

# 2019 SPARK! Spouse Conference

## Presenter Biographies

### Special Guest



**Vera Stewart**

Vera Stewart, host of The VeryVera Show, has been the example of female entrepreneurship in the Augusta, GA area for over 35 years. Stewart made her start with a cottage catering business, made a name for herself by shipping cakes and casseroles all over the country, and became a cooking and lifestyle TV show host after a successful run on Throwdown with Bobby Flay.

She has been featured in countless publications over the course of her career, including two separate runs in Southern Living, O, The Oprah Magazine, InStyle, Town & Country, The New York Times, and Veranda.

With a degree in Home Economics Education for the University of Georgia, Vera spent four years educating high school students on culinary knowledge and adult living practices. Motherhood brought Vera out of the classroom and into the home, where her catering business was born. The event that put her business on the map was the inaugural luncheon for Georgia Governor Joe Frank Harris in 1983, and in 1984, the VeryVera brand was crafted. To continue the company's growth, she diversified into a multifaceted catering and mail-order business with national sales.

Vera's love for teaching opened up another opportunity for diversification when she started a summer cooking school. VeryVera Cooking Camp, which sells out yearly, enters its 16th year in Summer 2019. 2017 brought VeryVera's inaugural camp franchise program, in which franchisees in Columbus, GA and Aiken, SC held their very own VeryVera Cooking Camp for the first time. Due to the success of this franchise program, at least 5 franchises will hold VeryVera Cooking Camp in Summer 2019. Since 2012, tens of thousands of fans tune in to watch her put a twist on classic Southern recipes and introduce new ways to entertain. The VeryVera Show is dearly loved for Vera's take on Southern cuisine, prized giveaways, and well-known culinary figures from the south and beyond, including Tyler Florence, Nathalie Dupree, Virginia Willis, The Lee Brothers, and Rebecca Lang.

On April 17th, 2018, Vera released The VeryVera Cookbook: Recipes from My Table, which contains recipes for every product she ever sold via mail order and in her café. The VeryVera Cookbook has gained media attention from Taste of the South, Relish, and Local Palate magazines, Reese Witherspoon's Draper James blog, and many other online outlets.

Throughout all eras of her career, Vera has found her true passion in mentoring young people. As an homage to those who helped shape the person she is, Vera takes pride in seeing her employees flourish under her guidance. In recent years, this has manifested in an emerging internship program at VeryVera that has a 100% hire rate for interns. Since 1997, Vera has also given college scholarships to high school students on her staff that exhibit a strong work ethic and determination.

She was named 1997 Small Business Person of the Year by the Augusta/Richmond County Chamber of Commerce and is one of two women named a CSRA Business Hall of Fame Laurette. Other accolades include two-time GABBY Merit Award winner, Emily Quin Pou Professional Achievement Award winner, and University of Georgia FACS 100 Honoree.

Vera is easily recognized by her winning smile, contagious enthusiasm, and visible passion for her work. Vera's home is in Augusta with her husband, Andy, an attorney, and her growing family.

## Home



**Melissa Riker**

Melissa Riker is an Army spouse of 13 years. She has moved with the military 7 times and most recently relocated to Ft. Stewart by way of England! Melissa is the owner/operator of “The Happier Homemaker Blog”, a lifestyle blog focused on home efficiency and management—from decorating to cleaning and baking.

“When I was a newlywed I thought I had it all under control—my house was going to be spotless, fancy home-cooked meals on the table every night and of course, my children would be perfect angels! God gave me a reality check when he blessed me with three crazy little boys and showed me the true chaos that family life can be! Over the years I’ve learned how to run my home more efficiently so I can spend more time doing the things I love.”



**Darlene Pearson**

Having served as a Military Police Officer for ten years, Darlene Pearson is a Financial Readiness Counselor for Army Community Services. Darlene has a Masters in Personal Financial Planning from Kansas State University and is an Accredited Financial Counselor® through Association for Financial Counseling & Planning Education® (AFCPE).

Darlene’s family includes her “no-such-thing-as-retired” Soldier-husband, her 16-year-old Star Wars mega-fan son and her “fur kids” – Jena Bean, an OCD Border Collie and newest addition, Holly Berry, a tiny dynamo kitten.

