

Manufacturers Launch Program To Hire More Veterans

Kevin Freking, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some of the nation's leading manufacturing companies announced a new program Monday to help veterans gain the skills necessary to fill some of the estimated 600,000 high-tech, manufacturing jobs that remain open because employers can't find qualified applicants.

The manufacturers say the program will be initially offered in 10 cities. The companies will work with local community and technology colleges to offer training and to put veterans on a fast track to obtaining certification in such areas as electronics, welding and machining.

The effort to hire more veterans will also involve working with employers. General Electric and Military Families at Syracuse University are developing a reference guide that employers can use to help them more effectively recruit and mentor veterans. The guide will be made available to those companies participating in efforts by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the White House to help 100,000 veterans and their spouses obtain work by 2014.

The unemployment rate for veterans is generally lower than the overall unemployment rate of 7.8 percent, but veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have had a harder time finding work and the unemployment rate for those veterans is about 2 percentage points higher than the national rate.

The new program comes amid the presidential election campaign, in which both President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney have cited veterans joblessness as a top priority. Romney has encouraged states to create a common system to recognize credentials that veterans have earned through military training. The provision was also part of a jobs bill pending in Congress.

The companies launching the new training effort are General Electric, Alcoa Inc., Boeing and Lockheed Martin. They're providing about \$6 million in seed money.

"We have an opportunity to help veterans with extraordinary leadership capabilities better compete for good paying jobs with a long-term future," said Jeff Immelt, General Electric's chairman and chief executive officer.

The first class of veterans will be enrolled in January near GE Aviation's manufacturing hub at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College in Ohio. Additional sites will open throughout 2013.

Organizers said they believed the program will help 15,000 veterans qualify for careers in manufacturing. They said manufacturing jobs pay about 27 percent more,

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

on average, than non-manufacturing jobs.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/29/2015 - 8:23pm):

http://www.impomag.com/news/2012/10/manufacturers-launch-program-hire-more-veterans?qt-digital_editions=0