



# TRISTAR

## Decades of Defense

By **Matt Ottinger**

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**Employees:** 321

**Resource:** Carlos Gaitani, president and CEO

Carlos Gaitani has been involved with TRISTAR, a Bloomington-based defense contractor, nearly since its inception 30 years ago. The Navy veteran has not only ascended to president and CEO but took ownership of the company a decade ago.

TRISTAR now employs over 320 with three locations in Indiana, which include Naval Surface Warfare Center, Crane Division, as well as in California, Florida, South Carolina and Virginia.

The process has featured evolutions for the defense contractor.

“In the early days of the company, we tried to do commercial work,” Gaitani reflects. “What we learned as we started to grow was that you can’t really mix commercial work with defense work. The requirements to work with the government become very complicated.

“It is a bureaucracy, so it’s hard to be competitive in a commercial market when commercial companies don’t require all of the reporting mechanisms that the government has,” he adds.

### Homing in

Like a submarine focusing its periscope, TRISTAR would ultimately find its target markets and any early obstacles have been eschewed. That’s evident in the fact that the company is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

Gaitani shares how the organization landed on its current mission.

“TRISTAR focused mainly on Navy combat systems, basically doing technical support, which includes repair and maintenance,” he recalls. “Sometimes we would do what’s called obsolescence. And obsolescence is where you have older systems that have been in the fleet for a long time. Those vendors no longer make those pieces of equipment, or they no longer make parts for them.”

Helping to find alternative options or rendering those systems operational became a key objective for TRISTAR.

“We were doing testing, evaluation support, and then over time we grew into information technology,” Gaitani says. “We started off doing help desk support, and then that migrated into what’s now called cybersecurity information assurance. Then we started to get into software development.”

TRISTAR now boasts a team of nearly 80 cybersecurity specialists and software developers that are supporting government defense programs.

“And we still have our core business that we started with the technical support services,” Gaitani adds.

He points to expanding work for the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), which includes projects

for not just the Navy, but the Air Force, Army and Marines as well.

“Our Navy footprint is still probably the biggest piece, but we’re growing into other areas,” he shares.

### **STARS in the community**

Being a reliable steward in its communities is important to TRISTAR’s leadership. That translates to different initiatives, including supporting STEM education to bolster the workforce. More specifically, TRISTAR sponsors and participates in community events that encourage an interest in STEM, which encompass software coding activities, ethical hacking challenges, drone race competitions and more. The company also gives employees the time to volunteer with robotics clubs and other STEM initiatives in their hometowns.

“(It’s important to) give back, whether that’s your expertise in STEM or working with nonprofits to help veterans or working with nonprofits to help the homeless. Whatever the case may be ...” Gaitani expresses. “We need to be giving back and we need to be funneling resources into the community to help it grow.”

The company also champions veterans’ causes, including the Wounded Warrior Project – a non-profit veterans service organization offering a variety of programs, services and events for wounded veterans.

“I think a tenet of small businesses is that most small businesses are homegrown and they want to give back to the community,” Gaitani affirms. “And I think that’s important. I firmly believe that no matter how large we ever get, we’re looking to continue to be good stewards of the communities that we’re in and giving back is essential.”



“One of the things that I strive for is ultimately we’re supporting the soldier/sailor/Marine on the ground; that’s what we’re doing. While it is important to me as a veteran that we’re supporting our men and women in the field, I can’t do that if I don’t have a good team, if I’m not treating our people correctly ... .”

– Carlos Gaitani

### **Serving the team**

Helping the country and its clients achieve military objectives is paramount, but it doesn’t come at the expense of TRISTAR’s staff, many of whom are veterans themselves.

“One of the things that I strive for is ultimately we’re supporting the soldier/sailor/Marine on the ground; that’s what we’re doing,” Gaitani relays. “While it is important to me as a veteran that we’re supporting our men and women in the field, I can’t do that if I don’t have a good team, if

I’m not treating our people correctly and making sure that they have their needs covered.

“When we’re sending people overseas or we’re sending people on trips, we try to be very careful about how much time these people are spending away from their families.”

When looking for staff, Gaitani credits partnerships in the Hoosier state with institutions like Indiana University, Purdue University and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology as just a few examples.

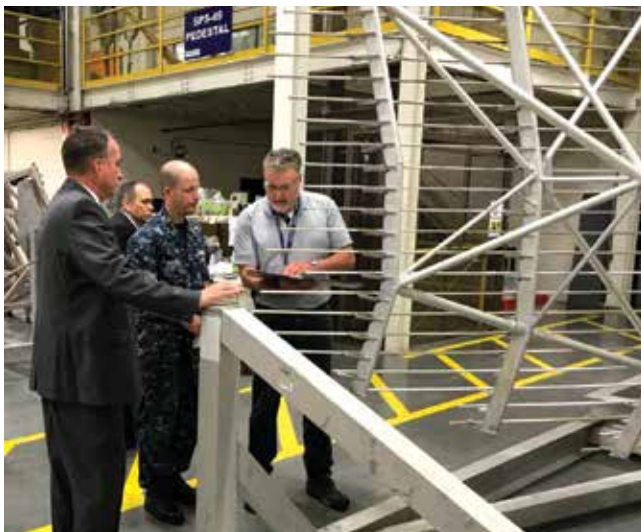
“Obviously, we’re also reaching out to veteran organizations to see how we can bring talent here,” he notes.

Continuing to build on TRISTAR’s success is made easier by its location in southern Indiana.

“The great part about Indiana is that we’re selling living here,” he praises, noting there are others who also work remotely around the country. “But it’s not hard to sell Indiana. And what we’ve found is that especially in the surrounding area around Crane, there is so much and a really great environment for families.”

Perhaps most illustrative of TRISTAR’s passion for serving its workers is that when Gaitani is asked about the future, he relays hopes of ultimately becoming an employee-owned operation (via implementation of an employee stock ownership program).

“If we’re looking at a five-year window, I would love for us to be employee owned,” he concludes. “I think that’s important, and our employees are so important to us and to me. I want to be able to give that option and help their growth and their future. I think that’s essential.”



Bloomington-based defense contractor TRISTAR steadily grows in impact, recently being notified that it will be included on the 2025 Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America.