

VETERANS BRING THE RIGHT STUFF

Operators who connect with military placement agencies find a valuable resource in hiring qualified chauffeurs.

By Tim Crowley, LCT senior editor



Torrey Pines Town Car assistant general manager Sean Steeves (second from left), with three new chauffeurs with prior military experience who have become standout employees, (from L to R), Robert Chastang, Ryan Barina, and Voytek Portykus.

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — As chauffeured transportation companies nationwide struggle to find qualified chauffeurs, the ranks of military veterans can provide ready-made, high-quality candidates.

Torrey Pines Town Car can vouch for how their chauffeurs with military backgrounds turn out to be lead performers. “We have three chauffeurs who are veterans, and we’ve had great success with these guys,” says assistant general manager Sean Steeves. “They’re some of the hardest workers you’ll find, and with all three, they’re instilled with punctuality and professionalism and come from a regimented, on-time background.”

To find more veteran candidates, Torrey Pines, based in San Diego, a city with one of the highest concentrations of military personnel in the U.S., has partnered with B.R.A.V.E. (Business Recruiting Allies for Veteran Employment). “I think [the limo] industry is well positioned for veteran communities,” says Eve Nasby, vice president for B.R.A.V.E. “The requirements of a good chauffeur fall in line with the skill-set of many former military members. [Veterans] are naturally on-time, dedicated, committed, and safety conscious. It’s embedded in them during boot camp to work as a team and fulfill the mission, so when it comes to getting someone from point A to point B, if there’s ever a situation with a road-block, they’ll be able to think outside

the box and overcome the obstacle.”

Heading up Torrey Pines Town Car’s chauffeur team is Ryan Barina, a former member of the Special Forces, who while on active duty, worked as a driver in Afghanistan and Iraq escorting high value personnel such as senior officers, generals, and civilian contractors through hostile territory. Barina took quickly to the chauffeur position, and his quiet professionalism made him a favorite among clients.

“We had one female client who was a real estate agent requesting a car to show two gentlemen a house,” Steeves recalls. “She asked if Barina would mind staying and be visible during the house-showing because she said she did not want to be alone. [Barina] simply stood by the door throughout the

meeting, but afterward the woman wrote the most glowing review on Yelp saying how comfortable he made her feel and how much she valued him during the trip.”

The Right Fit

Although Barina’s past military experience resembled civilian chauffeur work, a good chauffeur can come from any type of background, Nasby says. It’s important for operators and placement agencies to fully vet each candidate to make sure they’re right for the job. “You have vets coming out [of service] who truly don’t know what skill sets they have and don’t know what they want



Chauffeur Voytek Portykus with a Chevy Suburban SUV. Portykus served six years in the Navy before working as a chauffeur.

to do," he says. "If they drove dignitaries in the military, that looks great, but maybe that's not what they want to do anymore in civilian life. And conversely, maybe you have someone who was in logistics or administration while enlisted, but now they want something that gets them out of the office more."

Voytek Portykus, a Polish-born, American-raised veteran who served six years in the Navy and holds a college degree, often works the evening shifts and drives large-capacity groups with his Class A license. Voytek still addresses everyone with a crisp "Sir" or "Mam," and was quick to pick up the tech aspect of the chauffeuring job. "A lot of [vets] are well-versed in technology and get to play with some cool toys before the civilians ever get them. When we teach them how to receive reservations and use our apps, they pick that right up," Steeves says.

Tax And Marketing Benefits

The advantages for operators hiring veterans include tax benefits. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit allows employers who hire veterans and wounded soldiers to receive the credits depending on how many are employed and other criteria. Many of Torrey Pines Town Car's clients also are retired military members who appreciate the company hiring from the service branches. "They definitely have noticed and are glad that we're doing it," Steeves says.

It's important that employers treat veteran candidates like any other, and interview them thoroughly before giving them a job, Nasby advises. Placement agencies around the U.S. similar to B.R.A.V.E. help vets find work because transitioning to civilian work life can be difficult. "When it comes to hiring vets, the number one elephant in the



Eve Nasby, vice president of B.R.A.V.E. (Business Recruiting Allies for Veteran Employment)

room is PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). There are free organizations that educate employers about veteran employee retention and debunk myths about PTSD," Nasby says.

Reston Limousine in Sterling, Va., posts listings on military job boards and attends about three to four government sponsored job fairs a year. Lead recruiter Mary Radford will host booths at job fairs showcasing Reston Limousine as a great place for military vets to work.

"I don't think a lot of [veterans] come to the job fairs thinking they'll find a career or long-term job, but when they get to our booth and talk to us, they realize the flexibility they get with chauffeur work, and many find it's a great situation for



Mary Radford, recruiter at Reston Limousine

someone looking for a job in another field," Radford says. "They can get busy with us and start working with us, and I tell them all the time that when they find that job in whatever field they're really looking for, they can still work with

us part time if they want."

Radford partners with Hire Our Heroes, (hireourheroes.org), which has online job boards and scheduled job fairs throughout the year. Radford also uses Hero to Hired (h2h.jobs), a program sponsored by the Department of Defense. The Department of Veteran Affairs Employment Center (VEC) can be found at www.ebenefits.va.gov/jobs.

Radford has recently discovered another program called Troops to Trucks, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (www.dmvNOW.com/T2T), which helps military personnel obtain their civilian commercial driver's licenses.

"For people who drove trucks or operated heavy machinery in the military, this program helps take that experience into account when they apply for their CDL, and it puts them on a fast track to get it quicker," she says.

Overall, Radford recalls positive experiences with former military members. "[Veterans] tend to be extremely dependable. They're rule followers and as a group take a lot of pride in their work and role. They have a good sense of being a small part of something bigger, and they do a great job contributing to the overall success of the company." **LCT**

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HOW TO HELP VETS SUCCEED

Many veterans face tough challenges when exiting the military, evident in disturbing statistics such as 22 U.S. veterans committing suicide per day, an unemployment rate at 5.2% with 573,000 unemployed, and about 50,000 homeless. Fortunately, the non-profit placement agencies have stepped up with new ideas and programs.

PsychArmor, a non-profit that provides free education and support to any American that works with, cares about, or employs a veteran, provides online training on how to support veteran hires and make sure they succeed. Started by Marjorie Morrison, PsychArmor recently launched a call center so people can call in and get help. Liz Ballenger, executive assistant at PsychArmor, says employers will find ways to remedy problems by working with PsychArmor. "We help decode the language so employers who may be reluctant to hire veterans will feel confident in not only employing them but ensuring a high level of veteran employee retention."

PsychArmor also helps companies with government compliance for tax credits and offers full courses on hiring veterans on its website: www.psycharmor.org.