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Veterans in
Construction
Electrical
(V.I.C.E)

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The Puget Sound Electrical JATC is an apprenticeship training program that is jointly sponsored by the Puget Sound Chapter of the NECA (National Electrical Contractors Association) and IBEW local 46 (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers). For more information about them, please see: www.psejadc.org

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VETERANS IN CONSTRUCTION ELECTRICAL (V.I.C.E)

An Electrical Apprenticeship Program for Veterans Who Are Ready to Transition from Military Service to Civilian Jobs

V.I.C.E BACKGROUND

The Proclamation by President Obama for Veterans Day 2013 sets the stage for the value of programs like V.I.C.E. As the President said, “When America’s veterans return home, they continue to serve our country in new ways, bringing tremendous skills to their communities and to the workforce – leadership honed while guiding platoons through unbelievable danger, the talent to master cutting-edge technologies, the ability to adapt to unpredictable situations. These men and women should have the chance to power our economic engine, both because their talents demand it and because no one who fights for our country should ever have to fight for a job.”

Veterans who complete the V.I.C.E program don’t have to fight so hard for a job because the training prepares them well and is in demand by employers. V.I.C.E is an accelerated version of the first year of the registered apprenticeship training program operated by the Puget Sound Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (PSEJATC). Together the JATC partners: the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 46, designed the V.I.C.E. program to give veterans a jump-start in the electrical industry. To be eligible for V.I.C.E, applicants must be 18 years old or older, have a valid driver’s license high school diploma or GED, sealed high school transcript, honorable discharge within 7 years from application date, and proof of honorable discharge.

TRAINING PROGRAM

V.I.C.E is a 560 hour classroom-based training program. Students spend the first two weeks of class honing their 21st century essential skills, stress management and study skills, and later earn First Aid/CPR, Forklift, Scissor Lift and OSHA 30 certifications. In just 14 weeks students complete their first year of related supplemental instruction for the IBEW/NECA registered apprenticeship for Inside Wiremen. Most are dispatched to their first jobs within a couple of weeks after completing the V.I.C.E classroom program.

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The V.I.C.E program is also well-regarded by veterans and employers. V.I.C.E expects a great deal from those in attendance. One participant said, “V.I.C.E is so demanding. I feel like it gave me a new purpose – instead of fighting for my country I am striving for myself and my family and learning a skill that can help the whole community. I am still giving back, but in a different way.”

SkillUp WASHINGTON



Brian Westerlund – President of VECA with Washington Senator Maria Cantwell and Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye.

DESCRIPTION OF V.I.C.E TRAINING	HOURS
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Two weeks 21st Century Essential Skills	(80 hours)
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First Year NJATC Inside Wire Curriculum	
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Application Lessons	(25 hours)
Orientation Lessons	(25 hours)
Job Information Lessons	(45 hours)
Conduit Fabrication Lessons	(45 hours)
DC Theory Lessons	(60 hours)

Hands-On-Training Labs	
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Conduit Lab	
Electronics Lab	
Wiring Lab	(Total 140 hours)

NJATC Math Course	(52 hours)
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Occupational Safety and Health Administration	(36 hours)
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First Aid and CPR Training and Certification	(8 hours)
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Forklift Training and Certification	(8 hours)
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Additional Technical Training	
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NFPA 70E Electrical Safety	
Electrical Lock-Out-Tag-Out Training	
Ramset Fastening Tools Training	
Blueprint Reading	(Total 20 hours)

Additional Non-Technical Training	
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Orientation	
Dispatch	
Harassment and Discrimination	
Job Preparedness	(Total 16 hours)

TOTAL	560 HOURS
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THE V.I.C.E MODEL WORKS

Brian Westerlund, President of VECA (Veterans’ Electrical Contractors Association), a company that has been recognized nationally because of its commitment to veterans, reflected on his company’s commitment to hiring veterans. Founded in 1946, VECA now operates in many different locales and currently employs 400 electricians, including 15 V.I.C.E graduates. Ten percent of the labor force is veterans. Brian explained, “We’re looking for people who are highly disciplined, have a good attitude, want to learn and want a chance to provide for their families. We give them a chance to get their careers started.

