In Recognition of Veterans Day

The Division of Supplier Diversity is highlighting four Indiana business enterprises. The features will focus on their stories as soldiers and entrepreneurs. This week, we honor Mr. Rodney Stepp, owner and chief creative officer of Rodney Stepp Music Productions.

Rodney Stepp, owner and chief creative officer of Rodney Stepp Music Productions, was born and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana. Stepp has a family full of musicians and has been passionate about music all his life. He has been playing various instruments since childhood and began performing at a very young age.

While attending high school, Stepp began working for Designated Productions, a management company. At that time, it was common for singers and musicians to work with a management company to secure bands for local shows. Musical directors would coordinate with management companies to identify available bands for artists.

Designated Productions was the preferred company for many acts, “These guys had the best bands in the city under their wing,” said Stepp. Through them, Stepp was able to get a lot of exposure at an early age. At the age of 14, Stepp was playing for big names like Patti Labelle, The Emotions, Joe Tex, and The Spinners. While some of his fellow musicians dropped out of high school to pursue music full time, Stepp graduated and was accepted into IUPUI.

Military Conscription, commonly referred to as “the draft,” has a long history in America. From the Civil War until the Vietnam War, the draft has been used to fill the ranks of the armed services in every major American military conflict. To this day, young men are required to register with the Selective Service System. The last draft occurred during the Vietnam War in 1972.

Although it would come to a close in a few years, the Vietnam War was still active. Being enrolled in college kept Stepp from being drafted. After his first year, Stepp decided to take a semester off to tour with friends and earn money for school. Unfortunately for Stepp, the Department of Defense had another draft lottery and his number was called. Since Stepp was not a student at the time, his protected status was removed and he was drafted into the U.S. Army.

Stepp tested high on his initial military assess-
ment exams but was still assigned to the infantry. “We need smart people in infantry, too. We need people who can find the landmines, not just step on them.” I’ll never forget that,” said Stepp as he recalled the day he received his military occupational specialty.

Shipped to Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic training, Stepp was quickly recognized for his leadership ability and was sent to an advanced two week leadership course. After he graduated from his basic training, Stepp was sent to Fort Meyer, Virginia for his advanced individual training (AIT). There he was selected for another leadership course, “It was almost like they had me pegged, like ‘We want someone with his skill set,’ I don’t know what that was at that time or what they saw...I knew how to play the game pretty well though, I had two cousins I could call for advice,” said Stepp.

Stepp had two cousins who were high-ranking commissioned officers. He gives them credit for providing mentorship and guidance during his military career. When he graduated AIT and was assigned to the 3rd Infantry Regiment, Stepp thought his cousins must’ve pulled some strings on his behalf, “but they claim they didn’t,” said Stepp.

The 3rd Infantry Regiment, traditionally known as “The Old Guard,” is the oldest active-duty infantry unit in the Army, serving our nation since 1784. Since World War II, The Old Guard has served as the official Army Honor Guard and escort to the president. In that capacity, 3rd Infantry soldiers are responsible for conducting military ceremonies at the White House, the Pentagon, national memorials and elsewhere in the nation’s capital. In addition, soldiers of The Old Guard maintain a 24-hour vigil at the Tomb of the Unknowns, provide military funeral escorts at Arlington National Cemetery and participate in parades at Fort Myer and Fort Lesley J. McNair.

Stepp was tasked to the Arlington Cemetery funeral details and was kept very busy during the end of the Vietnam War.

Stepp was reassigned to the position of entertainment director of the noncommissioned officer and enlisted soldier’s club, at Fort Riley, Kansas. With only six months remaining on his contract, Stepp’s assignment was short lived because he was given a three month early honorable discharge to return to school.

“I wasn’t too thrilled about being there [in the Army], to be honest and still I haven’t used a lot of the benefits, but I am thankful that I had that experience now...because it was an experience I will never forget. Whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, it’s an experience that you’ll never forget,” said Stepp, reflecting on his military experience.

Stepp went on to have a successful career as a musician and music producer working with big names and on big projects like The Spinners and the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Even more recently than that, in recognition for his music, coupled with his community service, Stepp was the recipient of the Distinguished Citizens Award from the City of Indianapolis, the Distinguished Hoosier Award from Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, and the Julia Carson Congressional Award.

To learn more about Mr. Stepp and his music go to www.rodneystepp.com.