



Photo by Layla Garms

Mayor Allen Joines (third from the right) presents the proclamation to Sgt. Kevin Riley and Larry Calloway (center). Also pictured are (from left): Michale Atwood, Steve Miller, James McRavion, former Marine Alfonzo Boyd and City Council member James Taylor.

City issues call to employ vets

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

For Sgt. Kevin Riley, joining the U.S. Army seven years ago felt more like a calling than a career choice.

"I was a mechanic before I joined the Army. I woke up on my 21st birthday, and I don't know what it was; I just felt a higher calling," recalled the 28 year-old father of three. "About 15 days later, I was off to basic training, and I've never looked back."

Riley is one of more than 37,000 Forsyth County residents who have served their nation in the military. Unfortunately, soldiers are often at a disadvantage once they return home and attempt to transfer their military experience to civilian careers. Nationwide, the unemployment rate for veterans is nearly a full two points higher than the national average of 7.8 percent. Though Riley, 28, who currently serves as an Army recruiter at the Hanes Mall office, isn't ready to leave his military career behind just yet, he is hopeful that, by the time he does, conditions will be better than those his comrades currently face.

"These individuals have fought and died for the average American," said the Jacksonville, Fla. native, who did a 12-

month tour of duty in Iraq. "They should be rewarded and not just given a job, but a chance to prove that they can accomplish that job."

Mayor Allen Joines recognized the contributions thousands of local veterans make to the Winston-Salem workforce on a daily basis with a special proclamation declaring Nov. 11-17 "Employ a Veteran Week" in the Twin City.

"It's an honor for me to be here today to help bring attention to Employ a Veteran Week. It's so important," Joines told the handful of veterans service workers who gathered in his office for the ceremony Tuesday morning. "The military does such a good job preparing these young men and women for work."

James McRavion was among those on hand for the Nov. 13 ceremony, held one day after the federal Veterans Day holiday. As a veterans' employment consultant for the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, McRavion is often the first point of contact for veterans who have been discharged and are looking to return to civilian lives and occupations.

"(Unemployment) is something we have to deal with, especially when

you're dealing with veterans, because veterans are coming back with more issues than what they had before," he explained. "We have resources where we can help them with any kind of employment barriers."

Vietnam War veteran Steve Miller, who spent three decades as a real estate developer before taking on his current role as a disabled veterans outreach consultant, said things are beginning to look up for veterans. Miller, a third generation soldier, credits the implementation of government initiatives like the Veterans' Retraining Assistance Program - which helps veterans ages 35-60 retool for today's economy by sending them back to school and even providing a stipend to help offset household expenses - with helping to improve employment conditions for vets.

"The government really recognizes (the issue) and is really stepping up," commented Miller, whose daughter, a Marine and son, a green beret, both followed his footsteps into military service.

The proclamation was the brainchild of Larry Calloway, the veterans' supervisor for the Winston-Salem office of the N.C. Commerce Department's Division of Workforce Solutions. Calloway, who spent three years as an

Army medic in the 1970s, said nearly one million military service men and women are slated to be deactivated over the next five years, making it more crucial than ever for employers to recognize veterans' varied assets. Calloway said the federal government has sweetened the pot for employers with the Workers' Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), which offers a credit of up to \$9,000 a year for each veteran a company employs.

"With the tax incentives that are out there right now, it's a wise decision to hire a veteran," he remarked.

Workforce Solutions is working fervently to help veterans find gainful employment, Calloway said. In the 2011 fiscal year alone, the Division partnered with other agencies to stage 41 veterans' job fairs and helped 3,816 veterans across the Tar Heel State find employment.

"At Workforce Solutions, we believe in leaving no man behind," he declared. "...Anybody that's willing to sacrifice their lives for our country, we should always be willing to reach out and help them."

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