

# Local 395 Supports Our Veterans

## Helmets to Hardhats, Apprenticeship Program Help Vets Work After Service



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NWITimes

**PORTAGE** | With a father and grandfather in the construction industry, David Brightwell Jr. knew at an early age that he wanted to work as an ironworker. After serving in the Army, he has followed in their footsteps and become the third generation of his family with Iron Workers Local 395.

“I always looked up to what they do as it was interesting, and I decided when I was a kid that that was the things I wanted to do,” said Brightwell.

Doug Strayer, business manager of Iron Workers Local 395, said veterans are a good fit for the construction industry and the Helmets to Hardhats union’s apprenticeship programs can help them transition into a career.

“Veterans make ideal candidates (for the apprenticeship program) as they are educated, disciplined, have a dependable record. Most of them are trained in leadership, and they have a lot of experience we use in construction,” Strayer said. “Whether through the military, they come out and they are disciplined and are mature.”

## Placing Soldiers in Good Jobs

By Nick Dmitrovich  
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The unemployment rate for Gulf War-era II veterans (meaning all those who have served since 2001) is considerably higher than non-veterans, 11.9% compared to 8.7%. Programs like the Helmets to Hardhats organization and the Iron Workers Local 395 Apprenticeship Program are working to combat this problem and bring quality

careers to America’s troops returning home from overseas.

In September 2012, the Iron Workers National Apprentice Competition was held in Indianapolis. The second place winner of the competition was David Brightwell Jr., placing 11th nationally out of 12,000. Brightwell is a soldier who spent five years in the Army, a year and a half of which was served in Afghanistan. Upon returning from his tour in the Middle East, he underwent medical treatment at Walter Reed hospitals

for injuries sustained in combat. After he recovered he joined the apprenticeship program to fulfill the dream he had since he was four years old of becoming an iron worker. Brightwell says the most rewarding part of his career so far is overcoming a leg injury, doing what he loves and putting up buildings.

“You get that visual and physical satisfaction that a lot of other jobs don’t give you. Everyday you wake up and see what you’ve actu-



The nonprofit Helmets to Hardhats program is an avenue to help connect National Guard, reserve and transitional active duty members to career opportunities in the construction industry. The union's three-year program allows apprentices to earn money while they learn and with the majority of their time on the work site, they receive on-the-job training.

"Helmets to Hardhats helps direct veterans in our direction," Strayer said. "When they leave the military, they don't always know what to do. It's like, 'What should I

do now? Go to college? Sit behind a desk?' They are used to working with their hands."

Brightwell Jr. signed up for Helmets to Hardhats while in Afghanistan. He served as an Army infantryman with the 10th Mountain Division for just under five years. He also underwent medical treatment at Walter Reed hospitals for injuries he sustained in combat.

He is now wrapping up his apprenticeship program and recently placed 12th out of about 12,000 at the Iron Workers National Apprentice Competition in Indianapolis. The event is an opportunity for apprentices to showcase their skills through exercises including a written test, knot and rod tying, burning and welding competitions, and a column climb.

"It was a good experience," Brightwell Jr. said. "I met a lot of good ironworkers from all over the country. We were able to show them what we know in Local 395. We

make some of the best iron in the country."

"When you get to know and learn about his background and consider what he has seen and gone through and accomplished as well as he is doing a good job in training," Strayer said. "David is one of our success stories."

Strayer believes continuing to work with veterans is vital to the union's community role.

"We feel as former members of the military, they deserve the same opportunities. We believe as a union, we should provide them excellent opportunities to raise a family, make a living and retire with dignity and pension. After serving, we want to help them to give them the best life afterwards."

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For more information on Iron Workers Local 395, visit [www.ironworkers.org](http://www.ironworkers.org) and on Helmets to Hardhats, visit [www.helmetstohardhats.org](http://www.helmetstohardhats.org).

said Davy Hal, an instructor with the Local 395 apprenticeship program. "It's an investment in young people the Union Iron Working Industry is eager to make; investing millions of dollars every year in teaching, instructing and mentoring the next generation of successful iron workers. It's about real life, and real skills; it's about learning and training. It's about preparing young people for a successful future in a career they'll love," a Local 395 spokesman said.

Helmets to Hardhats is another program that is helping our nation's veterans find quality careers in building and

construction. Through funding from the Center For Military Recruitment, Assessment and Veterans Employment, the Helmets to Hardhats program functions as a referral organization that puts eligible candidates in touch with promising career providers, and puts providers in touch with candidates. As of December 2012, newly released statistics show that Helmets to Hardhats has verified the placement of 5,887 veterans into construction jobs, including more than 200 "Wounded Warriors."

In addition to helping soldiers find jobs, the program has invested more than \$124 million into programs for

the new apprentices – which cost an average of \$21,000 per placement. Over 100,000 veterans are registered on the site.

Programs like Helmets to Hardhats, and the apprenticeships through Iron Workers Local 395, are doing their part responsible for the steady decline in veteran unemployment over the few quarters. While the number of employed veterans still remains below the national average, programs like these are a step in the right direction for helping those who defer to our nation find quality careers when they return home.