

STAFFING Success

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At a time of personal lows, Iraq War veteran Ben Keen made a critical decision. He partnered with a staffing firm, put his skills to work, and found his stride. Now he's a champion for veterans, an engaged father, and 2016 National Staffing Employee of the Year.

THE STAFFING EFFECT

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STAFFING
Success



American Staffing Association

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In 2010, Iraq War veteran Ben Keen was faced with a life-changing decision: Get help, find work, and live the life he wanted—or continue a downward spiral of emotional turmoil and dependency. Today it's abundantly clear that he made all the right choices, including engaging with a staffing company.

THE STAFFING EFFECT

By Michelle Snyder

When asked to describe Ben Keen, staffing industry executive Susie Dietrich, SPHR, answers quickly: “Ben is the real deal.” It’s a simple response, but an exceptionally accurate one. Keen is the 2016 National Staffing Employee of the Year—an honor he was thrilled to receive. It is, after all, a well-deserved culmination of hard work, dedication, and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. >>>

Photos by Leslie & Eric Photography

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a grey cable-knit jacket over a blue and white plaid shirt, blue jeans, and brown leather shoes, stands smiling in front of a veterans memorial. The memorial consists of several tall, dark grey, rectangular panels. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a brick wall.

Keen visits a veterans memorial in Pittsburgh, where he lives and works as a contract employee for TEKsystems.



Keen worked as a contract employee with Dietrich's firm, e-Staff Consulting Group, in Pittsburgh, PA, in 2013. Today Keen is a valued contract employee of TEKsystems, another staffing firm, headquartered in Hanover, MD, and he's currently on assignment as a technical operations analyst with PNC Bank. Jason Lis, director of branch operations for TEKsystems in Pittsburgh, says Keen has been a valuable addition to the company. Keen receives numerous accolades from the client and provides outstanding leadership to his on-site team—composed of both contract and permanent staff. The bank recently chose to extend Keen's contract for another six months.

"We are only as good as the people we place," Lis says. "And our relationship with Ben has been a great success...The client trusts him. We trust him. He does excellent work."

STARING DOWN CIVILIAN LIFE

Keen is a proud veteran of the U.S. Army. For eight and a half years, he served as a communications expert, providing critical voice and data communications to support forward combat operations. Keen was among the boots on the ground

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during several deployments, including the historic 101st Airborne Division in Iraq. In 2003, his company endured enemy fire and he was injured. As he explains it, however, the physical wounds of war are much easier to heal than the emotional ones. Keen received an honorable discharge in 2008 and returned home to Pittsburgh unsure of his future.

As Keen describes it, "I was a young 27-year-old guy who was married with two children. I found myself in a city that I did not know, and without any sort of support outside of my then-wife and her family—since my parents lived five hours away. I

struggled at home with a failing marriage and two kids who knew to call me Dad, but still viewed me as this stranger in the house."

Keen struggled with debilitating post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as he continued to battle the demons of war after returning home. As a means to escape, he turned to alcohol. "When I came home, I thought the solution to my struggles would be to drink my problems away," he says. "For two years I was anything but employee of the year."

CHOOSING THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

In October 2010, Keen had an experience that changed his life. In his words: "My daughter Rebecca asked me to play with her. While I was physically there, my mind was at the bottom of another bottle of liquor. And when I saw the look of sadness on her face when I said I couldn't play, I received the biggest slap of reality across my face. I decided at that moment to turn things around."

Keen bravely took steps to get the help he needed to begin to address his demons and "talk to people about what was happening behind closed doors." He

Do You Know the Next National Staffing Employee of the Year?

The National Staffing Employee of the Year is an extraordinary temporary or contract employee who best exemplifies one or both of the industry's key messages of "bridge" and "flexibility," and who has a great staffing success story to tell.

Learn more about how to nominate one of your firm's employees at americanstaffing.net/awards.

sought assistance in finding work—because like so many veterans transitioning from military to civilian life, he struggled to understand the new corporate world of work.

For example, "I didn't understand the importance of having a résumé work for you rather than one that worked against you," Keen says. "I found I was not fully aware of the interview process and how to handle myself."

With help from local veterans groups, Keen learned how to put together a résumé that effectively translated his military experience into business terminology. He also learned valuable job-seeking

MEET THE 2016 NATIONAL STAFFING EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR ALL-STARS

For the first time this year, ASA announced National Staffing Employee of the Year All-Stars in five industry sectors—engineering, IT, and scientific; health care; industrial; office-clerical and administrative; and professional-managerial. These talented employees with great staffing success stories also will serve (alongside Keen) as industry ambassadors in 2016 and beyond.

