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## Using the Entire Field to Your Advantage



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### **Working with your staff, you can tell you are a proponent of team in the highest regard, what makes you the proudest of what your team is doing at VDEM?**

The whole organization has worked hard to break down barriers and set conditions for our teammates to feel comfortable reaching across divisions and challenging status quo. In doing so, the team is able to solve very complex issues and excel in the dynamic space we live in – crisis management. Watching the team learn, grow, build resiliency, solve problems, and, most importantly, take care of each other is most gratifying. I'm so honored working with such a great team!

### **After joining NEMA, what sparks your attention the most about the association?**

NEMA is a fantastic organization, I immediately recognized it is full of dedicated professionals who are passionate about their work of serving others. And we have an important mission – collaborating and building consensus across the nation and with our numerous partners to better serve and protect all people. And I suspect many would also recognize I feel at home and comfortable with the entire NEMA team, I enjoy hearing the stories and catching up on many friendships across the states.

### **We would be remiss not to ask you about your National Guard activity – thank you for your service. You currently hold the role as the Director of Joint Training and Exercise at the Virginia National Guard. How do you juggle both positions? What have you learned from your Guard duties and past deployments that you integrate back to your team at VDEM?**

That's a great question and it is tough to manage essentially two careers. I really rely on my Outlook calendar for sure, but the important issue here is being present at home when I'm at home. We must preserve our family relationships and protect those, that's a big priority I have to work hard at maintaining. But doing so provides an important foundation for me. I owe a lot to my beautiful wife and children for managing the house while I'm away. And as for my experiences, I really do owe a lot to my military training and deployments. I didn't know that as an artillery officer I would eventually end up leading working groups involving folks from different backgrounds or skills in the pursuit of synchronizing action to achieve a goal. These soft leadership skills are identical to those we need to lead the management of emergencies, and the deployments really did provide me many opportunities to learn and exercise these skills.

### **Lacrosse is an intense game. What are you thinking as Dad on the sidelines watching your girls compete?**

Wow, awesome question and lacrosse is a great sport. And it's great watching the girls play, learn, and focus on refining their skills. In particular watching my oldest lead the defense as the goalie – watching her issue directions to her defenders, call for adjustments, and demonstrate resilience in the cage is amazing. And for my little one, she's an attacker and seeing her begin to use the entire field to her advantage and see opportunities is wonderful.

### **Those who hold bourbon collections is one of amazement. There is so much history behind each batch as it holds the recipes and antics of generations ago. Not sure many people truly appreciate the beauty behind the perfection poured in the glass, but you do. As a bourbon collector, what are you favorites? What was the motivation behind the collection?**

I do enjoy bourbon and have a great collection I'm ready to share with anyone willing to try and learn, and by the way, I'm still learning too! That's the motivation by the way, something to learn and share about with others. It provides an opportunity to connect with others. What's unique about bourbon is the balance between art and science – there are so many variables in play here from the mash bill, the type of equipment, time, environment, and the barrel themselves to name a few. And it takes decades to get to a place where you can consistently make something unique and special. For me right now, I'm on a rye kick, and more specifically, I'm really into RY3, Old Pepper, and Stellum. I really like the spicy finish and that extra flavor profile that's ryes provide.

### **Your love of cooking is an inspiration. Smoking BBQ is a science paired with patience. What are your favorite dishes?**

Well that all started at home with my Mom, she worked as a chef and taught me strict cooking skills and the importance of following recipes. That all ended when I married my southern fried Mississippi Queen, Melana, from Natchez, MS. Once that happened, I shifted my attention to Cajun food and barbeque, basically another opportunity to combine the art and science of cooking. I have a lot more fun in the kitchen now since I can basically add whatever I want as long as it balances out. I really enjoy cooking and entertaining when I can, and it's across the board – brisket, pork, fish, and steaks – I enjoy all. The secret is the pellet grill for sure!

Something Melana introduced to me is Chicken Rotel, it's amazing - easy to throw together and you can't get enough, you should try it!

Melana and Shawn's Chicken Rotel:

- 1 lb Chicken Breasts
- 1 lb pasta of choice (we usually use penne)
- 1 lb Velveta Cheese
- 1 can Rotel tomatoes
- 1 can Cream of Mushroom Soup
- Parmesan cheese for topping

Instructions:

- Season some boiling water with salt, pepper, garlic, etc, and boil the chicken.
- While the chicken is cooking, chunk the Velveta and melt with the soup mix and rotel in the microwave. Cook and stir for about 3 mins at a time until smooth.
- Remove the chicken from the pot (keep the water), let cool and shred.
- Cook the pasta al dente.
- Combine all ingredients into a casserole dish. Season to taste. Top with Parmesan cheese.
- Cook in 350 degree oven until bubbly (usually about 30-45 mins if just prepared; 1 hour or a bit longer if out of the refrigerator).
- \*\* Note we usually use the mild Rotel to keep the spice down.

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