Welcome!

Do you want to...

...Network with other veterans and military personnel at Cornell?
...Participate in campus veteran's events?
...Influence veteran's practices on campus?
...Connect with the over 400 veterans and military personnel at Cornell?
...Access the New York State Veteran's Affairs Counselor for our region?

(video slideshow of various VCNG activities, gatherings, and events)

Sign Up for the Veterans CNG

Mission & Vision
Our Mission

Raise the awareness of veteran and military personnel issues here at the University; provide a forum for veteran’s and their supporters to meet to discuss topics of mutual interest and concern; and to support the University’s recruitment and retention of veterans and military personnel at Cornell University.

Our Vision

There are over 400 veterans who work or go to school at Cornell and we aim to connect with them all.

Events

UPCOMING EVENTS:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2022: 7:30 - 9:00 AM

In-Person Morning Mixer

East Hill Office Building Atrium (EHOB, 395 Pine Tree Rd.)

Welcome Back for the Fall Semester! All Veterans, Military Personnel, and Allies are welcome! Join us and reconnect with colleagues in our network. Coffee, juice, and light refreshments will be served.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2022: 7:00 PM

POW/MIA Watchfire

Myers Park, Lansing

OCTOBER 18-21, 2022

From Camouflage to Composition: Papermaking Workshop

Johnson Art Museum, meet in Appel Lobby

Times vary: Tues/Thurs 3-6pm; Wed/Fri 11am-2pm. More details: https://museum.cornell.edu/calendar/camouflage-composition-papermaking-workshop-1

NOVEMBER 11, 2022

Veterans Day
9:15 am: Guided walking tour of Cornell Veteran's Memorials

10:30 am: Breakfast Buffet

11:00 am: Guest Speaker Mark Minton, President of the Cornell Undergraduate Veterans, speaking about continuation of service.

Ways To Get Involved

Attend a VCNG event!

Join the listserv VETERANSANDMILITARYPERSONNEL-L. Contact us at veterans@cornell.edu.

Contribute to a discussion on LinkedIn.

Sweat with a Vet! Join our Team Red White and Blue - Ithaca Community for updates on weekly exercise opportunities and monthly events.

Access Cornell's Military Community page for veteran-specific resources.

Discover Cornell's military history through a tour of campus Veterans Memorials. View them online, join Team RWB on a scheduled run or tour them at your own pace.

Leadership

Current VCNG Executive Members:

- CHAIR: Debra Howell dhowell@cornell.edu
- VICE CHAIR: Randi Rainbow randi.rainbow@cornell.edu
- HISTORIAN: Emily A. Franco eaf11@cornell.edu
- TREASURER: Jase Baese jbb23@cornell.edu
- COMMUNITY OUTREACH COORDINATOR: David Saroka ds2286@cornell.edu
- MEMBER-AT-LARGE: Dave Juers dwj36@cornell.edu
- MEMBER-AT-LARGE: Rick Roper rmr43@cornell.edu
- MEMBER-AT-LARGE: Craig Wiggers cww67@cornell.edu

Executive and Ex-Officio Members:

- EXECUTIVE SPONSOR: Rick Burgess
- ROTC LIAISON: CPT Scott Hardy sah347@cornell.edu
- VETERAN REP. for EA: Debra Howell dhowell@cornell.edu
- STUDENT VETERAN COORDINATOR: Mary Fisk mml248@cornell.edu
Chair and Veterans Rep for the EA:

Debra Howell – I am currently Chair of the VCNG and the Veterans Representative to the Employee Assembly. I served in the U.S. Army Reserves as a medic from 1993—2001 and am a proud mom of a retired U.S. Army Ranger. I am committed to representing and advocating for our veterans community. At Cornell, I am the Director of Information Technology Operations for the University Library. I have an extensive background in facilitation, organizational change, teambuilding, and leadership. I received my Master of Industrial and Labor Relations degree from Cornell University in 2006. I’m also a certified Project Management Professional (PMP), an Office of the Secretary of Defense certified Master Trainer, and I serve as the Vice President of the Ithaca Branch for the Rochester Project Management Institute Chapter. My great joys are my grandsons, traveling, cooking, and reading. Feel free to contact me with questions or ideas at dhowell@cornell.edu!

Vice Chair:

Randi Rainbow has been the Director of Information Technology for the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University since 2006. His focus is on the development and deployment of technology services supporting the unique nature of the human-involved physical and social sciences of the college and their instructional, research and outreach missions. Prior to this, he was an Information Technology Area Manager in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, also at Cornell University. His military service spans a decade, from 1986-1996, starting with Army National Guard service as a DAAS3 computer systems operator, followed by two active duty Air Force tours as an Applications Developer/Systems Administrator with the Air Intelligence Agency (AIA) and Joint Analysis Center (JAC) in EUCOM. He served one combat tour in Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of the NATO mission and IFOR/SFOR. He followed military service with contract support for the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and Army Special Operations Command (ASOC) prior to moving to New York and Cornell. Randi is a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE), has a degree from the Community College of the Air Force in Information Systems.

