

LANDGUTH: Bunker Labs aims to make veterans into entrepreneurs

Scott Landguth Executive Director, South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority

The South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority and Ascent Innovation recently partnered with Bunker Labs — a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and national network of veteran entrepreneurs dedicated to helping new veteran entrepreneurs start their own businesses.

Bunker Labs is committed to seeing that every entrepreneur in the veteran community has the network, tools, and resources they need to start their own business. 25% of transitioning service members want to start a business and they need places inside their community where they can connect with the people, resources, and support they need to start and grow their businesses. All three entities have distinct objectives; however, they singularly represent our high respect for and community support of veterans and families.

For example, Bunker Labs consists of six nationwide regions, 26 chapters and a “boots on the ground” presence in 26 states. Their singular mandate is to help veterans and spouses pursue business dreams and to Inspire, Equip and Connect.

The Rapid City Chapter (#25) kicked off in October with two distinct receptions involving community officials, business leaders and a wide variety of veterans. As for attendance, the turnout was excellent with over 60 veterans and spouses; civic leaders; elected officials; council members; and business leaders attending, including Governor Noem’s Office; Senator Thune’s Office, Senator Round’s Office, Congressman Johnson’s Office; and senior veteran leaders (statewide and local). Rapid City will officially launch our Chapter in February 2020.

Ascent Innovation in Rapid City fosters the entrepreneurial ecosystem to ensure startups and small businesses succeed. A major groundbreaking for a new Ascent office complex took place on Oct. 9.

Yet, to make this happen, we’ll require leadership and teamwork. To that end, we are very fortunate to have three servant leaders who have all signed up for two-year commitments to serve as local Bunker Lab city Leaders. They are Mitch Nachtigall, John Schneider and Dave Kneafsey.

Mitch is a Client Manager at Ascent Innovation. He is a 20-year veteran and active member of the South Dakota National Guard. His military career has included overseas duty in Suriname, where he was responsible for diplomatic foreign military relations.

John is the founder and owner of Dakota Optics and Dakota Gun Cleaners. He is a retired Chief Warrant Officer Four, master helicopter pilot and served in the U.S. Army and the South Dakota Army National Guard.

Dave serves as the Operations Manager for the Ellsworth Development Authority. Dave is a retired disabled veteran with over 24 years of active duty service as an Intelligence Officer, Master Parachutist and Joint Specialty Officer.

So, we have a vision, and three aligned organizations. These three key organizations will collectively foster, partner and enable economic opportunity, job creation and business ventures in the Rapid City region.