

Embodying Service

PLEDGE TO SERVE
COUNTRY CONTINUES
AT HOME FOR VETERANS

Without speaking, their eyes began to tell their stories. Deep, strong and vivid, like the earthy tones in the fabrics they wore. The fine couture merely accentuated the women's true beauty, which lay undisturbed beneath the flowing lace and yards of silk. Covered in shades of green, blue and beige, these veterans from different military backgrounds, shared their stories and the threads of their wisdom combined to create a collective tapestry of purpose, loyalty, strength and generosity of spirit.

"There are so many parts of my life as a soldier which I loved," said medically retired Air Force Staff Sgt. Tamara Boxx. "Through military service, I helped to make a positive difference in the world. I'm proud of that work. However, during that time I was not

able to express my artistic side, which is part of my soul. Now, as *eBella's* fashion editor I can help empower women, as well as myself, through art and fashion."

"They called me 'Unique Monique' in high school because I dressed with style," added former Air Force Senior Airman Monique Hoshimoto. "But in the military, you become a piece of a greater whole with an immense purpose. Every day you wear your green and tan uniform (ABUs or Airforce Battle Uniforms) and steel-toe boots and look like everyone else. You don't join the military to focus on fashion trends," Hoshimoto finished with a smile.

Former Air Force Staff Sgt. Deborah Todd grinned in return. "The pants were certainly not fashionable. Four buttons up the front that were nothing but constricting," she said. "And the maternity clothes fit like a huge



Deborah Todd, Air Force

and Style

← Monique Hoshimoto, Air Force

← Hollie Murray, Marine Corp

↑ Deborah Lux, Navy

↑ Sarah Blanchette, Air Force

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CLOTHES, JEWELRY AND ACCESSORIES COURTESY OF WELL READ Department Store, Lace and To the Moon Boutique at The Promenade in Bonita Springs
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MAKEUP: Erica Cheri and Jaynie Tice

tent! I should know, like many others, I was pregnant while I served our nation," Todd added.

"The uniforms, maternity or not, were never flattering," agreed Sarah Blanchette, former Air Force senior airman.

Blanchette was military police, serving in 16 countries in four years.

"I'm not very tall. The crotch of my pants went down to the knees. I also wore a heavy 'Second Chance' vest that I was grateful to have as it probably saved my life. But it was extremely hot and heavy. It was, however, part of military fashion but didn't reflect my own style," she said.

Wearing a Byron Lars aqua lace cascading duster paired with Lauren Vidal's metallic gold pants, Deborah Todd's look, provided by WELL READ department store, flows like water. The perfectly paired metallic pants made from cotton and elastane for ease of movement work perfectly with the aqua duster. Adding a Travelore hand-beaded flying moth brooch to the collar of Todd's outfit spotlighted her divine red hair, allowing her to pop against the filmy background.





The women laughed in unison to these stories and others about their too-wide pant legs, bloused, tight at the ankle, and shoved into their heavy boots. They explained it was all just part of their duty to serve.

These proud veterans agreed that the emotional side of being in uniform was far different than those emotions reflected in the mirror of individuality.

“I felt strong when I was in uniform,” stated Hollie Murray, former Marine Corp sergeant.

Embodying her free spirit, Debi Lux wears the Pascale tank dress in olive green from To the Moon boutique with an Aratta embroidered gauze kimono from the collections of WELL READ department store. The gauzy material's balanced by a stunning gold covered brass necklace with turquoise and pearl tassels by Gypsy, paired also with a gold cuff, courtesy of WELL READ department store. The entire look was boho chic with the extraordinary jewelry flowing from Lux's neck that was also featured in the Smithsonian Museum, as part of WELL READ department store's cultured approach to fashion.

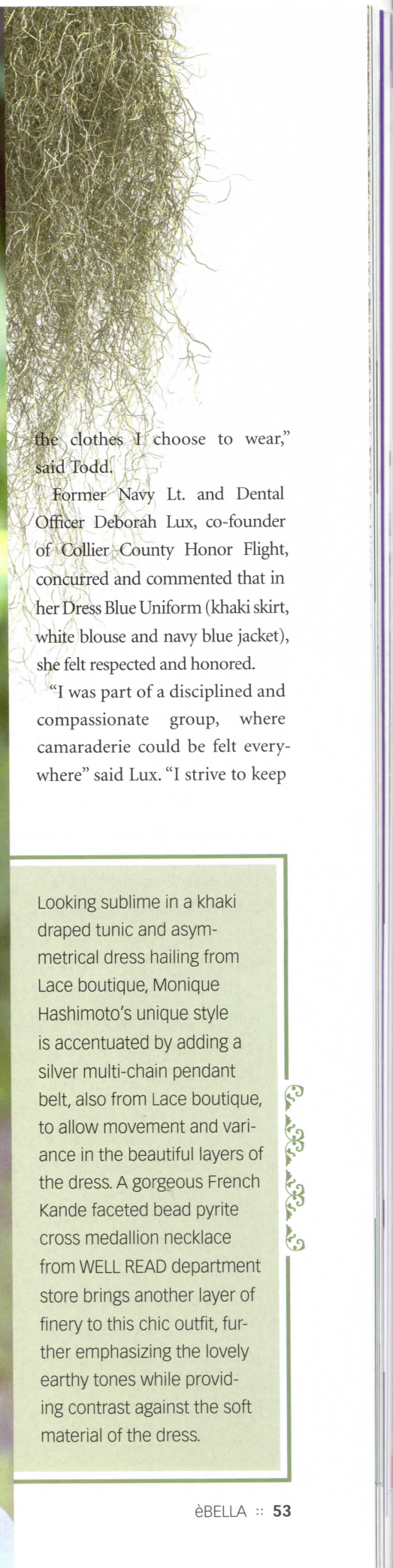
“We were proud and unified, and I was happy to be part of that effort. We perfectly rolled up our sleeves, literally and figuratively, for our country,” said Murray.

