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VFW Post Launches Entrepreneur Training Program

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter

REGIONAL – In the first four days after VFW Post 1093 announced a pilot program to teach military veterans how to be entrepreneurs, 11 former soldiers signed up for the seven-week course.

To Ed Marsh, an entrepreneur himself and the commander of the VFW Post in Ipswich, the response to his first Facebook posts was proof that veterans need and are excited to learn the skills of becoming business owners.

"I was pumped," Marsh said.

VFW Post 1093 in Ipswich Photo by Stewart Lytle

The weekly training program, free for military veterans, will be held on Wednesday nights from 7 to 9:30 p.m. starting January 11 and continuing for seven weeks through March 8.

The course, taught by military veterans who are entrepreneurs, will provide information sales, marketing, finance and operations. It will be delivered in the five-paragraph operations order format familiar to former soldiers.

The program culminates on March

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8 when participants will pitch their business plans to a panel of judges in a competition for cash prizes to support their business launch. Veterans will also be introduced to potential business funding sources as well as ongoing mentorships.

The course is conducted by VetToCEO, a non-profit training company. If successful, this pilot program could be rolled out to VFW chapters around the country, Marsh said.

VetToCEO has taught the program primarily on-line. The course offered at the Ipswich VFW will be only the second one taught in a classroom. The first was at Fort Bragg Army Base in North Carolina.

"There's widespread recognition of entrepreneurship in creating dynamic economic growth. Veterans bring an extraordinary skill set to entrepreneurial ventures. A scalable training program has the potential for enormous positive impact on the economy, the success of transitioning veterans and the challenge of veterans unemployment," Marsh said.

According to a study by the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, veterans are at least 45 percent more likely to take the plunge into entrepreneurship than people with no active-duty military experience. The result, according to census data, veterans owned 2.4 million businesses, which is about 9 percent of all businesses nationwide.

About 45,000 veterans live on the North Shore.

VetToCEO is a Georgia based non-profit which provides a learning program that has helped hundreds of veterans plan their entrepreneurial businesses.

Former Navy SEAL Monte Heath, who is the VetToCEO executive director, wrote: "Existing veterans entrepreneurship training programs are either geographically constrained or omit the personal interaction that's critical to building dynamic business plans. This pilot will demonstrate a scalable model through which our proven curriculum can be dynamically delivered in person in veterans clubs around the country."

Michael Horn, director and co-founder of VetToCEO, said another advantage of the program is that veterans hire other veterans. "When a veteran starts a business that's a twofer," he said "As more vets undertake entrepreneurial ventures, they contribute to a dynamic economy and create jobs for other veterans."

Facilitating the program will be Phil Thomas, a Navy veteran and founder and CEO of the consulting firm Boston Business Group, and Ed Brzychcy, a former Army staff sergeant and infantry squad leader who launched a consulting firm, Blue Cord Management. Speakers include sales and marketing expert Jack Derby.

The Institution for Savings is a sponsor of the program. President and CEO Michael J. Jones said, "We are so pleased to sponsor this innovative program that provides important training to veterans in our community who are contemplating entrepreneurship. Our veterans, more than 45,000 on the North Shore alone, have served our country honorably and deserve the opportunity to transition to a viable career choice after their military service."

For more information, visit www.vettoceo.org/veteran-entrepreneurship-training-in-person-at-ipswich-ma-vfw-post-1093 and register in the program at http://www.vettoceo.org/registration-for-veterans-entrepreneurship-training-at-ipswich-ma-vfw-post-1093.

Dinner will be provided at each session, and limited childcare may be available through the collaboration of VFW Post 1093 and the Ipswich Family YMCA under the North Shore Veterans Collaborative.

Corporate sponsorship opportunities are also available. Contact Ed Marsh to discuss sponsorship at VFWPost1093Ipswich@gmail.com or at 978-238-9898.