“We feel that we owe our veterans something.” As Brian saw it, “When veterans come out of the service, some of them have hard stories. They need to get to work.” He thought that the V.I.C.E fast-track

model prepared them well. However, since V.I.C.E completers do not typically have much on-the-ground experience, he started them out in the fabrication shop, noting, “It’s a win-win. They learn about the product, and they get the skills, there’s nothing like experience. It’s also good business.” When asked what he would tell other companies about the V.I.C.E program he said, “You’d be silly if you don’t hire these vets. They give us something of great value. We’re giving back to them by giving them an opportunity. How are you not going to feel good about doing that?”

ABOUT VETERANS ENROLLED IN V.I.C.E

There is no single profile of the veterans enrolled in V.I.C.E. For example, one student, a Somali immigrant, with two young children, had moved to the United States in 1996. Shortly thereafter, he entered the Air Force and served as an Air Force logistics planner for four years. After he left the military, he worked as a security guard. Upon hearing about V.I.C.E from a co-worker, he looked on-line and started the process of enrolling, noting, “V.I.C.E seemed like a good bet. I needed to make more money than a security guard job could provide.” Another was a Marine and single parent who spent four years in the military and later worked in an accounting job. She embraced the opportunity to attend V.I.C.E, saying that, “My accounting job is not enough for me – I wanted something more physical.”

The V.I.C.E students all have different stories. For example, one young man was in the army for four years. He had completed three years of college, before dropping out. Recently unemployed, he had worked earlier as a security guard. Shortly after hearing about V.I.C.E from his pastor, Justin enrolled eager for a new challenge. Married with two children, a six year old and a 15 month baby, Justin lives near Joint Base Lewis Mc Chord (JBLM) and commutes 80 miles a day to attend V.I.C.E. He thinks that the V.I.C.E

V.I.C.E HIGHLIGHTS

Employers Hire V.I.C.E Graduates

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“They beat the traditional first year apprentices hands down.” PSEJATC Training Director, Bill McCartan said. The employers are eager to hire the V.I.C.E apprentices because they have a much broader and deeper skill set than the traditional apprentices who are at the end of their first year of apprenticeship. Even in the years of the great recession, all of the V.I.C.E students were employed within 30 days. Employers benefited too from hiring skilled workers and were eligible for the Hire Our Heroes tax credit, which was up to \$9,600.

instructor is very good, and is enthusiastic about what he is learning. Every day, he takes pictures of his work with his phone and shares them with his six year old when he gets home. The day he was interviewed, he had wired a single pole, double-throw four-way switch, the kind that are used when you have two locations where the light can be turned on or off – like the top of the stairs to a basement or downstairs in the basement. He shared a picture of the fruits of his labor. He has a friend in the program who will be starting next quarter. He likes the V.I.C.E program because everyone is a veteran. Justin said, “We’re all brothers and sisters in the military.”

Gary enlisted in the military after he finished high school, and was in the Air Force for 11 years. His military jobs included jet mechanic and law enforcement officer. He said he moved to Washington State because, “Washington takes care of vets.” He noted that Seattle Central Community College’s Vet Rep was helpful. Reflecting on his experiences in



V.I.C.E HIGHLIGHTS

V.I.C.E Streamlined Recruitment and Assessment Strategies to Meet Veterans Needs

V.I.C.E partner, the Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Employment for Women (ANEW), dually supported recruitment and assessment strategies. The partner strategies to recruit veterans and women included:

- Specialized coaching and career advising
- Outreach and recruitment at places where veterans congregate, work and turn for support
- Waiving on line application fees
- Administering math aptitude tests to determine readiness for V.I.C.E
- Engaging veterans prior to discharge so they can be paid while in training

V.I.C.E. Gary said: “It helps folks who might otherwise have had a hard time translating their skills from the military into civilian life. V.I.C.E. students are highly motivated, highly focused individuals. Contractors recognize the value of us as workers.”

