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WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS NEWS

FEATURES

Veterans in Piping graduates first Wisconsin class

Date: June 7, 2011

By Sgt. Eric Liesse

112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Fourteen veterans are ready to enter the workforce as certified pipefitters with accelerated welding training, following their June 3 graduation from the first [Veterans in Piping](#) class at the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Camp Williams, Wis.

"It's not just a good thing to do, it's the right to do," said [United Association](#) General President Bill Hite, who created the program in 2008 in Washington state. "It's an honor ... to make a difference in these men and women's lives." Camp Pendleton, Calif., also has a VIP program.

The VIP program started its first class at Camp Williams in January, finishing its 20-week, free program Friday (June 3), certifying the veterans as second-year apprentices in the United Association at the Wisconsin Pipe Trades Association 99th Annual Convention. The program — a partnership between the United Association, [Wisconsin Army National Guard](#) and the [Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development](#) — provides training and also guarantees job placement for the graduates.

"When you're on active duty, you're behind the curve on employment," said graduate and Wisconsin Army National Guard member Sgt. Paul Anderson of Oconto Falls. "Thankfully, that is starting to change with programs like this." Anderson will work in UA Local 400 in Green Bay.

"To be given an opportunity like this is unheard of, and I can't think of anywhere else [this could happen]," said Sgt. Mike Dunlap, another graduate and Wisconsin Army National Guard member. Dunlap will work in UA Local 539, Minneapolis.

Of the 14 graduates, 10 are currently Wisconsin National Guard members. The program placed 10 graduates around Wisconsin, two in Minneapolis, one in South Dakota and one in North Dakota.

"We also take brotherhood and sisterhood seriously," said Mike Arndt, the UA training director. "All 14 of them said thank you. But you all need to realize you don't need to thank anyone. We need to thank you."

"This program is not about a job — it's about a career," Hite said. After five years of apprenticeship, UA members can earn journeymen status and may earn up to \$68,000 per year.

Graduates include: Justin Engelkens, Belleville; Zackary Romanowski, Chippewa Falls; Cassidy Gunderson, Grand Chute; George Maxwell, Green Bay; Michael Johnson, Menominee; Charles Buari, Middleton; Charles Cluney, Oak Creek; Paul Anderson, Oconto Falls; Benjamin Eskola, Osceola; Nicholas McGeshick, Rhinelander; Cody Fegraeus, Superior; Geoff Brand, Wausau; Michael Dunlop, Wausau; and Jacob Nieft, Wisconsin Rapids.

The second Camp Williams class will begin in mid-July.

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Anne St. Eloi, who heads Wisconsin's Veterans in Piping program, speaks at the graduation ceremony of the first group of Wisconsin-trained VIPs in Green Bay Friday (June 3). The VIP program is a free certification course in welding and pipe-fitting for veterans, National Guard and Reserve service members. The VIP graduates are then placed in apprenticeship positions. *112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Eric Liesse*



Pfc. Charles Buari, a Wisconsin Army National Guard member from Middleton, Wis., shakes hands after receiving his certification at the graduation ceremony of the first group of Wisconsin-trained Veterans in Piping in Green Bay Friday (June 3). The VIP program is a free certification course in welding and pipe-fitting for veterans, National Guard and Reserve service members. Buari will now be an apprentice with Local 539 in Minneapolis. *112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Eric Liesse*

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Senior Airman Justin Engelkens, a Wisconsin Air National Guard member from Belleville, Wis., shakes hands after receiving his certification at the graduation ceremony of the first group of Wisconsin-trained Veterans in Piping in Green Bay Friday (June 3). The VIP program is a free certification course in welding and pipe-fitting for veterans, National Guard and Reserve service members. Engelkens will now be an apprentice at Local 601 in Madison. *112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Eric Liesse*

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