



PRESS ADVISORY

Release Date: Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2011

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Jobs Now For Maine Vets kicks off with presentation to Maine business leaders

BANGOR, ME – Jobs Now for Maine Vets, a new private-sector job training initiative, kicked off with a video presentation to business leaders at the Maine State Chamber of Commerce’s annual awards dinner. Dana Connors, president of the Maine State Chamber (<http://www.mainechamber.org>), announced the initiative as a partnership between his organization and the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP; www.mainemep.org).

Speaking to an audience of more than 400 business leaders at the Bangor Civic Center, Connors stated that workforce development would be a key issue for the Maine State Chamber in the coming year. As part of its commitment to strengthening Maine’s economic growth, the Chamber is co-sponsoring the Jobs Now for Maine Vets (www.jobsformainevets.org) initiative. He called upon businesses throughout the state to join the Chamber in supporting the initiative.

“Maine’s economy requires high-level skills, but for years, education and training in the state has failed to match evolving employer needs. In 2012 the Maine State Chamber will make workforce development one of its highest priorities,” said Connors.

The Maine State Chamber plans to focus particular attention on the problem of unemployed veterans.

“Maine has a proud military tradition. Our state has one of the highest proportions of military veterans of any state in the nation. And that tradition continues among today’s youth. In 2010 Maine had the highest Armed Forces recruitment rate of any state in the country,” Connors noted.

But the current economic climate has created problems for Maine veterans as they attempt to transition back to the civilian workforce.

The unemployment rate for veterans is significantly higher than for the general population. For younger veterans, the job challenges are particularly severe. In September 2011, more than one-third of all veterans under age 25 were out of work, as the nationwide unemployment rate for this group topped 35 percent.

“Maine can’t afford to squander the talents of returning veterans. We know from our earlier studies with the Maine Development Foundation (www.mainechamber.org/MakingMaineWork) that one of our state’s chief

impediments to economic expansion is Maine's slow population growth and aging demographics. We need to fully utilize the potential of every Maine worker. If returning veterans cannot find work because their skills don't match civilian workforce needs, then we need to provide training so they can overcome that barrier," Connors said.

The workforce training for veterans will be provided by the Maine MEP using its Mobile Outreach Skills Training (M.O.S.T.®) program. M.O.S.T.® is a rapid response skills training program that is tailored to specific employment opportunities. The program begins by working with manufacturers to identify employment needs. A customized curriculum is then developed based on the employer's skills requirements.

As a condition for utilizing the training program, the employer must agree to extend an offer of employment to all successful graduates. The trainees then enter an intensive two-week targeted skills training program aboard a high-tech mobile classroom brought to the employer's place of business. Upon completion of the training class, the trainees graduate and immediately enter their new full-time jobs. On-the-Job training and mentoring by the M.O.S.T.® team for an additional six months develops employee proficiency and helps ensure a high job retention rate, which is critical to employers.

This customized mobile training program has proved to be a success in states where it has been implemented, with a training completion rate of 97 percent, a job placement rate of 95 percent; and a job retention rate after six months of 91 percent. These results far exceed the placement and retention rates of traditional job training programs at only a fraction of the cost per job.

The Maine State Chamber President noted that the Jobs Now for Maine Vets initiative will complement a national initiative sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to encourage companies to step up and hire veterans.

"The Maine State Chamber's co-sponsorship of Jobs Now for Maine Vets is one way in which we're supporting the national initiative to Hire Our Heroes," said Connors.

Hiring our Heroes (www.uschamber.com/veterans) is a nationwide program launched earlier this year by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Working with state and regional chambers, it hosts job fairs for veterans and military spouses in an effort to encourage companies to hire veterans. Its goal is to match veterans' talents with career opportunities in the private sector.

"We see Jobs Now for Maine Vets as a natural add-on to the national program. Job fairs are an excellent means for matching employers with veterans, but we also want to ensure that veterans who need additional skill training have an opportunity to receive it through this exciting new initiative," Connors explained.

The program has now begun working with manufacturers to identify job training needs and is calling upon companies across the state to provide financial support for the initiative.

"The Maine Chamber is calling upon all Maine companies to support the initiative," Connors said. "As a community, we owe those who have served in the Armed Forces a debt of gratitude. This program offers a concrete way for Maine's business community to express its appreciation for their service, at the same time that we deepen the state's labor pool and strengthen the economy."

For more information about the Jobs Now for Maine Vets, please contact the Maine MEP by calling (207) 623-0680, or by visiting www.jobsformainevets.org.

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