Darlene is an avid reader and ardent treasure hunter (thrift shopper) – ever in search of a good deal. Her husband tells her she shouldn’t say she is “cheap” but rather “frugal”. She is passionate about assisting Soldiers and their families in finding their inner financial guru.



**Kate Jones**

Kate Jones is the Founder of Kate Waldo + Co., formerly Orchid Organizing, a professional organizing business. She is a Savannah, GA local and has always had an eye for order and the most effective way to use a space. She founded Kate Waldo + Co. as a way to help others relieve stress from their lives by creating order in their homes and businesses.

She received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Georgia (Go Dawgs!) and her master’s degree from Armstrong State University. Kate is also a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO). [hello@katewaldoandco.com](mailto:hello@katewaldoandco.com)



**Maggie Pearson**

Maggie is an extremely organized, world traveling mom of two growing boys who is passionate about saving a penny wherever she can. Having lived in some of the most expensive cities in the world, Maggie has learned the ins and outs to saving money while feeding her growing children.

## Health



**Christy Munoz**

Christy has provided mental skills training as a Performance Expert for the U.S. Army since October, 2010. She started at Fort Gordon and made the move to Fort Stewart in November, 2014. Her passion for sport psychology stemmed from her experience playing basketball at Peace College. As an athlete, she realized that what determined success went far beyond the physical aspects of the game. A person's attitude, quality of relationships, and internal drive are part of what separate the good from the great. She has since dedicated her life to teaching skills to help people thrive in their personal and professional lives.

Christy works for the Ready and Resilient (R2) Performance Center. R2 efforts integrate key Army programs that build resilience, enhance positive behaviors, and prevent negative behaviors. The Army has taken a proactive and holistic approach to strengthening its people by providing education, promoting engagement, and encouraging the building of protective factors. Protective factors, such as maintaining good health, pursuing social cohesion and having a sense of being a valued member of the Army team in a culture of trust, helps Soldiers and Family Members enhance resilience, optimize performance, and sustain personal and unit readiness.



**Jenna Weinstein**

Jenna grew up in Brooklyn, NY. She competed in soccer for 10 years. She chose to play rugby once she got to college and competed at the regional level-qualifying for national competition. Following an injury, she continued her education at Springfield College. She focused her studies on the psychology of injury and wrote her thesis, which was entitled, The Coping Mechanisms of Athletes With and Without Physical Disabilities. Jenna spent two years working with spinal cord injury patients in Boston. She began working with the U.S. Army in 2014 and has worked out of Fort Bliss, Fort Bragg, and Fort Stewart.

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**MAJ Jennifer Lee**

MAJ Jennifer Lee currently serves as the Chief of Nutrition Care Division in Winn Army Community Hospital. She is a registered dietitian nutritionist with a master's degree in health care administration. She has extensive experiences in food operations management, menu development, dietary counseling for various conditions to include sports nutrition, diabetes, weight management, oncology nutrition, etc. MAJ Lee is a member of the Association for Healthcare Foodservice, Academy of the Nutrition and Dietetics, and the Sports, Cardiovascular, and Wellness Nutrition practice group. Her previous assignments included Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, Bavaria Army Medical Department Activity in Germany, Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX, and deployment with 10th Combat Support Hospital in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.



**Alexia Beauregard**

Alexia Beauregard is a food allergy specialist and eating/feeding specialist dietitian based in the Savannah, Georgia area. She is a member of the Nutrition Care Division at Fort Stewart. As a faculty member of the Ellyn Satter Institute, Alexia works with children and adults to help them overcome fears of eating or feeding that may develop as a result of food allergies or intolerances. The goal of her work is to bring the joy back to eating. Alexia serves in a number of professional organizations including American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology, American Academy of Asthma Allergy & Immunology, International Network for Diet and Nutrition in Allergy, Council of Pediatric Nutrition Professionals, and is on the medical advisory board for The FPIES Foundation. When not working, you can find her on the beach or a sailboat with her husband, 3 children, and Boykin Spaniel.



