

[STORIES](#) / [PROFILES](#)

Meet TFX, a VC Firm Looking to Bolster Ex-Military Founders

[✉ Email](#)[f Facebook](#)[in LinkedIn](#)[t Twitter](#)

Brandon Shelton presents at the Charlotte Veteran Startup Showcase. Photo Courtesy Dualboot Partners.

By Courtney Gabrielson

October 07, 2019, 03:41pm EDT

"If you know anything about me, I'm pretty focus-driven," Brandon Shelton tells me over the phone. We're discussing the impetus of the Charlotte Veteran Startup Showcase, and the entity that helped power it: [Task Force X Capital](#), of which he is the founder and managing partner.

The goal was a 20-minute conversation, but the subject is so nuanced and Shelton is so passionate that he kindly lets me ask additional questions until we're well past the interview's allotted time.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It's Shelton's self-avowed focus that began the journey that resulted in TFX — and eventually, the showcase itself.

"For me personally, I started working on this concept in the spring of 2015," he says. "I was not searching to get into venture capital ... not at all."

For context: Shelton had spent 8 years in the U.S. Army before earning his MBA at Duke University. Afterwards, he spent nearly a decade in the corporate world. But all that was secondary to his family.

"I'm a father of three, and I take that pretty seriously," he says.

Fast-forward to 2015, where Shelton, who describes himself as having a "track record of reinventing myself," decided that he wanted his focus his professional work on the small business community in Charlotte. He was hungry to give back.

After extensive networking, consulting and phone conversations (and briefly considering a jump into the angel investment pool), Shelton realized that the community's needs, his mission and abilities would best be served by a new venture capital firm.

"We bet on the jockey, not the strse; it's not what you did, but how you did it."

"In June of 2015, I had [developed] a one pager ... so off we went," he continues.

It wasn't as easy as all that, of course; Shelton had to learn even more about the ecosystem, requisite legal jargon and more in order to get the organization off the ground.

The result was, of course, TFX, an industry-agnostic venture capital firm that focuses on B2B companies in a pre-Series A and Series A stage. Companies must have a product and paying customers, proven domain experience and an "accomplished former military leader" on the team.

In short: "Our purpose is to accelerate the success of accomplished former military founders in order to deliver investor returns, develop leaders and grow a value-added network," its website states.

It's this focus on military service that sets TFX apart, Shelton explains, adding that the fund is currently the only one of its kind in the country.

"You're not born a military vet, you're built. The very fact that we focus on an experience-based founder is really important," he says. "We bet on the jockey, not the horse; it's not what you did, but how you did it."

It's this experience that creates an exceptional entrepreneur.

"I trained for one year to lead one platoon of 40 people [in the military]," he continues. "This is the environment that you are learning a professional trade ... [and it's] the exact opposite in most corporate settings. I may be 40-45 before I finally earned the right to manage other people."

Not so with service people.

"With that skillset inside of a founding team, we can increase our probability of success," Shelton adds.

And it's entrepreneurs with remarkable focus of mission that intrigue TFX.

"We only really want to partner with purpose-driven people who believe they were put on this earth to solve this problem ... and are relentless in that pursuit."

So far, Shelton and TFX have seven active companies from across the Southeast in their portfolio. They are doing everything from working to fix the student loan crisis to developing software that better protects businesses.

Shelton emphasizes how the work TFX does with those in its portfolio goes beyond "investing and waiting."

"We're constantly trying to help them and support them," he says.

And that's where the showcase comes in.

"All right, I'm going to run my own event."

Much like TFX, the Charlotte Veteran Startup Showcase was the result of "reacting to learning." Meaning: Shelton discovered, after various travels to networking and pitch events across the country, that the pitches and panel events were ... lacking. Speakers didn't always have the depth of insight the topic required; prize money for participating startups was inadequate; and overall, he found that the precious time required to attend some events was not worth the return.

Shelton began to consider the alternative.

"[Attendees] would come to an event if it was curated, and the audience was handpicked, and the prize money was significant and the judges and speakers were highly qualified ... " he thought.

The potential was so intriguing that Shelton just said, "All right, I'm going to run my own event."

And he was going to do it in Charlotte, the city for which Shelton is a self-avowed mega-fan.

"I am convinced, without a shadow of a doubt, how unbelievable this city is," he tells me.

The showcase would not only bolster up-and-coming startups, but also highlight the Queen City, which he called "the heartbeat of innovation" during the event itself (he wasn't wrong; this year, attendees flew in from New York, Texas and Tennessee).

And it's the Charlotte community in large part that Shelton says made the event such a success.

"While our name is on it, what you're really seeing is an expression of really great people who got involved. ... We're very thankful to our sponsors, not only giving cash, but discounted services. To pull off an event like that, we need our sponsors, we need a world class sponsor like Barings (Brian Pope especially) ... a connected group of people come together, and it's a singular outcome."

The result is even more impressive when you consider the size of the TFX team. There's Shelton, of course, as well as Kevin Eckert (partner; U.S. Marine Corps) and Abbey Johnson (director of operations) — the latter of whom Shelton says developed a host of new skills to make the event such a success.

"[The result] really is a collection of goodwill and focus on outcome; we're grateful and humble," Shelton adds.

"If you think you can help, lean in; don't assume you can't help."

While this year's showcase may be in the rearview, Shelton details how the team is already thinking about the year ahead — by reflecting on the past event and seeing what can be changed, tweaked or left as-is.

That's not all.

"We're investing in new companies pretty steadily over the next 18 months," he says.

Shelton adds that the work of TFX is bolstered by the community, too, and that anyone can impact the startups in its orbit.

"Look at our companies," he says. "If you think you can help, lean in; don't assume you can't help."

Disclosure: Charlotte Inno was a sponsor of the Charlotte Veteran Startup Showcase.

Keep Digging



How Charlotte startup aims to be game changer for CRE financing

Profiles



Skiptown CEO reflects on what's next for the pet-services startup

Profiles



Why this Miami-based fintech firm is growing its software team here

Profiles



How a local startup is using tech to disrupt commercial real estate

Profiles



Inside SkillPop's plan to revive in-person classes this summer

Profiles

SPONSORED CONTENT
by Brinkmann Constructors

[4 features senior living consumers look for p](#)

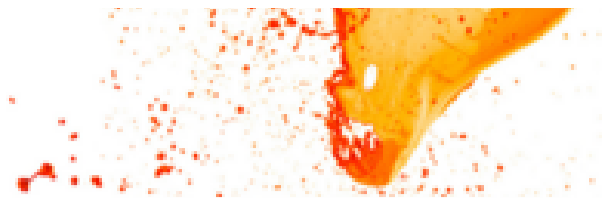
SPONSORED CONTENT
by Dualboot Partners

[Social challenge app from concept to launch](#)

Spotlight

[More](#)





Charlotte Inno's Fire Awards: Meet the 50 winners of 2021

[See More >](#)



Inno Under 25: Meet 10 young innovators making waves in Charlotte's tech, startup scene

[See More >](#)

Want to stay ahead of who & what is next? Sent weekly, the Beat is your definitive look at Charlotte's innovation economy, offering news, analysis & more on the people, companies & ideas driving your Charlotte forward. Follow the Beat

[Share the Beat](#)

[Sign Up](#)

Founding Partners



[Back to Top ▲](#)

CHARLOTTEINNO

© 2022 American City Business Journals. All rights reserved. Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement (updated as of 1/1/21) and Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement (updated as of 1/1/21). The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of American City Business Journals.