification guidelines.

**Where:** Roudebush VA Medical Center  
1481 W. 10th St. Indianapolis

**How:** Enrolled veterans who would like a vaccine may call the direct appointment line at 317.988.4899. Same day appointments are available between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. To keep things orderly and effective, all appointments must be scheduled, no walk-in appointments will be available. We will schedule your 1st and 2nd dose. If you would like to enroll in VA Healthcare, click HERE to get started.

## Operation Combat Bikesaver's 6th Annual Kickstarter and Bags Tournament

This year our 6th Annual Kickstarter Event will feature a Doubles Bags/Cornhole Tournament! We'll also be unveiling our latest TWO bike build projects! We need your help making this program work for our Veterans suffering from PTSD, TBI, and Depression. We need funding for a larger facility, updated tools, parts and materials for projects. Your donation will directly affect our ability to help our Veterans participating in this program have the best experience possible. If you'd like to donate items/gift cards for raffle, please e-mail [info@combatbikesaver.org](mailto:info@combatbikesaver.org) with the raffle item description and your phone number. For more information visit our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/249875856487445>

John Boner Neighborhood Centers  
2236 E. 10th St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46208  
317.808.2393



Holy Angels School  
2822 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46208  
317.926.5211

## Free Tax Prep for Veterans

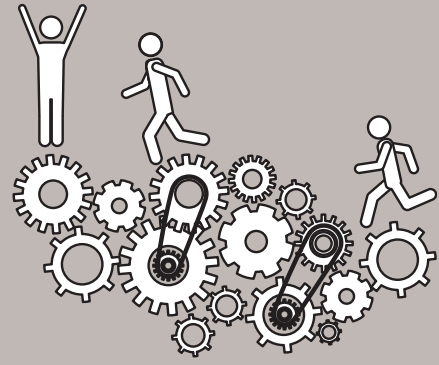
In partnership with Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, the following organizations and locations are offering free tax prep with a valid veteran I.D. card:

Habitat for Humanity  
3135 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46208  
317.921.2121

Military One Source  
800.342.9467

# Real Skill

EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION



## The Catalyst Program

- The first program of its kind for military veterans and spouses to successfully transition into the private sector. More than just resume building and job placement, we dive deeper into the holistic transition and work with you to find your own success – as you define it.
- Certificate Program, Undergraduate and MBA Programs available. All courses qualify for Tuition Assistance, GI Bill or state funding.
- To apply, visit [www.TheCatalystProgram.org/apply](http://www.TheCatalystProgram.org/apply) and submit your application. A member of our team will contact you within 24 hours. Have questions or want to talk to us directly? Contact Daniel Hance at [daniel.hance@TheCatalystProgram.org](mailto:daniel.hance@TheCatalystProgram.org) or call 937.414.9165.

## Job Opening: Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) – Muncie Region 6

Grow your career with the State of Indiana! LVERs conduct outreach to employers and business associations and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans and encourage the hiring of disabled veterans. More information and to apply for this position, [CLICK HERE.](#)

To view the current list of Veteran Resources in Indiana, [CLICK HERE.](#)

MEET YOUR

## DISABLED VETERANS OUTREACH SPECIALIST

Darrell Johnson

317.232.3910

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MEET YOUR

## LOCAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Tim Pore

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If you are an employer, a veteran seeking employment or a veteran interested in entrepreneurship & small business, visit the Veteran Employment page on our website at <https://www.in.gov/dva/about-idva/employment/>.

If you are an employer, a veteran seeking employment or a veteran interested in entrepreneurship & small business, visit the Veteran Employment page on our website at <https://www.in.gov/dva/about-idva/employment/>.