VETERAN COMMUNITY

by Alyssa Pressler

With eight active military bases across the state, it's no surprise there's a large military population in North Carolina. Fort Bragg alone, which is set to be renamed Fort Liberty in June, is one of the largest military bases in the world by population. The veteran population and veteran-owned businesses are a major driver for the state's economy, as you'll read in the following profiles. Organizations across the state are focused on supporting and hiring veterans as well as helping them develop their own businesses.

PHOTO CREDIT: SENIOR AIRMAN BRITTAIN CROLLEY

SMART BUSINESS

The North Carolina Military Business Center was created by the General Assembly in 2004 with the goal of leveraging military and other business opportunities to grow businesses, jobs and the defense economy across the state.

Since then, Executive Director Scott Dorney states the organization has helped businesses bring more than $17 billion in federal revenue into the state. Just last year, the NCMBC played a role in helping contractors win 530 prime contracts, which contributed to the $8.93 billion in federal contracts awarded to businesses in North Carolina.

The state entity considers itself a business development organization. While part of its focus is ensuring the veterans transitioning out of the eight North Carolina military bases stay in the state to contribute to the economy, a large part of their work is helping small and other businesses win federal prime and subcontracts.

“Prior to establishing the NCMBC, what was missing in growing defense contracting was someone to connect defense opportunities to our business capacity, and to provide technical support to help great businesses win,” Dorney says.

He’s quick to clarify that he and his team are not responsible for winning the contracts — they’re won because the business chosen has the best product or the best service at the best price. But the NCMBC plays a supporting role in getting more businesses registered to bid, competing for and successfully executing federal contracts that make sense for their businesses.

Each contract won means more jobs and an expanding business community in North Carolina, including veteran-owned and veteran-operated businesses. It’s a win-win, but Dorney says businesses need to register with the NCMBC’s public facing database (www.MatchForce.org) to reap the benefits, no matter what their business does.

“Some might think they can’t be government contractors, or that the government does not buy what they sell,” he says. “Whether they’re making weapons, painting houses, or selling ice cream, there’s no doubt the government buys it — and wants to do business with small businesses in North Carolina.”

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TENACIOUS VETERANS TRANSFORMING HEALTH CARE

The camaraderie at MAKO Medical Laboratories runs deeper than just sharing a place to work. The North Carolina-based diagnostic lab launched in 2014 with a goal of hiring U.S. military veterans.

"I know first-hand transitioning out of the military can be tough," says Adam Price, MAKO's director of operations and a 6-year active duty Army veteran who still serves in the reserves.

"We want to support those who are willing to fight for our freedom while at the same time addressing a critical need for skilled workers in the health care industry."

Now in 2023, veterans make up the majority of MAKO's logistics department which proved to be a powerful fit when the company was tasked with deploying COVID-19 testing in 43 states.

REBUILDING TOGETHER

Rebuilding and retooling lives is part of MAKO's culture. The company developed several initiatives to help veterans find employment and develop their skills, including the Veterans Placement Program. MAKO Medical also partners with several veteran-focused non-profit organizations such as Rebuilding Together of the Triangle to help renovate a veteran's home.

"This volunteer work is just one example of the 'why' behind our day-to-day work. We work to be able to give back," says Josh Arant, chief operating officer and co-founder of MAKO Medical.

MAKO Medical's positive and passionate approach to supporting U.S. military veterans is helping transform the healthcare industry by setting an example for other companies to follow.

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