



Donnell Johns Sr.
Founder and CEO
Veterans Growing America



Founded by Donnell E. Johns Sr., a retired Command Sergeant Major of the U.S. Army, Veterans Growing America (VGA) stands as a beacon of support and empowerment for military-connected small business owners. With a clear mission to bridge the gap between military service and entrepreneurial success, VGA has developed a comprehensive platform that supports over 3,179 military entrepreneurs since its inception in 2019.

At the heart of VGA's efforts is a vision to grow relationships and opportunities globally for veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs. "Veterans Growing America provides a forum for veterans and military spouses to showcase and grow their businesses," explains Donnell. The organization partners with local, state, and federal veteran organizations to increase brand awareness and conducts local events and marketing programs aimed at enhancing engagement within the veteran business community.

Since its foundation, VGA has made significant strides in fostering a supportive network for veterans transitioning into the business world. "We have conducted 500+ Veteran Pop-up Events, 11 Veteran Business Expos with AAFES (Army and Air Force Exchange Service), 35 Business Workshops, and 30 Veteran Connects networking events," Donnell shares. These events serve not only as platforms for learning and growth but also as opportunities for veterans to connect and collaborate, strengthening the community fabric.

Looking ahead to 2024, VGA is expanding its reach and impact with a dual focus on attracting retail vendors and bolstering support for military-connected business owners. "Our goal is to enhance our support infrastructure, making it even more robust and accessible to veteran entrepreneurs everywhere," Donnell explains. A cornerstone of this effort is VGA's signature event, the "Veteran Pop-Up Market," which acts as a dynamic incubator for these entrepreneurs. This innovative platform not only provides veterans and their families with the

opportunity to launch and grow their businesses but also offers a nurturing environment to showcase their products and services. Through this market, entrepreneurs gain vital exposure, while benefiting from networking, mentorship, and skill development, thus accelerating their journey from concept to successful enterprise and enabling them to thrive in the competitive marketplace.

One aspect of VGA that sets it apart is its understanding of the unique challenges faced by veterans transitioning to civilian business environments. The shift from a highly structured military life to the dynamic world of entrepreneurship requires not only a change in skills but also a significant shift in mindset. VGA addresses this by offering tailored workshops and networking events that are specifically designed to ease this transition.

Donnell E. Johns Sr. invites other organizations and individuals to join VGA in its mission to support veteran-owned businesses. "Our approach is hands-on. We provide the resources, support, and community necessary for success," he emphasizes. By participating, stakeholders can help fulfill a dual purpose: supporting veterans in their entrepreneurial journeys and receiving quality products and services.

Reflecting on the philosophy that drives his work, Donnell quotes Bob Proctor: "Thoughts become things." He elaborates, "I focus on maintaining a positive mindset, ensuring that I and those around me envision success and work towards it actively."

Veterans Growing America not only supports veterans as they transition but also honors their service by providing them with opportunities to succeed in the civilian world. Through continued growth and collaboration, VGA aims to leave a lasting impact on the veteran community and the broader economic landscape.