



Making life better for MILITARY WIVES

A new jobs website helps unemployed spouses find work, financial stability and hope for the future. *by* TRACY SAELINGER



Stephanie Brown (left) and Jill Ivie launched The Rosie Network last spring.



Navy wife Mandy Nankivel runs *garagethirtysix.com*, a furniture-refinishing business.

Everything was falling into place for 28-year-old Mandy Nankivel—she was finishing up her master's degree in education and had just landed a job as an elementary school teacher in Southern California. Then she met her future husband, a chief in the U.S. Navy. So much for careful planning. "When I fell in love with a Navy man, I knew my life would look different," she says.

Within months of their wedding, they received orders to move to Germany. After Mandy had her son there in 2010, she threw herself into being a stay-at-home mom while she figured out her next step. "There were literally no teaching jobs to apply for," she says.

Mandy is one of many military spouses caught in a bind (see box, right). Families move frequently, making it hard for employees to build up seniority, obtain certifications or even get hired in the first place by many employers, who don't want to retrain someone else in two or three years. On top of that, many spouses act as single parents during deployments, without family nearby to help—all on a modest income. "For what we ask of them, it's alarming what some of our junior enlisted

“Military families move frequently, making it hard for spouses to get hired.”
Mandy Nankivel

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families make,” says Stephanie Brown, a Navy wife of 15 years, who left her interior design business behind when her husband was posted to Puerto Rico in 1999.

Taking action

Stephanie and Jill Ivie, also a Navy wife, launched The Rosie Network (*therosienetwork.org*), a free website that allows military spouses and vets with their own businesses to showcase their goods and services. It's Etsy-meets-Angie's List, and it gives people who want to hire and support military families an easy way to do so. The site features real estate agents, photographers, crafters, life coaches and estheticians, among others. “The only truly portable job is being self-employed—taking your business with you,” Stephanie says.

Last year, Mandy, now 35, found herself in San Diego with a 2-year-old and a husband overseas. One day she picked up an old pine hutch on Craigslist, stripped it and painted it a beautiful turquoise. “I loved doing something on a budget, taking an item and making it pretty again,” she says. Mandy turned her refurbishing talent into a business and joined The Rosie Network—she now has a few dozen clients. “It provides financial stability, lets me be a stay-at-home-mom, and I have something of my own again. It's been a blessing.” And if Mandy has to relocate, The Rosie



Takeisha Jefferson's JT Cheri Photography business is booming.

is much more likely to stay and serve.” To further address the issue, First Lady Michelle Obama is urging governors to speed up the licensing and professional certification processes in some fields for military spouses who move to a new state.

Reliable employment certainly makes life at home easier. Nica Hubbard, 29, a mom of two and the wife of a Navy master-at-arms in Fort Worth, TX, says her family was living paycheck to paycheck two years ago. Nica began making decorative wooden blocks, and became a Rosie, listing Posh Blocks on the site and promoting it on Facebook. Nica's income is now around \$3,000 a month. “It's a lot of sleepless nights, but I'm glad I can work from home.” She even has an employee, a Navy spouse who does invoicing and customer service from her Georgia home.

Air Force veteran Takeisha Jefferson, 36, started photographing people and special events to supplement her Air Force technical sergeant husband's pay. “Before this, we didn't have savings, retirement, 401(k), any of that,” she says. “It was scary.” Takeisha, a mom of four kids, can now put away 40% of her income for the couple's retirement—and she does what she loves. Being a Rosie, she says, is sure to help business: “It's getting better every year with my military spouse connections,” she says. “I'm on fire.” ♦

“Network members are called Rosies, for Rosie the Riveter, the World War II icon.”

Network will allow her to mine for clients before she arrives. “It takes away the stress of having to start from square one,” she says.

“We can do it”

Keeping spouses working strengthens the military, says Meg O'Grady, manager for the Department of Defense's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. “If the spouse is able to contribute financially and follow a path that allows growth, that service member

MILITARY SPOUSES BY THE NUMBERS

750,000
Number of active-duty military spouses in America and abroad

26%
Unemployment rate for active-duty military spouses (the national average is 7.5%)

85
Percentage of military spouses who need or want to work

7 to 10
Number of relocations a military family can expect over 20 years

\$28,000
Approximate annual salary cap for an army corporal after four years of service

50,000
Approximate number of military spouses who have their own businesses