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First cohort starts corporate fellowships

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Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

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Kansas City-area companies, including Alpha Pointe, Amazon, Black and Veatch, Cerner, Exhibit Associates, Fleishman Hillard, Hallmark, IHG, Johnson Controls and John Knox interviewed soldiers for potential internships.

“I think this is an awesome opportunity for transitioning leaders who may not be sure what they want to do when they retire. The internship allows them to experience corporate America first-hand, before making a decision,” said Col. Norma Jean Bradford, who is retiring with 30 years of service as assistant chief of staff, Army Reserve Affairs, Combined Arms Center. “This program allows soldiers to work at a corporation three days each week prior to leaving active-duty service.”

Bradford was among the soldiers who had scheduled personal interviews. Bradford said that among the significant merits of the internship program is the ability for soldiers to transition into a potential new career by preparing a relevant portfolio and networking with businesses while still serving on active duty.

Sgt. 1st Class James Schutt, a 26-year Army veteran from the 1st Infantry Division Combat Aviation Brigade at Fort Riley, Kan., said he agreed with Bradford’s assessment.

“I have to mirror appreciation for the networking aspects of this program,” Schutt said. “From my perspective, the interviewing process is also a two-way audition of sorts — in order to see if there is synergy between the corporation and the soldier.”

Ursla McCarthy is the program manager of the Hiring Our Heroes Corporate Fellowship Program for both Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley. She said the program is available for any transitioning soldier seeking a management position.

“The job of my office includes finding corporations that are looking for management talent. Reception to the program has been very positive because corporations know the quality of candidate they get with former military individuals,” McCarthy said. “There are 17 members in this first cohort, but I can accommodate up to 25 qualified soldiers. There will be three cohorts per year going forward. Successful applicants must already possess, or be working toward, a bachelor’s degree.”

Brett Rosene, Fort Leavenworth transition services manager for Fort Leavenworth’s Soldier For Life - Transition Assistance Program, said the interview event falls under the Army Career Skills Program.

“The purpose for (the interviews) is to provide an opportunity for participating corporations that are looking for active-duty interns, to engage applicants face to face,” Rosene said. “It also gives soldiers participating as applicants in this internship program a direct opportunity to meet with specific companies. The goal is that both soldiers and corporations will be satisfied when internship opportunities are in progress.”

First Lt. Charles Hulka, Army National Guard, is the military recruiter for Amazon. He specializes in veteran military recruiting, is a former enlisted Marine and said his military experience remains valuable. Hulka supervised the two Amazon recruiting tables where representatives conducted interviews with transitioning soldiers.

“All of the members of our military recruiting team on the operations side of the house at Amazon are all prior-service. We have experienced representatives from every branch of service,” Hulka said. “Being able to have company liaisons for transitioning soldiers helps in understanding the specific skills military veterans possess and is important to our hiring process.”

Cheryl Edenfield, who is the installation administrator for the Army Career Skills Program, works with soldiers participating in SFL-TAP. She said that the CSP includes program opportunities for transitioning soldier participation in pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, internships, job shadow, on-the-job training and employment skills training.

“To be eligible to participate, soldiers must expect to be honorably discharged or discharged under honorable conditions, and released from active duty within 180 calendar days of starting a CSP,” Edenfield said.

Soldiers awaited interviews in an anteroom adjacent to the main ballroom where corporate representatives conducted the interviews. The 20-minute personal interviews were designed to add another dimension to the vetting process for the corporations and soldiers alike.



PHOTO/ CHRISTOPHER BURNETT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Kevin Romano, one of the 17 members of the first cohort of the Corporate Fellowship Program, interviews with Bret Wright of Amazon Jan 5 at the FCC as part of Hiring Our Heroes. Photo by Christopher Burnett/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

“The great thing about this program is that it gives clear context and perspective of my management abilities and applicable (military) experiences to corporations,” said Capt. Zachary Brownlee, 705th Military Police Battalion (Detention), who is transitioning after five years of service. “I’ve applied for many positions on my own to date and have received very few callbacks. But this program adds a unique element to that process with these interviews. My experience today has been that once corporate representatives meet you face to face, you can explain your resumé. And, the reception has generally been very positive.”

Hiring Our Heroes is a program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation that launched in March 2011 as a nationwide initiative to help veterans, transitioning service members and military spouses find meaningful employment opportunities.

“The primary goal of the entire initiative is to create a positive movement of awareness across America in the communities where transitioning veterans and military families return to live every day,” said Adam Martinez, senior manager of the Corporate Fellowship Program in Washington, D.C. “Hiring Our Heroes does this by working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s network of local chambers, as well as with our various other strategic partners from the public, private and non-profit sectors.”

As an integral element of the military life cycle transition model, Rosene said initiatives like the Corporate Fellowship Program also encourage soldiers to capitalize on the training opportunities available during transition to turn their military skills into post-service careers. He said the process is a valuable resource whether soldiers are pursuing additional education, finding a job in the public or private sector or starting their own business.

“We provide information, tools and training,” Rosene said. “This is a resource to ensure service members and their spouses are prepared for their next step in life.”

The number of participating companies determines the quantity of internship programs that can be offered transitioning soldiers. Kansas City-area companies interested in participating in the Corporate Fellowship Program should contact Edenfield at (913) 684-8999 or e-mail cheryl.edenfield.ctr@mail.mil.