

TIFFANY LEANDRA ORNER

Until Every Veteran Wants for Nothing



BY JENNA CAPUTO
PHOTOS BY TARA WILEY PHOTOGRAPHY

Tiffany Leandra Orner has a mission—that any person who ever raised their right hand to protect the constitution wants for absolutely nothing once their service to our country ends. As a third-generation member of our Armed Forces, she should know!

Tiffany's mom, Danita Elliott, was originally from Smithfield, NC and eventually joined the Air Force. Tiffany was born in Okinawa, Japan at the Kadena Air Force Base, but she grew up on the Travis Air Force Base in California while her mom was stationed there, before moving to Yountville in the Napa Valley. Tiffany has many wonderful memories from those years. "Yountville was amazing, looking back and remembering running through the vineyards, eating the awfully tart wine grapes, tire and rope swings into the creeks, walking to the farmers market to get a sourdough sandwich and Snapple were my favorite. We felt so grown up! If only we knew then that we were running among millions of dollars of wine!" she remembers.

During that time, she also often traveled to the east coast whenever her mom was on a tour of duty or deployed overseas, staying with her aunts in New York City or her aunt and uncle in Virginia. "I enjoyed meeting so many different types of people and experiencing their culture," she says. "From pig roasts in the backyards of our fellow service members from Guam to making sushi with our neighbor's grandmother from Japan. The cultural diversity one encounters in the military is simply amazing and underappreciated!"

For Tiffany, growing up on a military base was similar to any childhood, however, there were indeed differences. "You stop and place your hand on your heart when you hear the national anthem. You go to sleep hearing 'Taps' being played over the entire installation. It's always loud because of the planes. Oh, and everything you need is right there on base, from perfume to groceries to 80-inch TVs—it's all there, making everything accessible and tax free!"

During high school, they moved to Marlton, NJ where Tiffany graduated before joining the Air Force herself. She generally adapted easily to any environment, but had a hard time adapting to life in NJ. She wanted to get back to the west coast and figured the military would be the best way to get there. Military life was a natural part of her background since her grandfather, uncles and brother all served in the Army, in addition to her mother's service. Tiffany decided to follow her mother's footsteps and joined the Air Force. Training took place in San Antonio, TX, where she also completed



her tech school before being stationed at Travis Air Force Base—right where she grew up!

While at Travis, she worked as a War Readiness Technician, charged with managing equipment and parts critical to the operation of C-5 aircraft. She also had her Commercial Driver's License and drove 18-wheelers to and from the Aerial Support Squadron in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

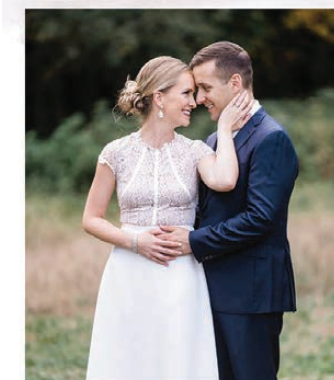
She loved the common work ethic among her peers and the



opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with so many like-minded Airmen who were from completely different backgrounds and cultures. The diversity coupled with the opportunity to learn about and be embraced by such a variety of cultures was exhilarating. "My time in the military was an experience that I will always remember," she says. "I met some of the most amazing, selfless people—my closest friends that I now consider family. I've also experienced some of the most heart-wrenching situations that no one deserves to experience. That's what we sign up for; that's life. I am thankful to have the opportunity to serve my country."

She was honorably discharged just before the recession and couldn't afford to continue living in northern California, so she decided to move back east, ending up here in the Capital District. However, her transition into civilian life was a challenge—at times it even seemed unbearable. "Like many other veterans, sometimes, after our service, we start to discount the AMAZING opportunity we've had to serve our country and see it as a liability—we didn't go to college, we don't have X amount of years in a traditional industry, and nine times out of 10, we're carrying some 'government issued' mental baggage from military life over to civilian sector," she explains. "I will say this—in everything I do, I aspire to be the person I needed when I was going through my transitions. Looking back, I am thankful for all that I went through, because now, on the other side, I am a stronger, more confident woman filled with relentless perseverance, joy and oh-so-much love! This has been a *long* road, getting to where I am now, and to all of the hurdles, missteps and faceplants, I am forever grateful. I am thankful and I will not stop doing all that I do until EVERY veteran wants for nothing."

