

# Flying high

## Business owner's Air Force experience helps her soar

By TOM GERMOND

Julie Daniels remembers being stationed in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War and hearing what she and her Air Force colleagues thought were enemy bombs exploding nearby.

As it turns out, the bombs were actually U.S. missiles. "Sirens go off. Everybody jumps into their chemical gear. Because we don't know. We are ripping stuff apart in the middle of the night," she said.

She had pajamas on under her chemical gear. "I had the mask on. It was crazy," said Daniels, who spent 21 years in the military, retiring as a captain in 2007.

"There was actually a Patriot launch site two miles from where we lived. What we thought was actually bombing us were the Patriots launching. And it literally sounded like somebody was shooting bombs at us," Daniels said.

She served overseas during the Gulf War for five months. That and other experiences in the military prepared her for challenges in her personal and professional life years later.

Joining the Air Force on the advice of a friend, she served in Germany before being stationed for 60 days at Hurlburt Field in Fort Walton Beach. Then she was deployed to a communication station as part of Operation Desert Storm. As can be expected, Daniels was nervous about her overseas assignment.

"I was definitely nervous because we didn't have anyone to lean on and say, 'What is war going to be like?' But when we got there, we had a much cleaner, faster war than what we participate in now."

A native of Buffalo, New York, Daniels beamed as she talks

**"Some guys think even that they took a job with a woman, they are going to come in and run the company ... But I spent 21 years in the military. I don't care what your sex is. If I'm in charge, I am in charge."**

**— Julie Daniels**

owner of Handymen for All

about her military experiences abroad, such as traveling extensively in Europe. She learned the value of camaraderie, especially "when you are truly depending on someone to help sustain life for you. ... It builds a bond that you can't get anywhere else."

The military also developed her organizational and leadership skills.

"Even if you are a low-ranking person, and there's other people doing or not doing what you do, you have to take on some leadership roles. I think that truly prepared me to become a

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Photo by TOM GERMOND

Julie Daniels, owner of Handymen for All, said her military service helped prepare her for business ownership.



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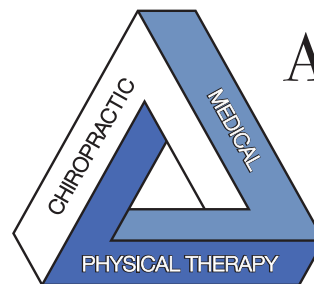
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also provides equipment specifically designed for use by kids with sensory disorders, such as suspended equipment with swings for balance and vestibular treatment; crash mats and crash pillows for fun, motor planning and strength; tunnels; a zipline; rock climbing; wall trampolines for building leg and core strength; an indoor play structure for climbing and increasing playground skills; sensory-based toys; motor play toys and equipment and a fine motor arts and crafts area with chalkboard.

Burrows said it was very important for her to create a space not only for kids, but for their parents as well.

"My biggest reason for doing this was to help parents find resources to help their child be the best they can be," Burrows said. "I want a place for parents to be able to sit and chat with other parents who may be going through the same thing they are."

Burrows also said she hopes her gym can help normalize the stigma often associated with children who deal with spectrum disorders.

"We understand and often tell our parents, 'You don't have to apologize for your child



The gym offers a variety of equipment and activities that are specifically designed for children dealing with spectrum disorders.

being who he is," she said.

She also hopes that the interaction between neurotypical children and spectrum disorder children will lead to a better understanding at a much younger age.

"Autistic children have so much to teach other kids," Burrows said. "I just want to give them the chance to do that."

We Rock the Spectrum Clearwater is an all-inclusive children's gym, open seven days a week, offering open play rates. To learn more about the gym, classes or to enroll your kids, call 240-1785.

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business owner," she said.

After returning to the states from Desert Storm, Daniels went into the reserves and continued her education. Daniels earned a bachelor's degree in computer information science and a master's degree in management from Troy University in Alabama.

She and her former husband didn't want to remain in Fort Walton Beach, and she set her sights on Atlanta. Hearing about a job in Clearwater through an Atlanta newspaper, she moved to Palm Harbor where she still lives.

Daniels worked as a computer software developer and then as a data base administrator. While working for Lockheed Martin, the company sent her to Operation Iraqi Freedom as a civilian, running databases.

Later, working for smaller companies, she felt she was at a maximum point in her career and could only advance so high without moving into management. After conducting research, she bought a franchise involving remodeling and repairs – but not before taking the general contractor's exam.

"That literally was the hardest exam I have taken in my life," she said. "I passed it my first time. I think God knew if I didn't pass it that first time, I was never going to try that again."

She started her current business, Handy-men for All, in 2007 and shares office space with Charles Curry, who owns Bayshore Trophies and Awards at 25718 U.S. 19.

From white-collar to blue-collar work – Daniels grew her business during the Great Recession.

Handymen for All has taken on some big jobs, such as replacing 204 windows in apartment complexes for the city of Clearwater.

"I just had confidence and I learned from

people who were willing to teach me," Daniels said.

Therein lies her advice for younger women looking to start a business.

"What I would say is pick something you are going to stick with. It doesn't even matter if you don't love it to start with; make it your own and stick with it. Work hard and through time, it will prosper," she said.

She has five employees and hopes to add more – and making sure her employees know whom the boss is.

"Some guys think even that they took a job with a woman, they are going to come in and run the company. So I deal with that as well. But I spent 21 years in the military. I don't care what your sex is. If I'm in charge, I am in charge," Daniels said.

She has one daughter, Sabina, 21, a senior at Florida International University and an accomplished dancer. A photo of the two together sits on a bookcase in her office. On her "love me" wall, as she calls it in jest, are numerous certificates of appreciation and awards for her community work.

A member of U.S. Rep. David Jolly's military affairs committee, Daniels tries to help him pass legislation that benefits veterans. She also has been involved with the Tampa Bay Veterans Alliance. She is a member of the Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce's Military Veterans Affairs Committee, is president-elect of the Rotary Club of Clearwater East and also is a former chairwoman of the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County.

Daniels also keeps in contact with some of the people who served with her in the Air Force, such as a friend in Gibsonton who was in her reserve unit.

"The military," she said, "you kind of never leave it."