

## More Than Just Mentoring

The Veterans Entrepreneurship Program and Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans both help Veterans become vetrepreneurs.

BY KATHLEEN GANSTER

VEP • Veterans Entrepreneurship Program • Riata Center for Entrepreneurship • Oklahoma State University • 405-744-7552 • <http://eee.okstate.edu/vep>



Mike Laws had run his own company for nearly 10 years, but like any smart business owner, he knew he could always find room for improvement. That's one reason he decided to attend The Veterans Entrepreneurship Program (VEP) two years ago. It was a wise decision.

"It was the best educational week that I have ever spent. They put so much into that program and cover such a wide-variety of topics, I knew there was something that I was going to learn," said Laws.

Laws, a 62-year-old Army veteran and owner of an environmental contracting company, said he gained invaluable knowledge in marketing from the VEP program. He also felt the yearlong mentoring relationship that VEP helped him find was vital to his future success.

"[His mentor] is a business consultant in Tulsa and he donated a year of his time to give me a different perspective on how to market in both the government and private industry," Laws said.

Laws is just one of the disabled veterans who attended one of the inten-

**"WE BUST OUR BUTTS AND PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS — THESE PEOPLE ARE WORLD CLASS INSTRUCTORS, BUT WE EXPECT YOU TO WORK YOUR BUTT OFF TO MOVE YOUR BUSINESS FORWARD."**

— DR. MICHAEL MORRIS,  
AIR FORCE VETERAN AND FOUNDER/  
DIRECTOR, VETERANS ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
PROGRAM, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY,  
RIATA CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

sive, eight-day VEP programs offered through Oklahoma State University Riata Center for Entrepreneurship.

### ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

The training program is one of the three-phases of the VEP program. Michael Morris, Ph.D., founder and director of the program, said VEP includes a six-week online course, the program at

Oklahoma State, and then the yearlong mentoring partnership. The online program sets the veterans up to start thinking in an entrepreneurial mindset, according to Morris, and thinking about their own business and what makes a successful entrepreneur.

"One reason the program is successful is that we have a razor-sharp focus," he said. "Too often these programs are viewed as just another training opportunity, but we are intensely focused on getting their ventures started and being successful."

An Air Force veteran, Morris said one of the advantages of the program is that it isn't limited to veterans from a particular war or era.

"Some are younger, some are obviously older and can contribute life experiences," he said.

VEP is now in its fourth year, training an average of 45 veterans per class. The program is free for eligible veterans—who go through an application process—including transportation.

The classes at Oklahoma State go from early in the morning with sessions in the evenings and are taught by professors as well as successful entrepreneurs.

"We bust our butts and pull out all the stops—these people are world class instructors," said Morris. "But we expect you to work your butt off to move your business forward."

The partnership with the mentors has been another successful component for VEP.

"We will walk the journey with you and the mentors help do that," Morris said.

For more information about VEP visit [www.entrepreneurship.okstate.edu/vep](http://www.entrepreneurship.okstate.edu/vep), e-mail [vep@okstate.edu](mailto:vep@okstate.edu) or telephone 405-744-7552.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP BOOTCAMP

The Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) at UCLA Anderson School of Management is one of eight locations for the program founded at the Whitman School of Manage-

ment at Syracuse University.

The consortium of schools also includes the University of Connecticut School of Business; the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University; Florida State University College of Business; E.J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University; Krannert School of Management at Purdue University; and Mays Business School at Texas A & M. ▶

### Mike Laws

Age: 62  
Company: Mirage International, Inc.  
Military service: U.S. Army, 1968 to 1971, Sergeant (E-5)

Awards: 3 Bronze stars, 2 with "v" device, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal with "V", Combat Infantry Badge, Good Conduct Medal, Expert Marksman, Unit Citation, Vietnam Ribbon

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— MIKE LAWS, MIRAGE INTERNATIONAL, INC.





► Like the VEP program, there are three phases to the EBV program including a self-study online segment where the students work on their business concepts; the nine-day residency program at one of the consortium members, and a 12-month mentoring/consulting aspect with EBV faculty experts.

The program at UCLA, which graduated its fifth class this summer, is constantly updating the components to better assist veteran business owners, according to Elaine Hagan, executive director of the Harold and Pauline Price Center for Entrepreneurial Studies. Those updates include adjusting speakers to meet the needs of the current students and introducing new resources as they become available such as social media.

“We had a class with a lot of folks interested in starting non-profits, so we tailored some of the classes for that segment,” she said.

#### STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

One of the additional benefits of the program for graduates is that they gain access to all the resources of the entire EBV alumni network, said Hagen. That network is now more than 500 graduates.

“We also host webinars and alumni conferences so veterans can continue to network and sharpen their skills,” she said.

One of those alumni, Amy Sufak, an Air Force veteran and owner of Red Energy Public Relations, went through EBV in 2009, thanks to a referral from another veteran business owner who had attended EBV. She now works with the program to assist other veterans.

“I learned so much – EBV helped me have a strategic focus on my business and have seasoned professors and professionals review my business plan,” she said.

The networking from both the instructors and those who attended EBV were also invaluable to Sufak.

“That was one of the most attractive aspects to me,” she said.

Despite an MBA and years of public relations experience in the Air Force, Sufak said the EBV helped move her business forward in just two short years.

“They really helped me look at



#### Amy Sufak

Age: 38

Company: Red Energy Public Relations, Inc.  
Colorado Springs, Colo.

[www.RedEnergyPR.com](http://www.RedEnergyPR.com)

Military service: U.S. Air Force,  
1996 to 2007, Major (O-4)

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**— AMY SUFAK, RED ENERGY PUBLIC RELATIONS, INC.**

things in a different way,” she said.

Sufak has returned to pass on her knowledge to other veterans by presenting a public relations and marketing workshop.

“EBV helped me, I want to help other veterans succeed,” she said.

EBV is also completely free to eligible veterans.

“We want to make it possible for veterans to attend without worrying about costs,” said Hagan.

For more information on EBV visit [www.anderson.ucla.edu/ebv.xml](http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/ebv.xml) and the phone number 310-206-4169. ☎

#### UCLA Entrepreneurship Bootcamp

UCLA Anderson School of Management  
[www.anderson.ucla.edu/x20079.xml](http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/x20079.xml)

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**— ELAINE HAGEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE HAROLD AND PAULINE PRICE CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES.**