Now Tiffany is a devoted advocate for all veterans in the Capital Region, looking for every opportunity she can to help. "If I can aid a fellow veteran in a smooth transition,



tara wiley

WEDDINGS | FAMILY
LIFESTYLE
PHOTOGRAPHY

tel (518) 712.9213
info@tarawileyphotography.com
tarawileyphotography.com



I am being the person I needed years ago. Helping my fellow sisters and brothers that served is my 'why'!"

Tiffany is currently a member of several veteran-based organizations, including the Veterans Business Council (VBC). The VBC helps facilitate opportunities for military veterans, connecting them with the business community to enhance their knowledge of employment opportunities, job or entrepreneurial training, and new business development. She is a board member of the McNulty Center for Veteran Entrepreneurial Activity, an outreach center to assist aspiring veteran entrepreneurs and their loved ones to start, purchase or grow their own small business by providing advisors and targeted business training, counseling and mentoring. She's also an ambassador for the Capital Region Chamber and a member of the Chamber's Unified Military Affairs Council, which supports the NY Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing, the Naval Support Activity in Saratoga, Nuclear Power Training Unit in Ballston Spa and the Watervliet Arsenal as well as other military units in the Capital Region. In addition to supporting the military installations in the area, they also work to increase public knowledge of the contributions of each unit, all of which impact our local, national, state and regional security and economy.

In addition to her many other volunteer initiatives throughout the community, Tiffany is also a board member for the Veterans and Community Housing Coalition (VCHC), which hosts the annual Veteran's Ball each November to honor our local veterans and to raise money for the VCHC to continue providing housing and support services to homeless veterans. Due to the pandemic, the ball this year has gone virtual. Caffe Lena will host the live event on November 11th, and it will be live-streamed on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and other networks as well.

The VCHC is also working on a new project for the area—Foreverly House. This will be a duplex specifically for homeless female vets and their children. Foreverly House is the first of its kind of shelter in the state and will be located on the grounds of the Guardian House in Ballston Spa. The project is currently in the planning stages and they hope to have a new website up soon.

Although she's busy, Tiffany feels like she is exactly where she needs to be. She's always felt that her purpose is to serve—in whatever capacity she can. "I love connecting people. I love helping others. I can't not help. Being in a career that's mission involves being the change needed and providing relief is paramount for me," she says.



When she’s not busy serving others, she’s spending time with her family. Married to Craig Orner, Tiffany has three children: Donovan Joseph Pacanowski (16), Ashton Wesley Pacanowski (15) and Max Leandra Orner (4), along with their beagle mix, Foxy Roxy.

Craig, who was born in Albany and raised in Delmar, is the operations manager for one of their family businesses, Sevenzocks Tree Service and Stump Removal, operating out of the Delmar/Bethlehem area and servicing the whole Capital Region. The boys are students at Christian Brothers Academy and play lacrosse and indoor track. Her daughter, otherwise known in their family as the “Feral Queen,” likes to stay outside all day no matter how hot or cold. As a family, they love being outside together, going on family walks, having friends over to BBQ, watching anything Avengers, roughhousing and generally having fun together.

Tiffany’s mom is now the manager of staff at a senior living community and works part time at the Stratton VA, continuing to work tirelessly to support her fellow veterans whenever possible.

