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A safe space for women: New organization on campus exclusively for women veterans

Keira Gilmore

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New RSO, the Women's Veterans Association, shares its mission of creating a safe space for women veterans with potential members on Wednesday at the Military and Veteran Success Center open house.

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The Women's Veterans Association introduced themselves to the UCF community on Wednesday at an open house and tabling event held by the Military and Veterans Success Center.

Although UCF has the Student Veterans Association on campus for all veterans, there has never been an organization exclusively for women.

Alexandria Marcellus, senior business management major, is the founder and president of WVA at UCF. Marcellus served seven years in the United States Army, and after living all over the world in South Korea, Texas, Kuwait and Germany, she transferred to UCF to continue her education.

“It means creating a safe space for women veterans, the space I was craving when I got out of the military,” Marcellus said.

Marcellus said she felt there was a need for a women's-only organization because after leaving the military, many women wanted to be around others they can relate to after leaving a male-dominated industry. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, in 2021, women only made up 17.3% of military personnel.

“When you're walking around campus and you see someone from WVA, it brightens up your day and that's the goal,” Marcellus said.

Marcellus said she wants women joining WVA to grow academically, professionally and personally together. Marcellus wants women veterans to feel that they have a place on campus surrounded by a support system of like-minded students.

“It's about creating unity within the community for women veterans,” Marcellus said.

Brianna Torres, junior elementary education major, is the vice president of WVA. After serving in the United States Navy, she came to UCF to pursue a bachelor's degree but was also looking for a safe space on campus when dealing with depression and PTSD. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, about 7% of all veterans will have PTSD at some point in their life.

“I did not feel motivated to do anything until I jumped into this organization,” Torres said.

Torres explains that being part of this group has helped her and others feel better about adjusting to life outside of the military and their new student life.

“We can experience new experiences and keep learning together,” Torres said.

Lydia Pandorf, junior business administration major, is the secretary of WVA. Pandorf said after coming across WVA in an email, she felt that she could finally meet people and network with like-minded women.

“It's good to know that I'm not behind and that there's people just like me doing the same thing and not to be too hard on myself with where I'm at,” Pandorf said.

Pandorf wants to be more involved in the community because she feels that she can finally make a name for herself here, all while surrounding herself with those like her.

“It's almost like a sorority but for women veterans,” Pandorf said.

At the open house, they wanted women and students alike to know that they are here on campus and are a safe space in the UCF community for women veterans.

Marcellus, Torres and Pandorf said that through networking, support systems and social events, WVA hopes to unite women and support each other in their lives outside the military.