



SOLDIERSTRONG

# 2023 LIFE-CHANGING EFFORTS AND IMPACT

## STRONGTIMES

*A quarterly newsletter with life-changing impact.*

VOLUME VI, NO 2, 2023

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### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN/FOUNDER - CHRIS MEEK

Dear Patriots,

*"As we express our gratitude we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them."* So said President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Those are words that have echoed throughout American history, where a storied

tradition resides to give back to our nation's armed forces - not just in words but through action. SoldierStrong continues to build a lasting legacy based on the same foundation by providing veterans with revolutionary medical technologies that would have only existed in the imaginations of our forefathers.

Though the manners in which Americans give back have changed considerably over the centuries, the guiding impulse behind SoldierStrong's work remains unchanged: to anticipate and meet the needs of our nation's veterans.

Currently, the United States is tragically losing 17 veterans a day to suicide. Addressing the crisis of veteran suicide requires more than recognizing, acknowledging, and even

investing in prevention efforts. Solutions come through innovative approaches. Those innovative approaches are at the heart of what we do and can be seen in our initiatives such as Battle Buddy, the virtual human-led mobile mental health and wellness application that SoldierStrong recently received a \$1 million award for from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and the BraveMind virtual reality system, which SoldierStrong has deployed to six VA hospitals so far this year, bringing our total number of BraveMind donations to 30.

Despite the decreasing trend, veteran suicide still requires more innovations. Even one suicide per day is too many. SoldierStrong thanks all Americans for supporting our mission, enabling us to fulfill the obligation of caring for service men and women. We are pleased to present your support in action throughout these pages.

God bless,

Chris Meek



# SOLDIERSTRONG RECEIVES \$1 MILLION MISSION DAYBREAK AWARD

SoldierStrong, in partnership with the University of Southern California's Institute For Creative Technologies (USC-ICT), were recognized as one of ten winners of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' Mission Daybreak initiative. Mission Daybreak is a \$20 million grand challenge to reduce veteran suicide as part of VA's 10 year strategy to end veteran suicide through a comprehensive, public health approach. **As a second place winner, SoldierStrong and USC-ICT received a \$1 million award.**

Our partnership was awarded for our efforts to advance the use of technology to prevent suicide through Battle Buddy, a virtual human-led mobile mental health and wellness application. This interactive, embodied conversational agent leverages content related to the VA's Suicide Safety Planning program embedded within brief daily check-ins with veterans. The Virtual Human will also allow veterans to opt-in to connect their wearable sensors to the app, leveraging sleep, exercise, vocal analytics and other sensed signals to their overall well-being.

Upon launching the multiphase challenge in May 2022, VA received more than 1,300 concept submissions in Phase 1 from veterans, veteran service organizations, community-based organizations, health tech companies, startups and universities. Last year, SoldierStrong and USC-ICT were selected as one of 30 finalists before ultimately being awarded second place winners in February 2023 by a multidisciplinary judging panel, which represented a diversity of perspectives, from veterans and clinicians to social workers and technical experts.

SoldierStrong is incredibly honored to be recognized by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' Mission Daybreak initiative for our partnership in innovation with USC-ICT in the veteran's mental health space. We are eager to share more information about Battle Buddy with our supporters in the near future.



*Addressing the crisis of veterans taking their own lives requires more than recognizing, acknowledging, and even investing in prevention efforts. Solutions will come through innovative approaches that are only possible through relationships that share valuable information and capitalize on each partner's strengths. Effectively leveraging real-time data via easy-to-implement technology will significantly enhance individual wellbeing and aid efforts to reduce the overall number of suicides. Working with such an exceptional partner as the University of Southern California Institute of Creative Technologies to create a life-changing – and life-saving – breakthrough of this scope is one of the very reasons SoldierStrong was founded.*

- Chris Meek, SoldierStrong Founder and Chairman





# SOLDIERSTRONG RECOGNIZES ANNUAL SOLDIERSCHOLAR RECIPIENTS ★★★★★

Delivering on our commitment to help military veterans take a significant academic step forward, SoldierStrong is proud to recognize the recipients of our annual scholarship initiative, SoldierScholar. Since 2012, SoldierStrong has awarded more than \$500,000 in scholarships.

Though the post-9/11 GI Bill has helped thousands of veterans with their post-secondary education, there are still funding gaps that can become insurmountable obstacles toward the completion of a degree. SoldierStrong is committed to helping to fill those gaps because we recognize that higher education is one of the most powerful tools to help veterans make a smooth transition to civilian life.

When Americans ask themselves who they want to be the leaders of tomorrow, they will surely think of individuals like our SoldierScholar recipients - whose contributions to our society within the civilian sector will no doubt parallel their contributions to our nation during their service. Congratulations to the following SoldierScholar recipients:



## **JACK MORGAN, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY - EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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Jack Morgan is a United State Marine Corps Officer who concurrently serves as a Scout Sniper Platoon Commander and Company Executive Officer, where he leads infantryman and intelligence analysts. He served on Active Duty from May 2018 to May 2022 and has since served in the Reserves. Officer Morgan received a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Le Moyne College in 2018 and is currently pursuing an Executive Masters in International Relations from Syracuse University with an expected graduation date in May 2023.