Tiffany’s favorite quote from Dr. Seuss’ *The Lorax*, is a good reflection of her life— “Unless someone like you who cares an awful lot, nothing



is going to get better. It’s not.” She takes her mission to continue serving very seriously. “It is so important to be there for one another after service. Transition is difficult sometimes and it is too easy to sink into the darkness and feel ‘less than.’ My goal is to make sure not one veteran feels alone. That, no matter what, there is hope and things will get better.”

#UntilEVERYVeteranWantsForNothing

For more info about the Foreverly House or the upcoming Veterans Ball, please visit the VCHC at <https://www.vchcny.org>.



JDOG Foundation

BY RJ GAGNON

The **JDog Foundation** is guided by the principles of JDog Brands— Respect, Integrity, Trust. Our mission is to develop and implement programs and services that support veterans and veteran-related groups and to provide funding and related assistance to individuals and organizations that provide benefits to veterans.

Veteran and Military Suicide Prevention

Since 2008, there have been more than 6,000 veteran suicides each year, and the suicide rate for veterans is 1.5 times the rate for non-veteran adults.¹

Among active duty service members, the suicide rate has been rising an average of 6% annually over the past five years, and the number of suicides jumped from 285 to 325 between 2017 and 2018.²

The impact of these deaths is far-reaching—survivors of suicide loss are at increased risk of suicide as well.³ Soldiers belonging to Army units with five or more suicide attempts are twice as likely to attempt suicide themselves.⁴

We can and must do more to support our current and former servicemen and servicewomen, beginning with proper treatment of PTSD and support for transitioning veterans. We know that readjustment from military service back into civilian life can be a confusing and stressful time. The shift from a heavily structured, disciplined and fraternal daily routine to one that is quite the opposite can be pronounced and unsettling.

Drawing on the success of promising new techniques and psychotherapy programs such as fitness camps and equine therapy, The JDog Foundation aims to develop targeted initiatives for veterans, military personnel and their family members to support their mental, physical and emotional health and curb the escalating rate of veteran suicide in the US.

Stop Soldier Suicide

The JDog Foundation is proud to have partnered with Stop Soldier Suicide (SSS)—a nationwide organization committed to helping struggling service members and veterans find a life worth living. SSS employs a multi-faceted approach—all focused on providing best-in-class services for our veterans.

While SSS is not a crisis call center, their clinical teams are constantly monitoring inbound calls. Through 1-on-1 assessments and individualized wellness plans, SSS provides personalized care and continued case management for as long as it takes to secure a bright future for its clients.

SSS serves all service members, veterans and military families from every branch and every generation, regardless of discharge status. Clients never receive a bill for support from SSS. Stop Soldier Suicide is a registered 501(c)³ that has achieved the 2018 Platinum Seal of Transparency from Guidestar™. The organization is not government funded.

If you need help, you can call the JDog Foundation directly at **484-324-1155** or **844-889-5610**. Check out <https://stopveteransuicide.org/>.

Higher Education for Veterans

56% of veterans cite inadequate financial resources/financial burden as a barrier to obtaining a higher education degree.² Federal initiatives to support veterans in education, such as the GI Bill, have brought a college degree or trade within greater reach for many military families. But not all veterans qualify for this aid, and the benefits often do not cover the full cost of education.

Additionally, the frequent relocations associated with military service make it difficult for veterans to establish residency in any one state and limits their ability to qualify for more affordable, in-state tuitions.

For the nation’s future generation of military servicemen and service-women, college ROTC programs offered by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force offer students scholarships in exchange for their military service post-graduation. But not every cadet qualifies for financial assistance, and scholarship amounts vary.

The JDog Foundation seeks to encourage and support veterans and ROTC cadets in higher education through need-based scholarships and partnerships with university registrars, offices of veterans services and ROTC detachments. Visit JDogFoundation.org for more information. Check out stopveteransuicide.org for more information.

US Dept of Veterans Affairs: 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report

- 1. Dept of Defense Annual Suicide Report for 2018
- 2. Responding to Grief, Trauma and Distress After a Suicide: US National Guidelines
- 3. JAMA Psychiatry Sept 2017