Health Care Sector All-Star Damien Murdoch

After completing his commitment to the U.S. Marine Corps, Murdoch chose travel nursing as a career because he liked the work schedule flexibility and variety of experiences it offered. After completing each of his 13-week assignments with Parallon Workforce Solutions, he had the flexibility to pursue his other great passions in life—cycling and the great outdoors.

While the flexibility that staffing provides was the original lure to working in the industry, Murdoch recently bridged to a permanent position with Lawnwood Regional Medical Center and Heart Institute in Ft. Pierce, FL, and is currently completing his bachelor's degree.

Industrial Sector All-Star Brandon Shingles

After graduating from Morehead State University, Shingles played point guard for several European basketball teams. He is currently with Uni-Riesen Leipzig in Germany.

During the off-season for the past three years, Shingles has headed home to Lexington, KY, and has engaged with Integrity Staffing Solutions to land assignments in logistics and distribution. While he has been offered several permanent positions over the years, he prefers the staffing solution because the schedule flexibility allows him to pursue his passion for basketball, spend quality time with his daughter, and coach youth basketball. Shingles is an exemplary Integrity employee, and has been promoted from associate to coach—a mentorship role designed to offer leadership opportunities and help other associates be successful on the job.

Office-Clerical and Administrative Sector All-Star Jonathan Morales

A passionate Nintendo gaming fan, Morales was interested in a job as a Spanish bilingual consumer service representative, supporting the company's contact center in Redmond, WA. Unfortunately, that position wasn't available at his time of interview, so he was offered an English-only speaking role that paid less.

After consulting with Zoe Stamolis, the Nintendo program manager at Parker Staffing Services, Morales decided to accept the position due to the potential it offered. Later, when a permanent bilingual position became available, Morales applied and was hired as a team support adviser.

Morales is no longer a contract employee, but he says Parker Staffing will always be a part of his family. He and his wife named their daughter Zoe, in honor of the staffing manager who helped him ultimately land his dream job.

Professional-Managerial Sector All-Star Cynthia Nichols, Ph.D.

Nichols, a professor in the School of Media and Strategic Communications at Oklahoma State University, came to work for the international headquarters of Express Employment Professionals in Oklahoma City to fill in for a member of its communications and public relations team who was on maternity leave.

Nichols chooses to work with Express because of the flexibility staffing assignments offer. She is able to work during college breaks, and the supplemental income is helping her pay off her student loans. Staffing also offers Nichols valuable real-world experience to share with her students in the classroom. She is a strong supporter of the staffing industry, and encourages students to explore the staffing industry as a source for jobs or a career.

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skills. After working on various staffing firm assignments, he eventually connected with Dietrich's company, e-Staff, which quickly placed him on a contract. He proved to be an exemplary employee, and was offered a permanent role with a client. Keen, however, was looking for his best fit. Soon he engaged with TEKsystems, which placed him on his current contract with PNC Bank. Keen loves the work, the camaraderie with other employees, and the ability to also pursue what has become his life's passion—helping other veterans.

ADVOCATING FOR VETERANS

After making great strides to reclaim his life, Keen became determined to help others like him. In 2010, he founded Steel City Vets (steelcityvets.org)—a nonprofit organization that provides a variety of vital services to veterans who call the Pittsburgh metropolitan region home. He wanted to offer the lessons he learned when transitioning, as Keen describes, from “boots to suits.” He quickly became an outspoken veterans advocate, speaking before numerous organizations around the country about PTSD and other critical topics. Keen also is a regular commentator on veterans issues on his local CBS radio station, and his story has been featured in a number of national and local publications.

Keen takes advantage of every opportunity to speak with business and civic leaders to debunk negative myths about veterans in the workforce. His acceptance speech as the 2016 National Staffing Employee of the Year at Staffing World® was one such occasion. Keen offered two challenges to industry professionals. The first was to “think back to a point in your career when someone gave you that one chance to prove yourself—that one break that changed your career forever. Hold onto that idea and think, would I be here today if it wasn't for that one chance?” The second was to “change how you may view veterans. While I know that everyone here supports veterans, this image of a needy veteran has perpetuated for too long.”

Veterans are ready for the chance to prove themselves. They want a job, not a handout, Keen says. Veterans have so much to offer, and often they just need an opportunity to prove it.

