

## Hiring Minnesota Heroes: Connecting employers with veterans

By Bill Blazar

The Minnesota Chamber is pleased to announce Hiring Minnesota Heroes, our new program that encourages employers to develop and implement programs focused on hiring military veterans. We are ready to recruit employers, help them adopt veteran hiring goals, and then, most importantly, meet those goals.

Hiring Minnesota Heroes addresses two needs important to maintaining a vital state economy.

No. 1, our state needs workers at all skill levels. The Minnesota demographer estimates that the growth rate for our workforce will decline and slow to a trickle through 2030. Businesses statewide are already reporting difficulty filling the openings they need to develop and grow here.

No. 2, our program will help those men and women who have served our nation start or resume their careers in Minnesota. The unemployment rate among veterans is higher than the state's overall rate, and the percent that has stopped looking for work is about twice that for the state as a whole.

Veterans are a valuable and underused portion of our state's workforce. Approximately 381,000 veterans live in Minnesota. Their talents and leadership experiences bridge the entire spectrum of knowledge, skills and abilities.

We recognize that Minnesota has a variety of organizations dedicated to helping veterans get ready for work. What's lacking, however, is an equally well-organized initiative aimed at Minnesota employers. The Minnesota Chamber is ideally suited to fill that need. Our staff connects with hundreds of employers each year; our statewide network of local chamber partners has the pulse of their local business communities.

Hiring Minnesota Heroes identifies three steps for employers:

- Prepare: Evaluate your current plan, and then brand yourself as military friendly.
- Recruit: Engage your community in the search with an initial goal of hiring one veteran each year.
- Empower: Enhance your work environment; celebrate your military personnel on Veterans Day.

Ted Daley is overseeing our new program. He is a former state senator from Eagan with more than 20 years of military, legislative and policy/issue advocacy management. You can contact him directly at [ted.daley@mnchamber.com](mailto:ted.daley@mnchamber.com).

Many companies have the will to create a military hiring initiative, but due to various operational challenges, fall short in carrying it out. Hiring Minnesota Heroes is here to assist. We'll work with companies on a daily basis if that's what it takes.

We will learn from and thank those companies that are already full-speed ahead on veterans hiring initiatives. We will publicize their initiatives and ours, showing how it's benefitting the profitability, productivity and leadership development within organizations. We are ready to reach out, guide and assist any company that has expressed interest but isn't quite sure of the next steps.

Hiring Minnesota Heroes is a win-win for employers and veterans alike. Our initiative will help make that reality statewide.

**Bill Blazar is interim president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce – [www.mnchamber.com](http://www.mnchamber.com).**