

Solano Veterans Scene - May 2012

Vocational rehabilitation benefits for veterans includes new program

Jobs are everybody's minds these days. When you are a veteran dealing with service-connected disabilities, there are challenges and opportunities to finding a job.

One such opportunity is the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, which assists Veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, find and keep suitable jobs. You may hear it referred to as the Chapter 31 program, and it was authorized by Congress under Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 31.

For veterans with service-connected disabilities so severe that they cannot immediately consider work, Vocational Rehabilitation offers services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible. Services offered include:

- Comprehensive rehabilitation evaluation to determine abilities, skills and interests for employment
- Vocational counseling and rehabilitation planning for employment services
- Employment services such as job-training, job-seeking skills, resume development and other work-readiness assistance
- Assistance finding and keeping a job, including the use of special employer incentives and job accommodations
- On the job training, apprenticeships and non-paid work experiences
- Post-secondary training at a college, vocational, technical or business school
- Supportive rehabilitation services including case management, counseling and medical referrals
- Independent living services for veterans unable to work due to the severity of their disabilities

Active-duty servicemembers are eligible for the program if they expect to receive an honorable discharge upon separation from active duty, obtain a memorandum rating of 20 percent or more from the Veterans Administration and apply for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment services. Veterans are eligible if they have received, or will receive a discharge that is other than dishonorable and have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10 percent and apply for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment services.

The basic period of eligibility in which services may be used is 12 years from the date of separation from active military service, or the date the veteran was first notified by VA of a service-connected disability rating.

The basic period of eligibility may be extended if a vocational rehabilitation counselor determines that a veteran has a serious employment handicap. Veterans may apply for this benefit at their local Veterans Service Office.

A brand new benefit to help certain veterans who are not in other programs get training and find employment is The Vow to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 that was recently passed by Congress to provide assistance for unemployed veterans. If you are an unemployed veteran between the ages of 35 and 60 you might qualify.

The Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) was part of the recently passed legislation. The program is a VA and Department of Labor joint effort to provide training to veterans unable to find work. VRAP will provide 12 months of training assistance equal to the monthly full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty program (currently paying \$1,473 per month). Participants must be

enrolled in a program approved for VA benefits that is offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an associate degree or non-college degree or certificate.

To qualify, a Veteran must:

- Be at least 35 but no more than 60 years old
- Be unemployed on the day of application
- Have an other than dishonorable discharge
- Not be eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g. the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance)
- Not be in receipt of VA compensation due to unemployability and not be enrolled in a federal or state job training program
- Pursue a program that leads to employment in a high-demand occupation.

Nationally, the program is limited to 45,000 participants between July 1, 2012, and September 30, 2012, and an additional 54,000 participants from October 1, 2012, through March 31, 2014.

The Labor Department will provide employment assistance to every veteran who participates upon completion of their program. Applications will be accepted soon and you should check the VOW Website to be notified when and how to apply –

http://gibill.va.gov/benefits/other_programs/vrap_email_signup.html

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.