

CNIC Recognizes National Disability Employment Awareness Month

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WASHINGTON – Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) hosted a small ceremony to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness month this week at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. in the command headquarters building atrium.

Approximately 100 staff members attended the event hosted by Lt. Karla Fuentes, CNIC's, Port Operations Officer. Fuentes announced the theme for the month's event: "expect, employ and empower" and introduced Vice Adm. Dixon Smith, Commander, Navy Installations Command, CNIC's newest commander, who remarked on the importance of diversity and inclusion in the work force.



Vice Adm. Dixon Smith, Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) addresses the audience at the National Disability Employee Awareness Month event held at CNIC headquarters Oct. 28 at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington D.C. (U.S Navy photo by Ed Wright/Released)

"Diversity is important because it makes us better and the more we take in all those varying perspectives and skill sets, collectively, we become a better society," said Smith.

Smith said that it is not only the right thing to do but that it is essential to the success of the organization. "We have a responsibility to be inclusive," said Smith. "We have to do it for our survival as a country, as CNIC and as an employer."

Smith added that, after ten years of war, the wounded warriors are coming home. He said they bring a skill set to the workforce and employers need to make concession for disabled employees.

"You can address those kinds of things to make sure that they can be the most productive employee or citizen," said Smith. "They are capable and contribute because they add value," Smith added.

Keynote speaker for the event was Mr. Billy W. Wright, the nation program manager for the Disabled Veteran Affirmative Action Program. Wright served in the United States Marine Corps and deployed twice to Beirut, Lebanon. He is the recipient of the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities "Evie Cutler Public Service Award."

Wright focused his remarks about his own personal struggle with his disability and emphasized the value of people.

"I expect that everyone is part of daily operations and you want to empower those who want to be part of a team," said Wright. "It comes down to leadership ... and people matter."

Wright explained that he comes to work for two very important words – 'thank you.'

"I come to work every day and hear the people I work with, the families and the veterans that we serve say 'thank you'," said Wright "It is all about showing genuine concern and I think we all want to be valued, accepted, understood, loved and trusted."

Wright shared his story about a car accident in 1986 that left him paralyzed from the waist down and how he found closure from taking a different perspective about the accident which changed his life. He found peace within himself and knew the accident was not intentional and could have happened to anyone at any time.

"It's been twenty years and I saw him (the driver from the accident) only once after the accident and never heard from him again," said Wright. "But, I've forgiven him because I know that you don't decide to go out and get one of your best friends paralyzed in a car accident."

Wright struggled with reaching out but eventually took the steps and made contact with him.

"Something came over me that I had never felt before," said Wright. "I felt like the weight was off my shoulders and then I realized that call wasn't for him, it was for me."

Wright summed up his remarks when he reiterated the importance of giving respect to get respect and the value of leadership to those above and below in the chain of command.

"The way that I led my life and the way that I supported my fellow employees was confirmation to not be afraid to help someone," said Wright. "It's all about serving; that's leadership."

Before the end of the ceremony, Joseph Ludovici, deputy commander for CNIC shared with the audience a story he had read recently in the news about disabled persons becoming distance runners and accomplishing goals that seemed out of reach.

"If we can have events with sight disabled people running marathons," said Ludovici, "we ought to have people with a variety of disabilities in our workforce doing the same thing that you and I do day in and day out."

Ludovici closed with the sentiment about the value of embracing disabled employees in the work force.

"There is nothing that a person with a disability can't do in our workforce," said Ludovici. "We need to acknowledge that."

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