



SIUE's Depew Named Illinois Student Veteran of the Year

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – “It takes one to know one.” That expression forms the foundation of Amanda Depew’s dedication to positively impacting the lives of women veterans like herself. After dedicating much of her life to military service, she now uses her lived experiences to drive her passion for community service.

Her incredible story of perseverance and fierce commitment to veterans has resulted in the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville graduate student being named Illinois’ 2020 Student Veteran of the Year.

Depew is slated to complete a master’s in social work in August 2021. A veteran of the United States Air Force, she has been an integral part of SIUE’s Office of Military and Veteran Services (MAVS), SIUE East St. Louis Center TRIO Veterans Upward Bound program (VUB), and the SIUE Chapter of the Student Veterans of America (SVA). Additionally, she is a member of the SALUTE Veteran National Honor Society.

“My own life experiences are what make community service important to me,” Depew shared. “I have been the homeless veteran, when my family and I found ourselves homeless within a year of my separation from the Air Force. I have dealt with, battled and won against suicide and substance abuse, and mental health issues. I’ve pretty much been the poster child of nearly all of the negative things a veteran can go through after transitioning from the military back into civilian life.

“It’s important for me to ensure as many veterans as possible avoid those experiences. But, if there is a veteran going through any of those challenges, I want to be there to walk alongside them and see them through.”

SIUE MAVS Director Kevin Wathen and Coordinator Telisha Reinhardt nominated Depew, noting her enthusiasm, integrity and attention to detail.

“Military and Veteran Services and Veterans Upward Bound fully endorse and support the nomination of Amanda Depew for this award,” they wrote. “She is highly motivated in her advocacy for the local veteran community. She is a wonderful person to be around and her personality draws in veterans.”

At SIUE, Depew has educated administrators, faculty and staff about military and veteran culture, and brings awareness to the challenges encountered by student veterans via the Green Zone Training program, which Depew spearheaded. She has also volunteered to be part of the MAVS panel series entitled, “From Uniform to University: Veterans in the SIUE Community.”

As a graduate assistant with VUB, she provides veterans with guidance and encouragement as they navigate their way through the postsecondary education process.

She assists them in obtaining both state and federal benefits, developed kiosks to reach veterans at remote locations, and has maintained contact with program participants during the pandemic.

“I have applied for a VA fellowship, the gold standard when it comes to mental health treatments,” she explained. “This is an important aspect, as it plays into my future aspirations of starting my own non-profit inpatient recovery center for women veterans. This aspiration is driven by a personal experience on my road to recovery.”

The motivated influencer is co-founder of the Women Veterans of the St. Louis Area, a group focused on servicing and mentoring women veterans in the St. Louis and Illinois areas, using a peer-to-peer system. Founded in March 2020, the group aims to empower through a network of support.

“The need for this group was envisioned through the fact that there are no, or very few, services that are designed purely with women veterans in mind,” Depew said. “The needs and supports of women veterans are different than those of their male counterparts. Through our work, we’ve also discovered that military spouses are able to apply for many of the benefits that are meant to support women veterans.”

“Student Veterans of America-Illinois is honored to recognize one of its own, Amanda Depew,” said Justin Miller, executive director of SVA-IL. “As student veterans, we recognize the commitment and service Amanda provided to her campus and fellow veterans, especially during the past year with the pandemic. Her record is one of excellence and deserves to be recognized by her peers, the student veterans of Illinois.”

“Amanda Depew is an outstanding leader on campus and in the community,” said Dan Wellman, Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs’ (IDVA) Veteran’s Education and Training Section Administrator. “She represents the best values of the American veteran. We are honored and pleased to recognize her commitment to her campus and community as the 2020 Illinois Student Veteran Leader of the Year.”

“It takes one to know one.” Depew’s recent honor underscores the impact she makes by sharing her story and supporting fellow women veterans as they navigate life outside the military.

“I would like to thank SVA-IL and the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs for this honor,” she said. “Thank you to Kevin and Telisha for nominating me for this tremendous honor, and for their support in letting me run wild with what I think are crazy ideas. I’d also like to thank the many faculty and staff who have supported all my endeavors. I can’t express how important these individuals are to me and my success.”

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high-quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 13,000.