**Greg Holloway**

Greg “Isa” Holloway is a native of Georgia. He was born in Augusta, grew up in Thomaston and graduated from the honors Program at UGA in 1988. For the next eight years he studied and worked in France, Germany and England. He then returned to the US to work in New York City for four years followed by another year in London. In 2002 he moved to Cape Town, South Africa. In 2004 he began work on his Masters Degree in Oriental Medicine in Santa Fe, New Mexico from one of the top schools in the country, Southwest Acupuncture College. He studied with Chinese and American Doctors of Oriental Medicine in both the classroom and in their clinics. Board certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine and licensed by the Composite State Board of Medical Examiners of Georgia. “I’m just an ordinary guy who is totally on fire about an extraordinary and powerful healing force. And that healing force is YOU on Acupuncture.”



**Carson Fortner**

Carson Fortner hopes to share his passion for the basics of Krav Maga and self-defense with all of us.

Carson was born in Savannah and raised in Sylvania and Statesboro. He has a Bachelor of Science in Natural and Cultural Resource Management at Georgia Southern University and a minor in Finance from GSU.

He started his training in 1994 under Charles Prescott in Sylvania, Georgia. In 2005 he received his first degree Black Belt in American Tang Soo Do under Master Instructor Clay Pierson at Statesboro Karate and Krav Maga. He earned his 4th degree in December of 2014 earning him the title of Master.

He has always had a passion for teaching children and enjoys watching them develop into amazing young people. It has always been Carson’s dream to have a martial arts school and to create a home for his own students.

Carson is very close to his family, which includes his wife, daughter and two sisters.



**MSG Joseph Bouchard**

MSG Joseph Bouchard currently acts as the 3rd Infantry Division Religious Affairs NCO. In his personal time, he acts as a program instructor at Pooler Karate for various Krav Maga levels of self-defense. He is happy to share his skills and knowledge so that people can feel confident and secure.

A native of Deerfield, New Hampshire,

Joe entered the US Army on 7 November 2000, attending One Station Unit Training at Fort Benning, GA. He entered as an infantryman and immediately following that, he attended the United States Army Airborne School and the 75th Ranger Regiments Ranger Indoctrination Program earning the right to wear the Ranger beret.

He has extensive training within the Army and various certifications in various levels of combat.

Joe and his wife Kelley reside in Savannah, GA.



**Tammy Meyer**

Tammy Meyer’s professional and volunteer work is dedicated to helping military spouses keep their identity, enjoy a thriving career and pursue their personal best in health & wellness. As a Certified Personal and Professional Coach from the Institute for Life Coach Training, and Certified Purpose Clarity Coach, Tammy works with groups and individuals to support their personal goals.

Tammy was a contributing Author to “Behind the Scenes: The Tales of Military Spouses Making a Difference” and has been featured as a contributor in Legacy Magazine Volume II. Tammy was a featured panelist on Milspo Project’s GROW series topic: Entrepreneurial Success in Serving Military Families Tammy led Milspo Project’s “Reflection” Virtual Workshop & Book Club featuring the book ‘Start Where You Are’ by Meera Lee Patel. In 2017, Tammy opened and closed the 2 day MilspoCon Military Spouse Conference for Milspo Project, was a guest speaker on the Empowerment Panel & facilitated the Renewal portion of the program on mindfulness, meditation, setting intentions and gratitude.

In 2014, Tammy was nominated and selected by her peers to receive the Armed Forces Insurance Navy Spouse of the Year Award. In 2013, Tammy was chosen as an Inc.500 Military Entrepreneur Special Delegate for the GrowCo (Grow your Company) conference.

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Tammy earned a BS in Organizational Leadership and a BA in Exercise Science from the University of Minnesota. She holds and maintains continuing education for several certifications: American College of Sports Medicine, Certified Exercise Physiologist National Academy of Sports Medicine, Certified Personal Trainer & Corrective Exercise Specialist YogaFit Instructor Certifications & International Sports Science Association, Certified Fitness Nutrition Specialist.

After 3 deployments, multiple separations and 5 adventurous moves in 11 years (including one international) Tammy currently resides in Norfolk, VA with her Navy Seabee and their toddler son. Connect with Tammy: Facebook Happy Life Healthy Life, Tammy Meyer; Instagram tammyshappyhealthylife

## Career



**Christy Black**

Christy Black, half of the blogging team behind the successful lifestyle blog, 11 Magnolia Lane, has been an Army spouse for 22 years. She, along with her blogging partner, Amy Boyle grew what started as a hobby into a full-time career.