Historian:

Emily Franco: Following her graduation from Cornell University in 1992, Emily Franco was commissioned in the Army Quartermaster Corps and, after her Officer Basic Course, became Rigger Certified. She served tours in Korea and Germany, coordinating the logistics of troop movement and managing supply and maintenance warehouses. She left the Army as a Captain and returned to the US to work with Deloitte and Touche, LLC, consulting on corporate relocations and economic development projects. In 1998, Emily returned to her hometown of Ithaca to become the General Manager of The Rose Inn, a luxurious country inn with 23 guest rooms and a restaurant. Then she was drawn back to Cornell and the logistics field as the Purchasing Manager for Campus Life. In addition to routine purchasing requirements, she managed procurement of furnishings for the new residence halls of the Cornell West Campus Initiative and the opening requirements for five new Cornell Dining units. In her current role she manages the relationship between The Culinary Institute of America and the School of Hotel Administration and promotes their joint collaborative degree program.
Treasurer:

Jase Baese was born and raised in New Braunfels, Texas. After graduating from Trinity University in San Antonio in 1994 with a B.S. in Business Administration, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Ordnance Branch of the U.S. Army. Jase served a three year assignment in Germany, including six months in Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of IFOR/SFOR. Jase has worked at Cornell University and lived in Lansing since 1998, he is currently an Assistant Director for Information Technology in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University. Jase was the captain for the Ithaca Team Red, White and Blue community from 2014 through 2021 and encourages anyone interested in health and fitness, no matter what level you are at, to join Team RWB. In 2022, Jase began a term as VCNG Treasurer.

Community Outreach Coordinator

David Saroka was born and raised in the Ithaca area. After becoming an Eagle Scout and graduating, he enlisted as a Ground Radio Repairman in the United States Marine Corps. He was stationed in Okinawa, Japan and spent time on various operations in Korea as well. Honorably discharged, he went on to receive his B.S. in Physics and then to do graduate course work in physics at California State University Long Beach. He then did research and post-baccalaureate studies at Pace University, NYC, where he went on to publish on the heat transfer of electrons. From his studies and professional work, he began lecturing at Cornell’s Summer College for courses on robotics and computer programming. At his previous position at Edison Test Laboratory, he managed 7 HVAC test facilities, supervised 24 technicians across 3 shifts, and lead a team of engineers. He also worked as the liaison to the Department of Energy and the industry’s governing body. He is currently working as an integration developer and architect in Central IT for Enterprise Services. He loves to stay active and is raising his two daughters in the Ithaca area with his partner.

Members at Large:

Rick Roper: Rick served in the US Marine Corps from 1985-1994, as a Basic Field Electrician/Generator Mechanic. He met his wife, Jinhee, while serving at the American Embassy in Seoul South Korea, and received an Honorable Discharge after nine years of service, in March of 1994. His awards include the Navy Achievement Medal, and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in Somalia, Operation Restore Hope. After discharge, he received an Associate's Degree from Herkimer Community College, and in 2006 he received his Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management from Empire State College. Rick has been employed with Cornell University for thirteen years, and is currently the Training Program Manager & Safety Manager for the Facilities Management Training Group (FMTG), within Infrastructure, Properties & Planning (IPP).

Craig Wren Wiggers: A retired Marine lieutenant colonel with 25 years of service, is director of administration for the physics department. Wiggers enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1990. After graduating from Auburn University, where he served in the Reserves, he was commissioned as second lieutenant. He did two tours of duty in Iraq and also served in Afghanistan. For his second tour in Iraq, he and a team of 18 Marines advised 800 soldiers in the Iraqi infantry, helping them become a self-sustaining fighting force. Prior to coming to Cornell he served NATO and supported the mission in Afghanistan and worked as a defense planner for Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia between 2009-12. When he returned to the United States, Wiggers took a position in ROTC at Cornell as professor of naval science, 2012-15, teaching amphibious warfare and leadership and management skills. After retiring from the Marines, he decided to stay at Cornell. He joined Infrastructure, Properties and Planning, managing trades and Student and Campus Life housing before landing his current position in physics.
ROTC Liaison:

CPT Scott Hardy: The son of an Army Master Sergeant, CAPT Scott “Cooter” Hardy enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1986 attending boot camp at MCRD San Diego. His tours included HMH-462 in Tustin, CA and HMX-1 in Quantico VA where he supported Presidents Reagan and Bush Sr. from 1987 to 1991. After transitioning to the Marine Reserves, he attended Texas A&M University graduating in 1994. In the summer of 1995 he attended Officer Candidate School at NAS Pensacola and was designated a Naval Flight Officer in 1997.

CAPT Hardy is currently serving as the Commander of the Cornell University Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps. He most recently served as the Commander of Fleet Activities Okinawa where his command encompassed five installations, 30 tenant commands and 2000 Sailors. In that tour, he was the Senior Navy Officer on Okinawa working in close coordination with his joint service partners, local mayors and the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force.

