



Building blocks to job search success

by Master Sgt. Duff E. McFadden

Last fall, Capt. Tony Christoph, Operations Officer for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, returned home from Afghanistan. One of more than 2,600 troops, he was part of the Iowa Army National Guard's largest deployment since World War II.

A full-time Operations Officer with the Iowa National Guard, Christoph discovered, like many other Americans, that funding cuts had eliminated his job. He found himself thrust into a stagnant job market facing an uncertain future.

However, thanks to an innovative National Guard Bureau program – the Job Connection Education Program (JCEP) – Christoph was hired by the City of Ankeny Police Department within a few months of his homecoming.

Initially established in Texas as a pilot program in March 2010, JCEP was specifically designed to improve employment and reemployment rates for laid-off, under-employed and unemployed Guardsmen, particularly those returning from recent deployments.

Iowa was the second state to offer this unique program, laying down its roots Nov. 1, 2011. Not coincidentally, Iowa's program was established just as members of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry were returning home from a year-long Afghanistan deployment.

Since its Iowa inception, the program assists an average of 120 participants per month, with 86 current hires and a goal of 100 hires within the first year.

While other job assistance programs exist, they typically focus on serving Soldiers transitioning from the military to civilian employment and life. JCEP focuses on the specific challenges faced by National Guard servicemembers who are deployed away from their employers or other job opportunities for extended periods of time.

"I had a great experience with the Iowa JCEP. Coming back from a deployment in which I lost my full-time job at home due to Department of Defense funding

cuts put a lot of stress on me," said Christoph. "This program is a wonderful tool for Soldiers who are in need of assistance in finding civilian employment."

What makes this program such a valuable commodity in this day and age, is while JCEP primarily assists the National Guard, it also aids other reservists, spouses, retirees moving to the civilian world, and veterans who seek help.

One of the key components of this National Guard Bureau-based program is the ability of JCEP specialists to work closely with both employers and prospective National Guard employees. They ensure employers are aware of, and know how to access, all the resources and benefits available in their efforts to hire Guard men and women.

In JCEP, Servicemembers find a distinctive tool to help them identify aptitudes and abilities honed through the military, arrive at a plan transferring them to a civilian job setting, and assist them in understanding and mastering key job search resources and services for optimal job placement.

While JCEP staff certainly can't guarantee participants will get the job, they do their best to ensure the resume and application are appropriate for that position. They also make sure the hiring manager is aware a JCEP participant is interested and has applied for the position.

While there is no single agency or organization responsible for developing a robust workforce, JCEP's intention is to partner with existing state and local agencies, such as workforce commissions, job centers, and community colleges, as a complimentary resource that helps participants seek and secure employment.

The first step to success, said Shawn Hippen, a JCEP Business Advisor and retired Iowa National Guard Soldier, is to build a resume.

JCEP

Continued on next page

Sgt. Carlos Puente Morales: A JCEP success story



Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Shawn Hippen

Although I have never met Sgt. Carlos Puente Morales in person, the first thing I noticed talking with him was his infectious confidence. This is a young man with big goals and knows how to pursue them.

As a member of the Job Connection Education Program (JCEP) team, I had the privilege of watching Morales' dream of becoming a police officer come to fruition.

Morales first heard about JCEP while demobilizing at Fort McCoy, Wis. After registering on their website and receiving a welcome letter, Morales said he didn't know how much assistance to expect.

It began with a resume that reflected his skills and abilities. "I was surprised because it looked so professional and highlighted all of my accomplishments. My improved resume definitely gave me an edge over other resumes."

Morales then participated in a mock team interview to prepare him for his upcoming interview with law enforcement officials. Because of that, Morales said he felt "calm, secure, and very comfortable," during his actual interview, which he attributes to obtaining his dream job with the City of Ottumwa Police Department.

"The mock interview was the best. The tips and suggestions I received from the JCEP professionals were huge. I was truly set up for success and received excellent feedback. I was told by a member of the Ottumwa Police Department I totally smoked the

interview. The officer said I came out on top over all the other applicants."

