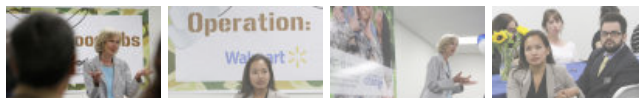


Goodwill and Walmart launch veteran jobs program in Lompoc

300 SB, VENTURA COUNTY RESIDENTS TO BENEFIT



Daniel Dreifuss/Staff

Congresswoman Lois Capps speaks at the launch of Operation: GoodJobs, a program that helps veterans and their families find meaningful work and gain financial stability, Tuesday at the Goodwill Workforce Services office in Lompoc.

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Local leaders and nonprofit workers launched the Operation GoodJobs program in Lompoc on Tuesday, at a gathering where community members discussed new career services now available for veterans in Santa Barbara County.

Operation GoodJobs, the result of a partnership between Goodwill Industries International and the Walmart Foundation, is a program that helps military veterans and their families find civilian work and gain financial stability, according to a press release from Goodwill. More than 300 veterans in Santa Barbara County and Ventura County will benefit from the program.

A \$5 million donation from the Walmart Foundation will extend the program through July 2016, according to the release.

Goodwill will connect program participants to the resources and education needed and will work with business partners to match potential employees to employers. The program will also offer a subsidized employment to veterans in order to offer employers an incentive to hire them, said Bruce Wilroy, the vice president of Goodwill Workforce Services.

The national unemployment rate for veterans is 7 percent, and the number is 20 percent for veterans under the age of 25, Wilroy said.

Community leaders met at the Goodwill Workforce Services office Tuesday to discuss the benefits of the program and the importance of introducing veterans into the civilian work force. Theresa Miller, Goodwill's veteran services coordinator, said at the launch that, as a military veteran herself, she sees other veterans struggle with the transition from a military career to a civilian career.

"Veterans, like myself ... we are used to discipline and regiment and things like that," Miller said. "Transition into other things is not easy."

Operation GoodJobs also offers assistance to military spouses and adult children dependents from the ages of 18 to 24, Miller said. She said she is also a surviving military spouse — her husband was killed in Afghanistan.

"I think the country, as a whole, is recognizing the challenges we are facing and that I have faced," Miller said. "It's not because of a lack of experience or education. It is a different world out there. We need to provide people with what they need to move forward and to turn all that experience into a new job."

Jim Maynard, a market manager for Walmart, said California has one of the highest concentrations of military veterans in the country. Additionally, Walmart is one of the largest private employers of veterans, he said.

"We believe (veterans) should have every opportunity to connect to all the resources and tools that will ... lead them to long-term success, for them and their families as well," he said.

District Representative Joyce Howerton, who works from State Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson's office and a former mayor of Lompoc, said the partnership between the Walmart Foundation and Goodwill will strengthen the community.

"Some people having the biggest struggles (finding work) will be able to at least have their door opened," Howerton said of the program. "It's difficult to develop a career or get a foothold somewhere."

Congresswoman Lois Capps appeared at the launch and said veterans are at a disadvantage in the "cutthroat" civilian job market.

"We really need to recognize what skills we have in this group of highly dedicated, patriotic folks," Capps said. "I have no doubt that this is going to (have) a strong and positive impact. We'll all be watching to see the good that's going to come."

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