

# Smooth Transitions

Last Modified on 12/06/2019 2:17 pm EST

## South Puget Sound, Washington

Last year, Washington state budgeted \$495 million to widen seven miles of Interstate 5 that run along Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM). This installation, which was formed in 2010 from the merger of the Army's Fort Lewis and the McChord Air Force base, has more than 40,000 active service members and about 17,000 civilian workers, making it Washington's second largest employer (after aerospace giant The Boeing Company).

The improving highway, which traverses the Pacific Northwest's booming South Puget Sound area, is a fitting metaphor for transitioning service members' path to civilian employment in the region. The workforce development programs are the work of local governments, businesses and the base. They created the South Sound Military & Communities Partnership to provide a single point of contact to develop, discover and coordinate opportunities in higher education, entrepreneurship, employment, and career and technical apprenticeship training. Among those participating are local and county stakeholders from more than 15 communities, including the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

The culmination of each year's efforts is the Washington State Military Transition Summit, where thousands of service members and a range of educators and employers convene. However, many programs serve the military throughout the year, including:

- Rally Point 6 (RP6) in the City of Lakewood, a national nonprofit that helps service members, veterans and their families map out a strategy for their transition. Help can take the form of reformatting resumes or guiding a homeless veteran into emergency care. Nearly all RP6 participants – 98 percent – are connected to resources, and 40 percent achieve their employment goals, which is well above the industry standard.
- The Veteran Internship Program in Tacoma, which focuses on those with cyber security and training development skills who are interested in working in local government. Veterans help the “VIPs” by serving as transition coaches.
- Camo2Commerce, a project of the Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council, Workforce Central, local chambers of commerce and other partners, provides career coaching, specific training, and placement with the help of local community and technical colleges. In November 2015, the program received the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Capital One Award for Small Business Veteran and Military Spouse Employment for leadership as a small business or organization in hiring veterans,

transitioning service members and military spouses. In January, the program also received \$2.5 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, which will help to keep its doors open through June 2017.

- The human resources department of the city of Tacoma does job recruitment at JBLM. It helps potential job candidates by conducting open mock interview exercises and employment information sessions. The city also offers a veterans hiring preference per its municipal code.

Steve Vincent, a retired U.S. Navy captain who serves as a volunteer member of the Washington Military Transition Council, observed, "Transition is a full-contact team sport. The unique catalyst in this community is the willingness for all the players to roll up their sleeves and work together. We bring together a broad section of industry, education, for-profit training, Department of Defense, state agencies and nonprofits with a common interest of helping a transitioning service member successfully transition into the civilian world and land on their feet. We do this because many of us have been in their shoes ... and we know what great employees they will be."

Transition services are just one manifestation of the strong bond among the base, its military and civilian personnel, and the community at large. Their mutual commitment came to the fore when JBLM was faced with a possible reduction of 11,000 soldiers and civilian jobs through the Army's Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (SPEA) 2020. At an Army SPEA 2020 listening session held in January 2015, the support of representatives of 600 local stakeholders helped to persuade the Army to slash the proposed reductions by 90 percent, down to 1,250 active duty personnel. The welcoming community, flourishing area employers including Boeing, Amazon, Starbucks, and Microsoft, the transition services, plus the magnificent waters and mountains of the Puget Sound region, are key elements in making JBLM the nation's number one requested installation. — KB

---