“I agree,” began Todd. “We were so polished. All straight lines squared off with our boots laced tight. I felt empowered. I was a medic for eight years, dressed in camo every day and worked on Air Vac missions with daily ‘life and death’ moments,” she said.

Todd’s inviting smile and intelligent banter were matched in depth by her eyes and accentuated by the beautiful cleft in her chin. “Now, I want to feel pretty, confident and adventurous in

Wearing a delicate Janice white lace halter dress courtesy of To the Moon boutique brings a whimsical softness to Sara Blanchette, contrasting beautifully against her dark curls and reserved personality. The trendy olive-green Eden military jacket complete with chevrons, also from To the Moon, pays homage to her stoic yet edgy side. Rolling the sleeves adds a little casual flare to the ensemble, which flows perfectly with the set.





the clothes I choose to wear,” said Todd.

Former Navy Lt. and Dental Officer Deborah Lux, co-founder of Collier County Honor Flight, concurred and commented that in her Dress Blue Uniform (khaki skirt, white blouse and navy blue jacket), she felt respected and honored.

“I was part of a disciplined and compassionate group, where camaraderie could be felt everywhere” said Lux. “I strive to keep

Looking sublime in a khaki draped tunic and asymmetrical dress hailing from Lace boutique, Monique Hashimoto’s unique style is accentuated by adding a silver multi-chain pendant belt, also from Lace boutique, to allow movement and variance in the beautiful layers of the dress. A gorgeous French Kande faceted bead pyrite cross medallion necklace from WELL READ department store brings another layer of finery to this chic outfit, further emphasizing the lovely earthy tones while providing contrast against the soft material of the dress.

that feeling in my life now. Service to others is just part of being in the military.”

Lux’s kindness and confidence shine through her beautiful brown eyes, lightly freckled complexion and delicate features, all surrounded by her mane of red-dish blonde hair.

At the mention of hair style, the group responded in unison that ‘their days of wearing it high, tight and off their collars were over.’

Lace drips off Hollie Murray like the Spanish moss from the oak trees on set. Wearing a two-piece Celine set from To the Moon boutique, Murray is the picture of elegance with an edgy nod made by her adorable topknot hairstyle. You can see the intricate detailing in the set and how the fabric flows in a gradient from front to back. The off-the-shoulder top gives a peek of skin, allowing a coy playfulness. Murray’s look is topped off with a gold Midori Linea layering necklace, supplied by To the Moon boutique, providing a delicate shimmer to balance the off-the-shoulder lace look.





“I want my now long hair to be free and moving,” stated Lux.

Hoshimoto’s box braids extended beyond her shoulders in her own expression of creative coiffure.

“It was hard to find my sense of style again, after the military. But, as you can see, I am trying,” she said, her wide grin offset by two matching dimples.

Murray nodded in agreement, eyes twinkling under a canopy of long, dark bangs.

“It wasn’t possible to show individual style while in the military,” she said. “I offset that by getting a star tattoo in every country where I was deployed. They take up the entire space between my right shoulder and my neck, where no one could see them. Lots of vets have tattoos.”

Blanchette agreed, her tiny features belying her huge inner strength and determination. A twisted tree tattoo on her back depicts her rooted belief in helping others.

“I took an oath, like all these women, to serve my country,” she said. “Veterans need a sense of community when they come home.”

Toward that effort, Blanchette co-founded Military Movement, a not-for-profit organization that bridges the gap between businesses and government resources for veteran families in Collier County. (MilitaryMovement.us)

“I always wanted to help people and the military certainly gave me that opportunity,” said Todd. “I continue my sense of duty and service by working for our local clinic at the V.A. I am very involved in virtual medicine as a health technician. Guess that will always be who I am. Service is just part of me,” she said. (VA.gov)

“In the military, I worked on the flight line, keeping the planes running smoothly,” said Hoshimoto. “Now, I do the same for programs at SWFL Home Base.”

As the project and administrative coordinator, Hoshimoto oversees Home Base’s three primary programs offered at no cost to local veterans: Warrior Health & Fitness, Resilient Warrior and the Adventure Series. (HomeBase.org)

Murray, a logistics technician in the military where she handled the specifics for her company’s deployments is now an occupational therapy assistant.

“In the military, we think of our family and friends when we are working, but really our work is for everyone. It’s hard to ever stop thinking like that. I help people every day with what I do,” said Murray. (HCR-ManorCare.com)

Lux said she feels similarly about acting in service, within and beyond the military.

“I cater to people, always have,” said Lux. “As a dentist, in the military and afterwards, I looked after people’s teeth, which made them smile. Now I create smiles by taking veterans on Honor Flights, so they may visit our national memorials dedicated to their service and sacrifice,” she added.

With a mission to transport local veterans to Washington, D.C. and back home again, Lux co-founded Collier County Honor Flight, which now also serves Lee County. (CollierCountryHonorFlight.com).

These beautiful women embody the empowered strength and integrity of our nation’s soldiers. Their intelligence, loyalty, courage and personal styles are often hidden just below the surface, as are the tattoos that many of them have, but do not always share. Each woman took an oath to protect our nation, no matter the personal cost. They carry that hefty promise, along with their other attributes, and quietly move among us. When you take time to thank a veteran for their service, look into their eyes. Without speaking, you may find that their eyes begin to tell their stories. ❀

Caryn Hacker-Buechel is a psychotherapist, a freelance writer, mom, stepmom, grandma and the proud daughter of a veteran. She is working on her first novel.