

Kathryn Roth-Douquet *91 (SPIA)

McLean, Virginia

Graduate Alumni Trustee

Kathryn Roth-Douquet *91, the founder and CEO of Blue Star Families, admits that her first time on a military installation was as a college student “climbing over a fence at a US Army Depot, protesting nuclear weapons.” Little did she imagine she would found the nation’s largest national non-profit for military families reaching over one million military and veteran families, with Princeton’s School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA, formerly the Woodrow Wilson School) “playing a key role” in her evolution.

She credits Princeton with giving her not only intellectual and practical skills, but also a network giving her opportunities to connect with leaders across a broad spectrum that included politics, philanthropy, technology, and the military.

From Princeton, she went to the Nathan Cummings Foundation, focusing on the environment, the arts, health, and Jewish life. In early 1992, she joined the Clinton campaign, then the Clinton White House, as the first woman to serve as Lead Presidential Advance. After another stint in foundation work, Roth-Douquet returned to public service as Acting Principal Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense.

By the early 2000s, Roth-Douquet had moved frequently with her husband, a Marine pilot, consulted, received a law degree, and most notably ran a \$35 million New Market Tax Credit Fund investing in low-income neighborhoods for a Silicon Valley technology fund. With her young children, she faced nine moves in sixteen years and multiple deployments. She began writing and speaking on the topic of what the country asks of the military and their families.

In a 2018 conversation with the *PAW*, Roth-Douquet described the birth of Blue Star Families in 2009: “We decided to create a platform where people who serve the nation and their families could have a seat at the table to talk about what the challenges were

and also to design the potential solutions and find the right partners to make those solutions real.”

With help from Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, Blue Star Families grew rapidly, doubling every two or three years, strengthening local communities. “True to my Princeton training,” says Roth-Douquet, “my organization focuses on being data-driven as well as building strength through strategic collaborations, which allows us to reach families with programs and services while shaping the debate in D.C. about how to structure and support our forces and their families.” In 2020, the organization launched the major initiative in the nation addressing the experiences of military families of color. Combining research, training, and collaborative action, Roth-Douquet is coordinating this work with the office of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

She has received numerous citations and awards, including the Secretary for Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service and the Chief of Staff of the Army Medal for outstanding Civilian Support. She is the inaugural selection for the National Football League Hall of Heroes, to be inducted August 2021.

In addition to her work with Blue Star Families, Roth-Douquet is senior advisor to Summit Institute, which brings together tech innovators, entrepreneurs, and non-profit and cultural leaders. She has written two books — *How Free People Move Mountains* and *AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America’s Upper Classes from the Military and How it Hurts Our Country*— and published frequently in such publications as the *New York Times*, *Forbes*, the *Boston Globe*, and *USA Today*. She sits on several boards, is a trustee of the Commons Project, and co-chaired the 2017 Bipartisan Policy Council Task Force on Defense Personnel.

For the University, she has done ASC interviewing around the world, spoken at a “She Roars” conference, and lectured at SPIA in 2020. She collaborates with Army generals and think tank scholars who have been her friends since they first studied together twenty years ago. In her words, “Princeton has been a companion to me in my work and life.”