## **CLIFTON WASHINGTON, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY - MASTERS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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Driven by a desire to become a part of something bigger than himself, Clifton Washington joined the United States Army and as an infantryman spent his military enlistment in Jordan where he trained the Jordanian Armed Forces. Understanding the value of education even before becoming a first-generation college graduate, Mr. Washington completed his undergraduate degree in economics from Robert Morris University while still in the military. He is currently pursuing a Masters in International Relations and Public Administration and appreciates Syracuse University for its support of veterans and the close-knit veteran community it provides.



## **JOANNA NEWCOME, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY - MASTER OF SCIENCE IN FOREIGN SERVICE**

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Joanna Newcome entered Georgetown University's Master of Science in Foreign Service program with a desire to advance her Turkish language skills. She began studying the language as an undergraduate and then further developed her speaking abilities during a summer semester abroad in Turkey. After serving in the U.S. Navy and then subsequently working in Russian military analysis as a civilian at the Department of Defense, Joanna believes that a concentration in global politics and security will become a critical skill set that will serve her well in the future.



## SOLDIERSTRONG WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER ALLISON STACK

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SoldierStrong is proud to welcome Allison L.M. Stack to the Board of Directors! Alli Stack, principal Stack Law & Mediation, PLLC, is an innovative problem-solver and strategic advisor with extensive Fortune 55 company level finance, human resources, legal, marketing, operational and project/program management experience. With a passion for community service, she has served on a number of nonprofit boards and has a proven track record of driving meaningful results through novel solutions. Alli holds degrees from the University of Kentucky (BA), the University of San Diego School of Law (JD), and Indiana University, Southeast (MBA), and certifications in Mediation (NCRC) and Lean Six Sigma (black belt), and is honored to be both a Kentucky Colonel and an active member of DAR. She lives just outside of Louisville, KY on a “mini farm” with her husband and two children. She enjoys reading, painting, and puzzles in her free time.



## SOLDIERSTRONG WELCOMES MIKE PREMI AS CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER

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Mike Premi joins SoldierStrong as Chief Technology Officer after a successful career at Intel Corporation where he led software innovation programs spanning Internet Security, Education, Medicine, User Experiences, and Artificial Intelligence. Mike's passion has been developing new technology solutions that improve peoples' lives. His most rewarding projects were leading a portfolio of Virtual Reality projects including: building simulators for medical training and surgery, driver training, disaster preparedness, clinical trials for pain management, and working with Dr. Albert “Skip” Rizzo on Project Bravemind. Prior to Intel, Mike was a U.S. Naval Officer, deploying to the Persian Gulf and Central America on USS Crommelin, a guided missile frigate. Ashore, Mike served at the Tactical Advanced Computer (TAC) Office, and was awarded the GSA “Hammer” Award by the US Vice President for saving the government \$6M+ for innovating IT Procurements for the Department of Defense. As a Veteran of Foreign Wars Legacy Life Member, Mike has led volunteer projects to help US Veterans and their families, earning the Intel Involved Global Hero award. Upon his retirement in April 2023, he is transitioning to Non-Profit leadership as an Intel Encore Fellow.



## SOLDIERSTRONG DONATES SIX BRAVEMIND SYSTEMS

Six medical facilities are the country's latest under the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' umbrella to partner with SoldierStrong to provide the revolutionary virtual reality therapy system known as BraveMind to aid in treating veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress.

The virtual reality technology behind BraveMind was developed by Dr. Albert "Skip" Rizzo and his team at the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies. The technology creates 14 "worlds" of combat scenarios, from a desert roadway to a crowded Iraqi marketplace or a slum in an Afghan city. Therapists select a world based on a veteran's traumatic experience and customize it in the virtual reality headset, thus placing veterans back within the midst of that memory at a pace they can handle. The six donations so far in 2023 bring SoldierStrong's total donations of BraveMind to 30.

### These facilities include:

- Kansas City VA Medical Center (Kansas City, MO)
- Ernest Childers Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic (Tulsa, OK)
- Clement J. Zablocki Veterans' Administration Medical Center (Milwaukee, WI)
- Providence VA Medical Center (Providence, RI)
- Edward P. Boland Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (Leeds, MA)
- Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center (Long Beach, CA)

## SOLDIERSTRONG DONATES A SOLDIERSUIT TO AUGUSTA VA



SoldierStrong donated an Ekso Indego robotic exoskeleton, also known as a "SoldierSuit," to the Charlie Norwood Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Augusta, GA in April to help paralyzed and injured veterans stand and walk again. This donation re-establishes SoldierStrong's partnership with Ekso Bionics and is the the 30th robotic exoskeleton that SoldierStrong has donated to a Veteran Affairs medical center in the last ten years of operations.

