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- ▶ [portland](#)
- ▶ [seattle](#)
- ▶ [classifieds](#)
- ▶ [bids](#)
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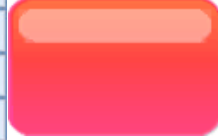
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The Skanner's Weekly Poll
Should the Big 3 automakers receive a loan bailout from the federal government?

- 1) Yes, give them the loan, the Big 3 are too big to fail
- 2) Yes, but the government should impose strict regulations on the companies
- 3) No, they dug their own grave, it's the peril of capitalism

[See Results](#)

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 E-mail Article

Union's Program Helps Vets Work

With high unemployment, welding apprenticeships provide careers

By William Crane Special to The Skanner

Today's war veterans are finding an increasingly bleak future when they return home. In part that's because many of the skills and the experience they gained in military service do not translate to the work world.

A new program recently piloted in Washington State aims to change that by training veterans to find long-term employment through a local labor union.

The Veterans in Piping (VIP) Program was designed by the United Association of Plumbers, Pipefitters and Sprinklerfitters (UA) to help veterans find stable, long-term employment through welding apprenticeships.

"My work history has been a roller coaster since I've got out," said Brandon Andre Thomas, a seven year Army veteran who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. "This is the first stable employment I've had."

Recent studies have shown that the unemployment rate among veterans aged 22-24 is three times higher than civilians the same age.

The pipefitters' program seeks to blend the most positive skills acquired through military service and apply them toward a new career where fresh workers are badly needed to fill the gap left by retiring welders and tradespeople.

Before being accepted into the program, a veteran must complete an intensive interview. Judae Bost'n, an outside consultant and certified trainer for the VIP Program, said the interview is set up like any other apprenticeship program, making sure that the veteran had the right skills and mindset to complete the program.

"It was a tremendous commitment to totally dedicate 18 weeks and put their life on hold," said Bost'n.

A key component of the program is that it adds two weeks at the beginning of the normal 16 week apprenticeship program, "to not only switch from military to civilian mode, but from war to peace mode," Bost'n says, helping veterans develop communication and social skills that can utilize at the workplace.

"The first two weeks I do a re-boot on them," said Bost'n. "The transition from the military 'we' to the civilian world which needs 'I' before 'we.'"

Part of the "re-boot" includes having veterans deal with ambiguities and complex situations that they could not predict.

Unlike military life, Bost'n said that the only thing apprentices knew for sure on any given day was arriving at 8 a.m. and leaving at 5 p.m.

"We purposely put them into these situations to see how they operate," said Bost'n.

"They are programmed to think in a military mindset," said Bost'n. "The military spent, at the very least, \$50,000 to get them through their first training."

While the military spent money to train them, there were limited options once out of service. Thomas said that the military also offered programs that helped transition back to life at home, he found this one "more user friendly." Before the VIP Program, Thomas says he had difficulty finding employment.

"I still used lingo which would scare away potential employers," said Thomas.

He also said that as an Army veteran, his skills did not translate as well into civilian jobs. Unlike the Navy or Air Force, many Army veterans only have limited options such as law enforcement or security jobs to utilize what they have learned.

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Thomas used a combination of unemployment, grants and reserve pay to support his family during his apprenticeship, but he said that one veteran who did not serve had to pay out of pocket and was not eligible for the same services as other veterans.

"Since it's a pilot program, there are always bumps in the road," said Thomas.

Thomas has himself completed the program, and sees it as a valuable opportunity to help veterans adjust to life after their service. The UA estimated that upon completion of the apprenticeship program, an hourly wage of \$40 can be expected.

"They took someone who knew nothing about welding and taught them how to weld," said Thomas. "It's union wage and a way to adequately take care of my family."

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