



SALUTE TO VETERANS

THE RIGHT STUFF

Vets are finding out that they have just what it takes to become entrepreneurs

By ERIKA PRAFDER

WHEN Mark L. Rockefeller took the leap from his high-paying job with a prominent Wall Street law firm job to launch a start-up, he had to rely in part on strengths he'd developed as a nine-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

A judge advocate general (JAG) who spent time in Iraq under General David Petraeus, Rockefeller helped the Iraqis prosecute terror suspects.

"Having to put on a bulletproof vest and go in to court each day, you become adept at working with diverse sets of people toward a common goal. There's a great parallel between that and trying to run a company," he says.

Rockefeller used his knowledge of tracking regulatory changes to co-found StreetShares (streetshares.com) with a software engineer and banker/credit expert.

StreetShares is a free, members-only marketplace where investors



Ex-military business people like Mark Rockefeller (left) and programs such as the Veterans Entrepreneurship Boot Camp at Pace are opening doors.

bid to provide shares of commercial loans to main street businesses of their choosing. Business owners are given the opportunity to "pitch" their request directly to investor members.

When trying to raise money for his venture, Rockefeller's military traits kicked into high gear.

"You develop the persistence in the military necessary to fund-raise for a company like this," says Rockefeller.

Today, along with a team that's grown to 13, Rockefeller is moti-



Nikhil Kalanker

vated to help other veterans on the entrepreneurial path.

"The vast majority of vets are ambitious self-starters and active team members with a great tradition of business ownership going back to World War II," says Rockefeller.

Area colleges and universities are also picking up on the need for entrepreneur programming aimed toward veterans.

At New York University, the school's Entrepreneurial Institute recently sponsored a panel discus-

sion on the topic, called, "Vetreprenuers: How to Turn Military Success into Business Success."

The event featured chief executives and co-founders from some of the city's leading brands, including StreetShares. The event was held at Leslie eLab at NYU, a newly opened collaborative space for entrepreneurial activity.

"It incorporates a prototype/fabrication lab, a workstation lab with software development tools and a dedicated staff who provide consulting and mentorship," says Frank Rimalovski, executive director of the institute.

At Pace University, through a grant from the Blackstone Charitable Foundation, the school recently launched a Veterans Entrepreneurship Boot Camp. The intensive seven-week program meets regularly at Pace's Entrepreneurship Lab, a newly launched facility.

The series covers business and entrepreneurship instruction, technical skills and hands-on lab work, says Bruce Bachenheimer, executive director of the Entrepreneurship Lab. Held at Pace's Manhattan campus, the boot camps are offered to Pace student vets and vets throughout the Tri-State area.

LOOK LOCAL

Use NYC's resources to your benefit

Veterans have a dizzying array of benefits on offer to them. However, because these benefits are so complex, they can be hard to find.

Rather than going straight to the federal level, try the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs in New York City. The office is at 346 Broadway, 8 West; call 212-442-4171 or 311; or log on to nyc.gov/html/vets/html/faq/faq.shtml#1.

MOVA advises the mayor on issues and initiatives impacting the veteran and military community. It also works with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs (NYSOVA), city agencies, veterans' organizations and other stakeholders to offer services to veterans, their dependents and survivors.

Access NYC (nyc.gov/accessnyc) is a useful online resource for quickly finding out what benefits you qualify for. You can screen for over 20 city, state and federal health and human service benefit programs. It offers help with applying for benefits, searching for office locations and filling out applications.

— Joseph Gallivan