*We are honored to be joining forces with Ekso Bionics to provide revolutionary technologies and innovative advancements to improve the lives of veterans and their families at no cost. The Ekso Indego Therapy will bring much needed rehabilitation support to our valued veterans within their homes enabling them to achieve mobility freedom that they deserve.*

- Chris Meek, SoldierStrong Founder and Chairman





## SOLDIERSTRONG PRESENTS COMMITMENT TO SERVICE AWARD TO MIKE AND SUSAN MCKAY

Each year, SoldierStrong presents the Commitment to Service Award to an individual or individuals who have demonstrated exemplary and inspirational leadership and provided material support to our mission to help service members and veterans. It is our honor and pleasure as an organization to announce that Mike and Susan McKay have been selected as the recipients of SoldierStrong's 2022 Commitment to Service Award.

We consider a number of factors and attributes in the selection of honorees, including their commitment to uplifting medical advancements that better the lives of those who have been injured while serving in defense of our freedom. We also consider how their contributions encourage leaders from across the country to keep our veterans and servicemembers at the top of mind, both in policy and daily life. Through Mike and Susan McKay's selfless support – and that of like-minded individuals – SoldierStrong is able to fulfill its mission to provide revolutionary medical technologies to as many VA facilities in as many states as possible. Their contributions to our efforts inspire others to also support organizations that benefit veterans and veterans issues.



We remain in awe of patriots like the McKays who demonstrate reverence to our nation's heroes through continued and conscious acts of kindness. On behalf of the men and women we serve, our staff and volunteers, SoldierStrong extends our heartfelt gratitude to Mike and Susan McKay for their continued commitment to uplift our efforts.

## COMING UP! SOLDIERSTRONG AMBASSADORS TO COMPETE IN PALMETTO GAMES

A group of SoldierStrong ambassadors are set to compete in an exhibition exoskeleton race at Clemson University's Palmetto Games on April 29. The exhibition race, organized by the nonprofit I Got Legs with a mission to re-enable the paralysis community to walk again, is part of an effort led by organization founder Adam Gorlitsky to have exoskeleton races recognized as an official sport in future Paralympic games.

Members of "Team SoldierStrong," including Bryce Cherryholmes of Stella, NC; Niki Countryman of Fairbanks, AK; Laura Cowen of Union Springs, NY; and Johnnie Williams of Oklahoma City, OK, will compete both in-person and virtually. SoldierStrong, along with the ambassadors, will document their participation on our social media channels in an effort to raise funds to go towards a future exoskeleton donation. Those interested in supporting Team SoldierStrong can give to our efforts here:

<https://givebutter.com/virtual5k/soldierstrong>



## CREATE A LEGACY FOR SOLDIERSTRONG

### FREEWILL

Are you looking for a way to create a legacy to honor those who fought and defended our freedoms? SoldierStrong is excited to share a secure online tool to help you support our efforts to provide revolutionary medical technologies to better the lives of veterans through a stock donation. [Learn more](#) about how your stock can benefit our work and your savings!



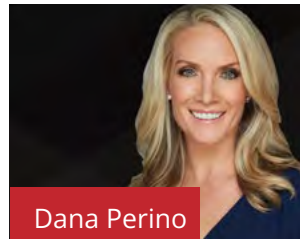
Scan to visit site



## NEXT STEPS FORWARD WITH CHRIS MEEK

Join SoldierStrong co-founder and chairman Chris Meek for his weekly podcast every Tuesday at 1 PM ET/10 AM PT for an uplifting hour focused on personal empowerment, commitment to overall wellbeing and motivation to achieve more than you ever thought possible.

In 2020, Chris began hosting Next Steps Forward with Chris Meek via the VoiceAmerica Talk Radio Network, the industry's leading producer and online broadcaster of on-demand talk radio programming. Next Steps Forward hosts leaders from the worlds of business, sports, entertainment, medicine and politics to engage thought-provoking discussion to help us all take the next steps forward in our journey to better ourselves.



Join us every Tuesday at 1 PM ET  
Learn More at [NextStepsForward.com](https://NextStepsForward.com)



Scan to visit site





# SOLDIERSTRONG PARTNERS

## 2023 PATRIOTS PROGRAM

Join the 2023 Patriots Program by donating \$20 per month to support SoldierStrong's mission to reduce the number of veteran suicides and provide PTS treatment options. As a thank you, you'll receive a unique gift.

Join us now by [clicking on this link](#) or scanning the QR code to make a difference.



Support SoldierStrong's Efforts to Provide BraveMind Virtual Reality Systems to Veterans Affairs Facilities Throughout the Country Through Our

## 2023 PATRIOTS PROGRAM

Only \$20 per month



## SOLDIER PARTNERS

As our mission evolves to meet the ever-changing needs of the community we serve, we recognize that we could not fully accomplish our mission without the help of our current partners below:



## BECOME A PARTNER OR CORPORATE SPONSOR

In the past ten years, we have accomplished so much thanks to the support of our partners, corporate sponsors, and thousands of Americans that believe our veterans deserve the best medical care there is to offer. SoldierStrong is committed to providing America's heroes with the technology and therapy they desperately need and deserve. We are actively seeking new partnerships and would love to speak with you about partnership opportunities!

[Learn More: SoldierStrong.org](#) | [Call: 888.898.3235](tel:888.898.3235) | [Email: info@soldierstrong.org](mailto:info@soldierstrong.org)

