

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
By Jackie Gast, Director

How Can Local Businesses Help in the War Effort?

Everyday, we read about our soldiers in Iraq. Sometimes, especially if they are local, we hear about homecomings for our young men and women. Afterwards, we hear little more about these young (and not so young) veterans. Many, in the line of duty, have become individuals with a disability. Notice I did not say *disabled*.

At the January General Membership meeting, Marine Brigadier General Mastin Robeson spoke to our attendees. Those who attended will recall that he said the best way we can help our troops here at home is to hire returning veterans. Many have returned with varying severity of the effects of the war ranging from the not-so-obvious psychological wounds to the more obvious physical limitations such as loss of limbs.

Fortunately through the Department of Veterans Affairs (www.va.gov or 800-827-1000), there are many resources for our veterans and employers. If you visit their site, click on *Vocational Rehab*, then *For Employers*. On the left tool bar, scroll down until you see *Ch 31 Job Bank*. On this very current employment service site, you will find many listings for jobs in our local area listed by local companies. Of particular interest is the tool "Military to Civilian Transferable Skills Identifier" which is located just above the Ch 31 Job Bank just in case you are wondering, for example, how *Intelligence Aide* transfers to *Operations Management*.

There are also financial incentives to the employer through The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program when hiring veterans which include on the job training, non-paid work experience and special employer incentive programs. These programs include reimbursement of salary to the employer for limited periods of time or no-salary-paid opportunities.

I recently spoke with a social worker who works in one of the many VA Outpatient Clinics (on the shore, we have one in Cambridge and one in Pocomoke City). She works with a support group for POWs, many whom have a disability as defined by the American Disabilities Act. She says these individuals adamantly state they are far from disabled and refuse to be labeled as such. Kirk Bauer, head of the Disabled Sports USA, who lost a leg in Vietnam, said, "... (soldiers) joined the military because they like to achieve an objective." (from The Washington Post, Jan. 25, 2005, Health F1, F4). When attitude, dependability, determination and reliability are obstacles to overcome with today's new hires, hiring a veteran seems to make a lot of sense.