



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III greets the recipients of the Larry Strickland Educational Award — Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Johnson of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., (center) and Sgt. 1st Class Rodney Harris of Fort McCoy, Wis. — at the Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting and Exposition on Oct. 21, 2013, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Lisa Ferdinando)

NCOs Awarded For Excellence in Educational Leadership

By Lisa Ferdinando

Army News Service

Two NCOs have been named recipients of the Larry Strickland Educational Leadership Award for their excellence in educational leadership and commitment to the development of Soldiers.

Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Johnson of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., and Sgt. 1st Class Rodney Harris of Fort McCoy, Wis., said they were honored and surprised by the recognition.

The award is named for Sgt. Maj. Larry Strickland, who served in the Army for 30 years. He was the sergeant major to the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel when he was killed Sept. 11, 2001, in the terrorist attack at the Pentagon. The Association of the United States Army presents the award in his honor each year.

Johnson and Harris were guests, along with the winners of other Army awards, at the Sergeant Major of the Army Recognition Luncheon on Oct. 21 at the Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting and Exposition in Washington, D.C.

At the luncheon, the vice chief of staff of the Army, Gen. John F. Campbell, and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III recognized the contributions of NCOs to the force.

Those being recognized at the luncheon, Chandler said, have demonstrated the best about noncommissioned officers and Soldiers.

"That's excellence in what they do — their commitment to their profession, their commitment, their character and their confidence," Chandler said.

Apprenticeships prepare Soldiers for life after the Army

Johnson works on a partnership between the Army Continuing Education System and the United Association in its "Veterans in Piping" apprenticeship program.

Active-duty Soldiers take part in the apprenticeship program at no charge, he said, to learn valuable skills that will qualify them for civilian jobs in fields such as plumbing, welding, pipefitting, and heating and air-conditioning.

"We were the first Army installation to pilot this apprenticeship program with active-duty Soldiers," Johnson said.

In these difficult fiscal times, Soldiers who are about to leave the Army often worry about getting a job after the service, Johnson said. The program provides the skills for Soldiers to succeed in the civilian world.

"In the last 10 months, we've put almost 80 Soldiers through the apprenticeship program. They left active duty and went straight into highly-skilled, highly-paid work with great benefits," Johnson said.

It is a win-win program, no matter how you look at it, he said.

Not only does it help Soldiers and their families, it reduces the amount of unemployment compensation the Department of Defense may have to pay, he said.

It also provides employers with the best employees, since Soldiers are disciplined and hardworking, Johnson said. It is also a great recruiting tool, since it shows the Army takes care of its own.

"As we draw down, we have to take care of our Soldiers and our families," he said. "It's all around just the right thing to do."

Sergeant first class earns Ph.D.

Harris said he has taken advantage of all the educational opportunities afforded to him as a member of the Army and he encourages all Soldiers to do the same.

"You always have to have a fallback plan, no matter what," he said.

"Knowledge is the baseline of everything we do, with your job, interactions with people," said Harris. "It doesn't just help you with your job, it helps you later in life."

Harris, who entered the Army with a bachelor's degree, earned his master's degree and a doctorate in philosophy while in the military.

He said he uses his own story as an example to encourage Soldiers to really focus on their own plan and plot a path that will help them for advancement in the military and when they leave the service.

"It helps them get promoted," said Harris, who also volunteers as a tutor for high school students. "It shows when their leaders look at them, that they have the initiative and the drive to excel and exceed the standard."

Harris has been a proctor for Soldiers who are deployed or in the field, which allows those Soldiers to have continuity in their courses and complete their coursework while they are on assignment.

In addition to college courses, the Army offers free e-learning with thousands of courses in information technology, business, leadership and personal development, he said.

Harris said Soldiers tell him that they had no idea the Army offered so much in the way of free education.

"They tell me 'I'm glad you pushed that,'" he said. "I also made it a block in their counseling and make sure they are staying on the right path."

Other NCOs also recognized

More than 350 people attended the luncheon that honored the exceptional leadership of non-commissioned officers.

Other NCOs recognized were:

- Sgt. 1st Class Krystal Jarret, Army Recruiter of the Year
- Sgt. 1st Class Mariela Richardson, Army Reserve Recruiter of the Year
- Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Mannel, Army National Guard Recruiter of the Year
- Sgt. 1st Class David Stover, Army Drill Sergeant of the Year
- Sgt. 1st Class Ryan McCaffrey, Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year
- Sgt. 1st Class Rodney Harris, Strickland Award winner
- Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Johnson, Strickland Award winner
- Retired Sgt. Maj. Andrew McFowler, Bainbridge Award winner



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