His operational sea tours include a Flag Air Ops tour with Carrier Strike Group Eleven (CCSG-11), on USS Nimitz (CVN 68) from 2014 to 2016; Commanding Officer tour with the Patriots of VAQ-140 in NAS Whidbey Island from Jan 2014 to Jun 2014; Commanding Officer tour with the Gauntlets of VAQ-136 at NAF Atsugi Japan on USS George Washington (CVN 73) and NAS Whidbey Island for transition from the EA-6B to the EA-18G from 2011 to 2014; Department Head tour with VAQ-135 Black Ravens with CVW-11, on USS Nimitz (CVN 68) from 2006 to 2009; Junior Officer tour with the Gauntlets of VAQ-136 at NAF Atsugi Japan and aboard USS Independence (CV 62) and USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) from 1998 to 2001.

His Individual Augmentee tours include Joint CREW Composite Squadron One (JCCS-1) in Baghdad, Iraq as the Assistant Director of Training from 2009 to 2010 and as Future Operations Officer for COMUSNAVCENT, Bahrain from 2003 to 2005.

His shore tours include Department Head tour for HAVOC, the EA-18G Airborne Electronic Attack Weapons School, at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center in Fallon, NV from 2016 to 2018; Instructor tour with the EA-6B Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) at NAS Whidbey Island from 2010 to 2011; Air Command and Staff College in Montgomery, Alabama earning a Masters of Military Science from 2005 to 2006; Instructor tour with the EA-6B FRS at NAS Whidbey Island from 2001 to 2003.

CAPT Hardy is married to the former Brandi Dawson. They have two children: Bryce (16) and Skyler (8). He has accumulated over 2800 hours in the EA-6B, EA-18G & C-12 aircraft and 845 carrier arrestments. He holds nine personal decorations and numerous other citations.
Student Veteran Coordinator:

Mary Fisk was born and raised in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania and is the Student Veteran Advisor & Program Manager for Cornell University. She joined the university in August 2019 after serving as the Coordinator for Veteran’s Outreach at The Pennsylvania State University. Mary retired from the Marine Corps in 2006 after serving 22 years on active duty as a Field Radio Operator, Communications Field Skills Instructor, Communications Systems Chief, Communications Chief, Drill Instructor (3 tours) and First Sergeant at duty stations all over the world: Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Kuwait; Iraq; El Toro, 29 Palms and Camp Pendleton in California; Quantico, VA; Okinawa, Japan; Parris Island, SC; and Camp Lejeune, NC. She received two Bachelor of Arts degrees in French & Francophone Studies and German Studies in spring 2015, and her Master of Education in Counselor Education in 2021, all from Penn State. Mary spends her free time visiting her daughter in Savannah, Georgia, her brothers and sisters in Pennsylvania, and lounging with her 3 pug dogs (Lady Angel, Sir Nigel & Lord Archibald) and senior kitty, Callie.

Executive Liaison:

Rick Burgess, PE, CEM, Vice President, Facilities and Campus Services

As Vice President for Facilities and Campus Services, Rick is responsible for planning, design, construction, and maintenance of facilities and utilities at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. He oversees the Office of the University Architect, Contract College Facilities, Facilities Management, Energy and Sustainability, Transportation and Delivery Services, Finance and Administration, Engineering and Project Management and the Cornell University Police Department.

Before coming to Cornell, Rick completed a 30-year career in the U.S. Navy. His final tour and career highlight was as the commanding officer of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command in Washington, D.C. He was the senior executive in charge of planning, building, and maintaining the facilities for eight naval bases in the D.C. area, including the Naval Academy and the Washington Navy Yard.

Rick served as the co-chair for the Cornell 2018 and 2019 United Way Campaigns.

Rick has a master’s degree in civil engineering and is a licensed professional engineer and certified energy manager.

Continuation of Service Award

The Veterans Colleague Network Group (VCNG) Cornell Veterans Continuation of Service Award recognizes Cornell veterans for their continued leadership and service. The award celebrates veterans who have continued to serve after their military service by giving back to other veterans or making outstanding contributions to the Cornell community. Award recipients will receive an engraved plaque which will be presented during the annual Veterans Day activities.

Nomination Form

NOMINATIONS DUE OCTOBER 28, 2022
Eligibility:

- Nominee must be current Cornell faculty, staff, or student in good standing or a veteran from the community that supports veterans at Cornell
- Nominee may not have previously received the award in the past 3 years

The VCNG Executive Committee will oversee the award review and decision-making process.

Criteria:

- Nominee serves as a role model and/or mentor for others and demonstrates a high level of professionalism, collaboration, and creativity
- Nominee enhances the quality of the campus and/or local area environment for the veteran community by providing extraordinary services, activities, or other initiatives to benefit the working and learning environments.
- Nominee advances opportunities and access for veterans