

Military Career Fair Introduces Veterans to Apartment Industry

BY MAUREEN LAMBE, CAE

During the past year, we have talked a lot about how the apartment industry makes an ideal career fit for veterans and military spouses. We have even conducted Certificate for Apartment Maintenance Technician (CAMT) trainings targeting veterans in Georgia and Texas. But, we also wanted a way to connect veterans with apartment industry employers and decided to kick off the 2013 National Apartment Association Education Conference & Exposition with our first NAA Education Institute Military Career Fair.

The career fair was held in San Diego on June 19 and was a tremendous success. Twenty-five companies paid \$1,000 each for booth space. Close to 200 active military, veterans and military spouses showed up to meet with employers and to learn more about the job opportunities to be found in our industry. That number may not seem like a lot of people, but many of the job seekers say it was the best military career fair they had attended.

For example, we talked with William Adams, who retired from the Navy in July after 24 years of service. He says he was impressed that all of the companies he talked with at our career fair were actually excited to meet with him and the other veterans.

"There's a lot of opportunity here," he says. "These people want to hire people like me. This is the most opportunity I have seen at a job fair —any job fair—that I have been to."

Kevin Moffat also serves in the Navy and says he stopped by to learn more about the job opportunities offered by our industry. He says he knew a little about the industry but never realized the wide variety of careers it offers to people with military backgrounds.

"Everybody seems so nice and charismatic about what they do and are willing to help you find a job and a position that you want," he says.

We have to thank all of the companies who supported and took part in the career fair. Throughout the day, we heard stories of employers who met job seekers they liked but may not have had a position that met a job seeker's specific interests or desired geographic region. Instead of letting the veterans go on

their way, employers introduced the person to representatives from other companies at the career fair that may have been a better fit for that veteran's area of interest.

The veterans and military members attending the job fair weren't the only ones impressed that day. We also heard from employers who were amazed at the caliber of job candidates they met with at the career fair. Many easily filled jobs they had open.

Tony Hogrebe, Director of Engineering for AvalonBay Communities, says his company interviewed approximately 50 people and would consider hiring most of those individuals. AvalonBay easily filled its San Diego positions and even started talking with veterans about positions it had open at its other properties around the country.

"I don't think we've met a single person that we would consider as unqualified," he says. "Everybody who has come through has had an excellent demeanor, was outgoing and well-spoken and has clearly had a responsible position in the military for a number of years. That qualifies them for our industry."

Thank you to all of the companies and service men, women and families who participated. Thanks also go to the San Diego Apartment Association and Sam Merrick at Lincoln Military Housing who helped us put together such a successful event. We hope to use this first military career fair as a model for other similar events to be held in the future.

One final note, as mentioned earlier—all of the companies participating in the career fair paid \$1,000 each for booth space. NAAEI donated 100 percent of that fee, or \$25,000 total, to two San Diego-area military charities—Armed Services YMCA San Diego and REBOOT. These charities have dedicated themselves to helping veterans and military families successfully transition to civilian life.

To learn more about career opportunities available in our industry, visit www.apartmentcareerhq.org or www.apartmentcareers.com.

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Nearly 200 active military, veterans and military spouses met with employers to learn about apartment industry job opportunities.