Christy and Amy met as freshmen at James Madison University and they remain the closest of friends. Frequent family moves, a shared love of entertaining and a similar design aesthetic motivated them to start a lifestyle blog together in 2010. 11 Magnolia Lane, named for the historic home the Blacks lived in during their second assignment to Ft. Bragg, features home design and decorating, stylish celebrations and entertaining, organization, and easy DIY projects. Over the years, the blog has evolved into a very successful lifestyle brand with a monthly social media reach into the millions.

Christy's and Amy's homes have been featured in national magazines, books and countless websites. While Christy's background is in nursing and she holds a master's degree from Duke University, decorating has always been her true calling. Christy and husband Chris have two children—a son in college and a daughter in high school and two rescue pets. Dog and cat hair figure prominently in Christy's decor style and in her spare time she enjoys drinking coffee or wine (depending on the time of day), arranging her exceptionally large throw pillow collection, and making endless lists of what the movers broke or lost in the last move.



**D'Shawn Russell**

D'Shawn Russell, an Army spouse of 20 years, four moves and countless deployments is the founder and CEO of Southern Elegance Candle Company. What started as a hobby in her home kitchen and selling candles at local Farmers' Markets has, in the course of three years, become a fully operational business with her products now stocked in over 300 stores as well as in an on-line shop, [www.secan-dleco.com](http://www.secan-dleco.com).

"I really had no idea that people could start and run a business without formal training. I was lucky to partner with R. Riveter. They were looking for some items for their flagship store after their appearance on Shark Tank. I pitched my little company and they said yes." It was the start of something great.

Since that time, D'Shawn quit her conventional job and moved her business into a 4,000 square foot production space and has hired a staff to help handle the demand for her products. Her candles were recently featured in Military Spouse Magazine.



**Danette Hayes**

Danette Hayes serves as the Partnership Program Development Manager with CASY / MSCCN (Corporate America Supports You / Military Spouse Corporate Career Network). CASY/MSCCN provides job placement and career development opportunities for military spouses and dependents as well as our Challenge program youth. Prior to this, she was Co-Director of National Guard and Reserve Outreach with the Blue Star Families (BSF) organization. Mrs. Hayes had 20 years experience as a Human Resources Professional before leaving the civilian sector to advocate for military families.

Danette is the spouse of MG Richard J. Hayes, Jr., the 39th Adjutant General of the State of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. She has traveled throughout the State of Illinois engaging with Soldiers and Families in support of the Illinois Army National Guard. Danette advocates for suicide awareness, issues impacting our women veterans and other important matters facing Service Members and their Families.

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Danette Hayes serves as the Partnership Program Development Manager with CASY / MSCCN (Cor-Danette authored a book entitled “400 Days” which gives insight into her journey through military life. The book chronicles her experiences as a military spouse and speaks to the importance of family in a modern Service Member’s life.

She and MG Hayes have been married for 28 years and have three children and five grandchildren. She and her husband spend their free time at their forever home in Lake of the Ozarks where they enjoy fishing, swimming and boating.



**Temeka Franklin**

Temeka L. Franklin is the Education Services Specialist at the Hunter Army Airfield Education Center. She serves as the Site Manager, DANTES Test Control Officer and Contracting Officer Representative (COR) for the Hunter AAF Education Center.

Temeka received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Southern Mississippi (2001) and enlisted in the U.S. Army. Temeka served as a Flight Operations Specialist, while stationed in Fort Stewart, GA (2002-2004) and Illesheim, Germany (2004-2006). During her time in the Army, Temeka earned a Master of Human Relations from the University of Oklahoma (2006).

After the Army, Temeka continued to serve as a Department of the Army Civilian and Spouse. She worked in Ansbach, Germany with Army Community Services and joined the Army Continuing Education Systems (ACES) team in 2009, as a Guidance Counselor in Vilseck, Germany. Temeka has worked as a Guidance Counselor at the Fort Gordon Education Center, an Education Services Specialist (ESS) for the Fort Gordon and Fort Stewart Soldier and Family Assistance Centers (SFAC); Education Services Specialist (ESS) and Education Services Office (ESO) in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Temeka also has a Master in Human Resource Management from Webster University (2016) and a Master of Art in Human Services Counseling – Crisis Response & Trauma from Liberty University (2016). She enjoys spending her free time with her six year old daughter, Mikayla.