EMBRACING THE STAFFING EFFECT

Keen credits the staffing industry with helping to change his life for the better. Staffing is a bridge to good jobs for veterans—to give them that chance they want and need. Staffing firms can also provide services, through organizations like Steel City Vets, to assist veterans as they transition from active duty to civilian life.

Several staffing firms in the Pittsburgh area, including TEKsystems, have partnered with Steel City Vets to offer programs on effective job-seeking techniques and employability skills. And in 2015, the American Staffing Association showed its support by contributing \$15,000 toward the launch of a new veterans transition program managed by Steel City Vets. The program will offer a variety of learning events, from writing effective résumés to dressing for success to interviewing. Through the program, Steel City Vets will also host small, industry-specific hiring fairs to connect veterans with interviews—or better yet, job offers.

TEKsystems is also honored to call Keen an employee—and celebrate him as an outstanding staffing employee. “TEKsystems is incredibly proud of Ben Keen and everything he has achieved—not only in his civilian career, but in the nonprofit he founded, Steel City Vets,” says Mike Powers, veterans and disabilities outreach program coordinator with TEKsystems and member of the Army National Guard.

Today, Keen has hit a remarkable stride. As a **staffing star**, **valued IT employee**, **veterans advocate**, and **dedicated father**, he values the flexibility his schedule provides.

“Ben has shown admirable grit, perseverance, and commitment to serving others. His dedication to supporting other veterans like himself is what's most impressive. Helping veterans transition to successful civilian careers is a goal we share at TEKsystems,” says Powers.

Keen already has linked several veterans to IT jobs through TEKsystems, according to Brian Jendesky, Keen's recruiter. Jendesky agrees that veterans are an excellent source of talent. In addition to

Rewarding Outstanding Staffing Talent

The next National Staffing Employee of the Year will receive national recognition as well as an awards package, including:

- All-expenses-paid deluxe travel and hotel accommodations for Staffing World® 2016, Oct. 25–27 in San Diego
- Cover story in *Staffing Success*, the flagship magazine of ASA
- News release coverage as well as coverage in the *Staffing Today* newsletter and other ASA media
- \$5,000 gift card
- Recognition during National Staffing Employee Week, Sept. 19–25, which celebrates the contributions of the more than three million temporary and contract employees on assignment each business day

Learn more and read about past National Staffing Employee of the Year honorees at americanstaffing.net/NSEY.

their experiences in the military, they “possess the intangibles—character, integrity, and courage,” says Jendesky, who has worked with Keen throughout his tenure with TEKsystems and serves as his day-to-day contact.

Today, Keen has hit a remarkable stride. As a staffing star, valued IT employee, veterans advocate, and dedicated father, he values the flexibility his schedule provides. He is an exemplary example of what veterans can bring to the workforce, as well as an inspiring look at the effect staffing can have on the lives of individuals throughout the country. Keen hopes his story inspires more companies in the staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions industry to work with veterans and organizations like Steel City Vets. He's proof that it can make a meaningful difference in the lives of so many, as well as benefit clients who need outstanding talent.

“It is truly humbling to have been selected as the 2016 American Staffing Association National Staffing Employee of the Year,” Keen says. “I am honored to join the growing list of amazing previous honorees...It is my desire that through this award other veterans may see that while the transition is not always easy, hard work and dedication can pay off in some amazing ways.” ■

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STAFFING STAR, VETERANS ADVOCATE, HOCKEY FAN

Here are some fun facts about National Staffing Employee of the Year Ben Keen—this year's ASA ambassador for staffing industry talent.

- Being a veteran is an amazing thing, Keen says, and so is being a father. He used his National Staffing Employee of the Year award money to take his children, Reilly and Rebecca, to Disney World.
- Keen is a huge hockey fan and always roots for the Pittsburgh Penguins. The team has been especially supportive of Steel City Vets. As part of a promotion for the veterans organization, Keen rode on the Zamboni during a recent game.
- When asked what he likes best about working in IT, Keen says, “I thrive on seeing red lights turn green. There is never a day that is exactly the same as the last, and it forces you to stay up-to-date on the ever-changing world of IT.”
- Keen's first job was a bagger at a grocery store when he was 16.
- Keen grew up in eastern Pennsylvania, and moved around quite a bit as a self-described “PK”—which stands for preacher's kid.
- In any spare time he finds, Keen enjoys photography and biking.