Not all veterans enrolled in V.I.C.E. had related experience in the military. Drake was a forward observer. When he left the military, he said, “It was important to find something as soon as possible. I’d always wanted to be an electrician. When I was in high school, I never guessed I’d be doing trig. You can’t get anywhere without doing math.” Drake liked the V.I.C.E first year block, noting, “I love the program. Without it, someone like me wouldn’t have found a job. The hands-on work is really fun. If you’re interested in this work, try and you’ll find out how much better you are at it then you thought. And it’s fun!” Drake liked the Port Jobs Financial Tools for the Trades (FTFT) training that was offered as a supplement to the program, adding, “I am on Unemployment Insurance and my wife works and has some savings. The FTFT helped us.”

Similarly, Daryl’s previous work in field artillery did not translate to many jobs in the civilian world. He saw a flyer about V.I.C.E. at JBLM. Daryl said that he went to vocational rehabilitation, which assessed his aptitude and interests. Because he had a felony when he was younger, he learned that construction was a possible field he could pursue. A parent of two girls, ages seven and eight, Daryl saw V.I.C.E as a good opportunity, reporting that, “The wages are good. The retirement plan is good and you can’t beat the benefits. And it’s about having a career, not just being a grunt.” Daryl liked being in a class of vets. “We’re more outspoken. It’s better to be around other people who are rowdy.” Contemplating his life as an electrician, Daryl said, “There are so many avenues you can go. It’s not just pulling a wire and putting in a light switch.”

LESSONS LEARNED

V.I.C.E partners focused intensively on the strategies used to recruit, assess and support the post-program persistence of veterans. For example, they made adjustments in front end assessment procedures to ensure that veterans had the necessary math skills before they were enrolled in the program. They also saw that recruitment was difficult because some veterans needed to get jobs right away, and could not afford to participate in the 14-week program. In response, they piloted a strategy of enrolling veterans in the class before they muster out of the military, as they still have access to housing and other resources. In addition, partners discovered that though veterans liked being in a cohort with other veterans, some found it difficult to transition from V.I.C.E. to the main apprenticeship program.

The Puget Sound Electrical JATC is in the process of implementing transition efforts that preserve a fast-track for veterans that is more affordable. As the PSEJATC moves forward it will continue to have a robust veterans hiring preference. It will use a veteran-specific application, and will waive the application fee. Veterans will receive 12-hours of soft skills training before starting their apprenticeships, and will become part of a cohort of apprentices entering their first year. Together, the class will start a six-week “boot camp” facilitating their integration with the broader group of apprentices. To accelerate veteran job placements employers asking for new apprentices will be able to have the dispatcher “pierce the list” for a veteran.

V.I.C.E HIGHLIGHTS

V.I.C.E Builds on Skills Veterans Applied in the Military

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As one veteran said, “V.I.C.E is a best kept secret. All vets should know about it. It builds on our work ethic and previous experience, and provides the kind of on-job-training that we need and employers want. Lots of us worked in jobs in the military that used some of these skills. And, for those of us who didn't V.I.C.E opened a new door. I tell my friends about it. We all do.”

NEXT STEPS

Programs such as V.I.C.E are critical resources for returning veterans who long to return to the community and get to work and to the local economy. To date, the performance of V.I.C.E has been very high. Fifteen people are still enrolled and the completion rate for the 155 people who have finished the V.I.C.E. training has been 70%. Five V.I.C.E students have transferred to other apprenticeship programs. The V.I.C.E model is rigorous and the graduates are successful. The program has earned the respect of veterans and employers for its ability to efficiently and effectively capitalize and build on the skills that veterans developed in the military and apply them to a high demand career. Efforts to replicate and sustain the successful strategies honed through V.I.C.E are underway.

CASE STUDY