**Sue Faust**

Sue Faust is the Human Resources Officer for Nonappropriated Funds (NAF) at the Civilian Human Resources Agency (CHRA) Fort Stewart. Ms. Faust directs the NAF management program which provides a full range of personnel services for managers and employees. She performs extensive technical and specialized work in the areas of staffing, pay administration and classification, training, labor-management relations, management-employee relations, awards, benefits, and regulatory compliance. Ms. Faust began her career with Army NAF in January 1980 as a Child & Youth Program/Administrative Assistant for Child & Youth Services at Fort Leavenworth, KS.

In November 1986, she transitioned to the Civilian Personnel Office to begin a profession in Human Resources, which she quickly discovered she loves! Ms. Faust transferred to Fort Stewart after being promoted to her current position as Human Resources Officer in December 2001.

Growing up in a military family as well as working 30++ years for the Federal Government, Ms. Faust understands the many challenges and difficulties of military life. She takes great pride in helping people with their employment endeavors. Ms. Faust truly believes the spirit of HR professionals is always about improvement and how to make things better whether we’re talking about recruiting talent, training, benefits, or making HR processes more efficient. We are always looking at raising the bar and taking people or processes to the next level.



**Alexandria Brown**

Alexandria Brown is currently assigned to the Fort Stewart Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) as a Human Resources Assistant. Since she started in July of 2017, her primary focus has been the recruitment and on-boarding of new civilian employees on Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield. This is her second assignment with the Department of Army in Federal Human Resources. She was previously assigned overseas at the Grafenwoehr CPAC in Germany. Mrs. Brown is a veteran military spouse with 10 years and 4 duty stations under her belt. Throughout her tenure as a military spouse she has had a variety of mini careers, driven by her spouse's military service. Mrs. Brown now has a career that is as portable as her active duty spouse's. This all came to fruition by a variety of factors; 1) The military spouse hiring eligibility, 2) skills and knowledge gained during all mini career experiences, 3) a whole bunch of persistence. The mobility of her new career has proved to soften the impact of PCS's significantly, and has eased the burden of restarting in all facets professionally.

Mrs. Brown graduated in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a minor in psychology from Salisbury University. When not at work Mrs. Brown likes to spend time with her family to include her rescue pup Dominio.



**Heather Jester**

Heather Jester is a Senior Human Resources Specialist at the Fort Stewart Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC). She is from Huntington, WV originally but has lived all over. She enlisted in the Army in 1994 and became a Correction Specialist for military prisons. She was stationed at Fort Carson, CO where she met her husband. She was supposed to be his sponsor to the installation, but ended up working instead. As fate would have it, they would still end up meeting. They were married in 1996.

She ETS'd from the military in 1997 to take care of her family, and became a military spouse for 20 years. During those years, she had several jobs, but wanted more so she decided to enroll in college in 2001. It took a bit due to moves and other obligations but she graduated in 2006 - becoming the first woman in her family to obtain a college degree.

When she was a young military spouse, she never felt she had a career. She had jobs - jobs she would give up every time they moved. She started working with AAFES in Italy as a store clerk in 1998 and moved to NAF in Child Services as a Recreation Aid not long after. She worked in a state employment office for about a year and half in MO. They moved to Hawaii and she was able to get back into NAF, but this time in the personnel office as a Human Resources Assistant. It was time to move again, so she found herself accepting a military human resources position in an S1 at Fort Leonard Wood in 2006 - a job she obtained through the Priority Placement Program as a military spouse. She moved to a personnel security position in the G2 office, then back to civilian personnel but on the GS side. She has been able to stay within civilian personnel and grow within the field, re-starting as Human Resources Assistant in 2008, to moving to a developmental Human Resources Specialist in 2010, reaching her full performance grade in 2012. She moved back to NAF Human Resources in 2015 as a Lead Human Resources Specialist, and has since become a Senior Human Resources Specialist at the Fort Stewart CPAC in 2017.