

There's No Place Like Homes

A returning servicemember finds a bright future in the multifamily housing industry.

Like many veterans returning from the battlefield, Whitney Clark, CAMT, struggled to find a job when she returned home to Georgia in March 2010 after six years serving her country in Afghanistan as a member of the National Guard.

She tried going back to college but found picking up where she left off as a freshman wasn't so easy. "I was just waiting for something to come along," she says. "It was a long wait."

Clark has since found her place in the apartment industry as a maintenance engineer with the Housing Authority of the City of McRae (Georgia) because of a pilot program conducted last year by the NAA Education Institute (NAAEI) and the Georgia Apartment Industry Education Foundation (GAIEF).

She was one of 24 veterans participating in a spring 2012 program through the National Guard Association of Georgia in which Certificate for Apartment Maintenance Technicians (CAMT) courses were offered for free to Atlanta-area military veterans. The classes were held at Georgia Piedmont Technical College.

Students completed online coursework and 40 hours of hands-on maintenance training, passed a final exam and participated in a one-day "job shadow" at an apartment community. Clark recently completed her one year of apartment maintenance experience, earning her the full CAMT designation.

Tricks of the Trade

The course taught her all aspects of apartment maintenance, as well as how to work with front office staff and other members of an apartment community team, she says.

She also learned the rules and regulations—particularly those applying to affordable housing properties—governing the industry and how to complete tasks often required of apartment maintenance technicians. The course information was presented in such a way that a student could not help but learn it, she says.

In May 2012, she took her first job in the apartment industry. Clark says the past year has been hectic, but a good learning experience. A maintenance supervisor oversaw her for the first six months, but she has been on her own since then. Her CAMT has become an invaluable tool, she says.

"Without the CAMT course book, I don't think I would still

have my job," she says. "I am constantly referring to it. Starting on your own as a maintenance technician is hard."

Clark says she fully understands the tremendous responsibility placed on her.

She pays careful attention to all aspects of her job and knows the importance of explaining safety issues to residents and why they must take certain safety precautions, such as not plugging too many cords into one electrical outlet.

"After a year on the job, I can fix just about everything on

this property with my eyes closed," she says. "I also now know exactly what tools I need to take with me to do a particular task or make a repair."

Besides being able to help residents, Clark says her favorite aspect of the job is the part she plays in serving as a role model for the children at her property.

Many of whom aren't used to seeing a woman in a job most often associated with men.

"I hope that I help the children see that they can be whatever they want when they grow up," she says.

Next Steps

Meanwhile, Clark says she looks forward to the next step in her career. She has no plans to leave

apartment maintenance anytime soon, though she does toy with the idea of one day opening her own business in home or property repair. She says she likes being that one person someone knows they can call when they need help around their home.

She also advises others to consider careers in apartment maintenance.

"The industry is growing, so the job opportunities are not going anywhere, but you have to be patient and understand that you are a liability when you first start in the apartment industry as a maintenance technician," she says.

Clark encourages anyone interested in an apartment maintenance career to learn as much as they can about how to do common home repairs in an efficient manner. Also, be patient, don't give up and pay attention to everything. Look for ways to gain experience in the industry, she says.

"Working in the apartment industry is really rewarding," she says. "I couldn't imagine doing anything else. It's nice to be that person who residents call on to help them."

Visit www.naahq.org/learn/education/certification-for-apartment-maintenance-technicians to learn more about the CAMT program.



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