

Fort Collins veteran to utilize immersion program Wall Street Warfighters Foundation to give instruction to ex-Marines

BY PAT FERRIER • PATFERRIER@COLORADOAN.COM • JANUARY 12, 2009

When Marine Staff Sgt. John Jones left the corps after 12 years, few job offers waited for him.

As the country began its rapid slide into recession, the civilian marketplace was less than welcoming to an ex-Marine who had lost both legs in the first gulf war.

"It's very hard for former military servicemen and women who've been disabled or injured to find employment because we're viewed as under-qualified in most cases," said Jones, who moved with his wife and children to Fort Collins six months ago to establish residency and attend CSU's business school.

"The fact is our knowledge and leadership is undervalued in the civilian market because we're overqualified with our global experience but lack necessary credentials for most jobs because we don't have a certain piece of required paper," he said. That's about to change.

On Jan. 26, Jones will begin a six-month financial boot camp that will train him as a securities trader.

This time, instead of a drill sergeant with a buzz cut and M-16, Jones will get his instruction from men and women in business suits armed with computers.

Jones is one of two disabled veterans enrolled in the first-ever Operation Wall Street, a six-month immersion program in the financial industry created by the Wall Street Warfighters Foundation.

Drexel Hamilton, a Philadelphia brokerage firm, helps fund the training program, room and board, securities exam courses to prepare for Series 7 and 63 certification, and monthly stipend.

Drexel Hamilton, chaired by Lawrence Doll, is a service-disabled, veteran-owned small business that began the foundation to help disabled vets.

"We're going after disabled veterans," said Joel Canfield, executive director for Wall Street Warfighters Foundation.

"There are many other organizations that help with job transitions, including Helmets to Hard Hats, which provides construction jobs, internships and training. But that doesn't do much for a guy with no legs and the added burden he has to carry," Canfield said from his Philadelphia office.

"What fits these guys better is training jobs where people can be behind desks or out managing money."

The program has the backing of the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace, who leads the Wall Street Warfighters Foundation advisory board.

That affiliation gives the program instant credibility, said Jones, who was skeptical at first.

"If Gen. Pace is actually backing this and guaranteeing it, based on his word that the whole thing is legit, I will try it," said Jones, who will move to Philadelphia in a couple weeks.

If successful, in six months, Jones will be a licensed securities trader back in Colorado with an internship lined up and a stable job waiting for him.

With the financial services industry suffering from a crisis in confidence, Canfield said Operation Wall Street is helping to "reinstill integrity on Wall Street one veteran at a time."

"Who do you want managing your money? People who have already done the wrong things or veterans who have been out there trying to do the right thing?"

The financial services industry already has a network of Vietnam vets who have been successful in the industry who have earmarked a number of jobs for disabled veterans participating in the program.

"They're psyched," Canfield said. "They're closing wounds from the past. They didn't have anything available for them when they came back so now they can say, hey, I have a place for you."

The veterans get good training and have a chance to make good money and be successful, he said.

The typical salary ranges from \$50,000 to \$75,000 in addition to bonuses.

Jones blames the nation's lack of confidence in the financial services industry on the companies themselves that "made huge mistakes. That's basically their own fault; they didn't have the right leadership in their companies."

But he believes the U.S. is still the safest place to invest, save, buy and start a company.

"It is a little trying right now, but it's not as bad as in the '30s" when unemployment was near



Marine veteran John Jones has been chosen as one of two participants in the Wall Street Warfighters Foundation's Operation Wall Street, a program that helps disabled veterans get trained to work in the financial services industry. Jones, who is pictured at Edora Park on Friday, lost both legs below the knee after the vehicle he was in hit a mine in Iraq in January 2005. Jones uses prosthetic legs to walk. (Rich Abrahamson The Coloradoan)

25 percent.

Wall Street may be a piece of cake for Jones who has spent two years learning to use his new prosthetic legs and now can often be seen running through the city's open space.

Staff Sgt. Jones had just two months left to his tour on Jan. 3, 2005, when the 65 men under his command in the First Battalion 7th Marines, were ordered to move out to take over for a company heading home.

"That morning before we started to head out, I made sure I knelt down and prayed," he said. "I sensed something was going to happen, I just didn't know what."

Twenty minutes later, Jones' future changed forever when his humvee hit a double-stacked antitank mine.

The blast sent him 25 feet in the air; he was the only one hurt.

After being medevaced to Bethesda Naval Medical Center, Jones lost his right leg just below the knee.

Doctors worked for 10 months to save the left leg before Jones told them to take it as well.

After a long rehab, Jones and his wife moved to Fort Collins to be closer to his wife's mother in Casper, Wyo., and establish residency in Colorado before enrolling in CSU's College of Business, where he planned to major in international business and marketing. Now, Jones said, the immersion program will be as valuable as a four-year degree.

"These individuals know how to do it by taking qualified individuals and putting them in a six-month, highly intense, demanding program and know we can do it. We've done it before."