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Shannon Langley, an Army veteran who helped lead an incredible turnaround in the ability of veterans to secure employment and training opportunities in Oregon, has been named the state's Woman Veteran of the Year.

Shannon enlisted in the Army in 1997 as a nuclear, biological and chemical specialist. After completing basic training, she was assigned to the 18th Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. She was soon elevated to the rank of sergeant, and also served as a battalion level training supervisor.

After completing her service, Shannon and her husband moved to Oregon, where she worked as a Disabled Veteran Outreach Program specialist for six years before being promoted to state veterans coordinator for WorkSource Oregon.

One of the most obvious signs of Shannon's impact on WorkSource Oregon's veteran program was the dramatic rise in the level of intensive employment services to veterans — a key measure the federal government uses to evaluate state employment agencies.

In 2011, this rate in Oregon was a paltry 0.3 percent — fifth lowest in the nation. After four years of Shannon's guidance and tireless work, this rate had risen to 97.5 percent — third highest in the nation.

Today, the Oregon Employment Department's veterans program is viewed as a "best practice" example in terms of increasing the level of intensive employment services provided to veterans.

"Shannon has always represented the qualities that we find in the best leaders: integrity, commitment to others, motivation to change the world in positive ways and loyalty to her team," said Tonja Pardo, director of the Veterans' Employment & Training Service in Oregon. "Veterans employment for both men and women who served this great nation are always at the forefront of her mind, and she fights for those who cannot fight for themselves."

Shannon said she was both shocked and honored to be selected for the award. She also felt like the award is representative of many in the women veteran community, not just herself.

"I work with a lot of female veterans who also dedicate their lives to helping their fellow vets," Shannon said. "In my mind, I felt like I was accepting it on their behalf as well. Because there are a lot of vets who do just as much as I do, if not more."

The Oregon Woman Veteran of the Year Award recognizes a woman veteran who has compiled a record of exemplary service as a veteran and an outstanding member of the community. Nominations were accepted from across the state, and the award was presented at the 10th Oregon Women Veterans Conference, held the last week of April in Sunriver.