One of the things Morales feels that makes JCEP successful, is the one-on-one interaction between the Employment Specialist and the Soldier. "The one-on-one was excellent. The process from beginning to end was so incredible. All the professional support, advice, suggestions, and feedback directly related to my obtaining employment.

"Everything the staff did for me, the follow-up emails and phone calls, brought me success." He said his follow-up, after he obtained employment, was just as important, because he felt the JCEP Counselor truly cared about him as a person.

Morales encourages other Soldiers to utilize JCEP. "It's a huge program offered to vets to improve on their skills, find a job, or better their employment. They give you everything you need to succeed in a very competitive world."

I love the confidence you can hear in Morales' voice.

"One thing that I can say, I am thankful I signed up for JCEP because it gave me an edge through the job search process. I am glad as a veteran, we can come back to the civilian side and have a program like this."

Truly we, the JCEP team, are the thankful ones, having the pleasure of seeing a young man's dreams come true by providing him with the skills to obtain his dream job.

"There's a lot of one-on-one interaction during this part, as well as a lot of career counseling. They're asked, 'What do you want to do,' and they figure out a plan. Sometimes, seeking further education or training is their best option at this time," he said.

Next, are one-on-one interviewing techniques and mock interviews, which prepares them for the "big" interview. From job search referrals to Partner Businesses Application Assistance, JCEP offers servicemembers a firm, yet constructive follow-up throughout the hiring process. Mentorship and career counseling rounds out this distinct process

"JCEP is merely a tool for Soldiers," said Christoph. "They still need to work hard and make it a job to find a job. The individual needs to be proactive in this process and not sit back and think just because JCEP is working hard for them, they don't need to do anything.

"I strongly believe the work and time I personally invested in my job search, along with the assistance from JCEP led to the law enforcement opportunity I accepted," he said.

According to Hippen, sometimes participants are just busy with their lives. While applying for jobs, they get excited about getting an interview, or even getting hired, they forget to call and let JCEP know.

"Our most successful participants are those that are actively maintaining communications with us, letting us know their status and using all the tools available to them.

"In some cases, participants are just looking for assistance converting their military training, skills and jargon in order to build an effective resume.

Once they receive their resume, job search and interview training, they sometimes begin their search on their own and we lose contact. Some con-

tact us right away, while others forget, making it difficult to know the exact impact on those we assist.

"In reality, the more active a participant is in JCEP, the more successful they are. The closer we work together, the quicker the hire happens," he said.

With the addition of military commitments, as well as family and personal responsibilities, securing full-time employment can be difficult in today's economy.

The Job Connection Education Program, which has now expanded operations to four States – Texas, Iowa Wisconsin and Tennessee – helps

provide the necessary tools needed for participants and state-wide companies to achieve their goals.

It's a win-win situation for everyone.

"We're NGB-funded, so I believe we've just begun to understand how employment is such a large part of our Soldiers' lives," said Hippen. "If our Soldiers have a great civilian career and family life, they'll also have a great military life.

"We make a positive impact on our Soldiers' lives, we hope it's not long before we push this program out to all 50 States," he said.

Society of Human Resource Managers survey identifies benefits of hiring employees with military experience:

- ~ Strong sense of responsibility (97 percent);
- ~ Ability to work under pressure (96 percent);
- ~ Ability see a task through to completion (92 percent);
- ~ Strong leadership skills (91 percent);
- ~ High degree of professionalism (91 percent);
- ~ Strong problem-solving skills (90 percent);
- ~ Ability to multitask (89 percent);
- ~ Ability to adapt to changing situations quickly (88 percent);
- ~ Ability to give back to U.S. veterans by showing gratitude for their service (88 percent);
- ~ Positive impact on the image and/or credibility of organization (86 percent);
- ~ Sense of patriotism at organization (77 percent);
- ~ Technology/information technology skills and training (77 percent);
- ~ Strategic planning/foresight (74 percent);
- ~ Fulfillment of federal and/or state affirmative action requirements (73 percent);
- ~ Global perspective (61 percent); and
- ~ Knowledge/expertise of defense issues (60 percent).