



## NARROW THE VETERAN- CIVILIAN DIVIDE

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**W**ith the national climate so divisive, it is important that we build cohesion and respect among people from various cultures and backgrounds. I believe the best way to help create unity is for everyone to spend time in direct contact with individuals of cultural backgrounds different from their own.

I think Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas have to grow in this regard because some sections of this region are still very segregated. I truly believe that one of the steps to creating unity and cohesiveness in this region and the nation is people from different backgrounds working together on common goals and community service projects. Veterans have this type of experience through working with a diverse group of fellow service members on a mission.

I'm a member of The Mission Continues, an organization composed of veterans and civilians who do service projects in local communities. People from all ethnic and economic backgrounds participate in those projects. I believe it's important to have people work together on efforts that are meaningful, where they talk to each other, have everyone's viewpoints heard, and see that we all have vested interests in this region. The more projects we do together, the more we learn to notice our commonalities and appreciate our differences.

I think PAServes, along with several dozen other providers in the network, is building a sense of "we" by narrowing the veteran-civilian divide. We help local employers learn about military culture, how to reach veterans and how to make their work environments more comfortable and welcoming for veterans. We're re-educating employers to see veterans as assets to their organizations, to the community and to the region.

We're also helping civilians get rid of some stereotypes they may have, such as all veterans return home broken or have PTSD, which is not the case. As an African American woman and leader in the veteran community, I try to create welcoming environments where all veterans feel comfortable and to shatter stereotypes of some people who often think of veterans as white men only. There are many, and we thank them for their service. But there are also under-recognized groups of women and people of color who have sacrificed to defend this country.

— Interviewed by Carmen J. Lee