

Santa Maria Sun / News

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Operation: GoodJobs helps put Central Coast veterans to work

BY AMY ASMAN

Abel Quintela served in the U.S. Navy from October of 1997 to December of 2012.

"I went in a little older than most—I was 27," Quintela told the *Sun* in a recent interview.

The Ventura County resident worked hard during his 15-year career in the military, but all of that work didn't translate very well on a résumé when he started looking for a civilian job.

"Everything changes; the economy changes every 10 years and the job requirements change," he said. "It's hard to transfer everything I learned in the military into civilian life."

Luckily for Quintela and countless other veterans like him, Goodwill Industries International is using a recent \$5 million grant from the Walmart Foundation to expand Operation: GoodJobs, which provides career services to retired military personnel and their families in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

Over the next three years, the nonprofit will connect program participants with the training, financial education, credentialing, and support they need to get back to work and advance their careers.

"I didn't realize Goodwill did training. I just thought it was a charity where you could make donations," said Quintela, who heard about Operation: GoodJobs from a friend. "[The training] does open the door and allow you to compete in the job market."

Goodwill Industries of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties is also providing subsidized employment to eligible veterans by paying a portion of their wages. The organization will work with local businesses to match potential employees with employers, and provide participants with free job search assistance, employment placement, and support services, including child care, nutrition advice, and transportation.

The program is expected to serve more than 300 veterans, their spouses, and dependent children ages 18 to 24.

"Our veterans have many great skills to offer the current job force, and with 1 million veterans slated to return home in the next five years, we need to ensure they have the opportunity to put those skills to work," retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Gary Profit, senior director of military programs at Walmart, said in a press release.

With Goodwill's help, Quintela got certified in various computer software programs and he's also been taking insurance courses online to prepare him for a new job at GEICO.

"I went in for the interview last week ... and I got a job on the spot," he said, adding that he's excited to start a career in insurance sales.

"A lot of vets might hesitate [to participate in Operation: GoodJobs] because it seems like charity, but it's not," he added. "Go ahead and take the training. These are essential skills."

Goodwill Industries of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties held an Operation: GoodJobs launch event on April 22 at the

Goodwill Workforce Services office at 1009 North H. St. in Lompoc.

For more information about the program, call the office at 981-0130 or visit goodwillvsb.org/index.php/operation-goodjobs.html.

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