

# LEADING THE CHARGE

Franchisors across the country are helping veterans find success in business.



**M**ilitary veterans own more than 66,000 franchises in the

U.S.—that's one out of every seven—and it's easy to see why. "Most military people I've been around are very organized, detailed, and systems-oriented," says Sean Oatney, adding that those are qualities that add up to success in his industry. A former Army Ranger, Oatney is EVP and director of sales for Signarama, a 900-location franchise that provides a full range of sign and graphics services to all segments of business.

Steve Caldeira, president and CEO of the International Franchise Association (IFA), agrees. "Veterans

fought for us," he says. "Now our industry is fighting for them through increased small-business ownership and employment opportunities." Vet-Fran, a 20-year-old initiative of the IFA, is composed of 463 member companies that offer financial incentives, training, and mentoring to veterans interested in franchising.

Many franchisors provide vets with support-related benefits, from advice on locations and public relations to steep discounts based on length of military service. Others go out of their way to hire and coach vets. Given that in 2011 the unemployment rate for veterans who had served post-9/11 was 12.1%, it's clearly a critical need.

Vietnam-era veteran Greg Tanner, Aaron's national director-franchising, has been instrumental in helping vets find jobs in the 1,970 company-owned and franchised Aaron's furniture, appliance, electronics, and computer stores throughout

North America. As a member of the International Franchise Association's VetFran committee, he is inspiring others to do the same.

Brian Miller, president of The Entrepreneur's Source, is with him. "We provide career coaching to vets because many coming back to the tight labor market aren't going to know where to turn," he says. A leading business ownership coaching organization, The Entrepreneur's Source offers free career advice to anyone through 230 coaches, including a networking group of retired military personnel.

## All About Teamwork

Being part of a network helps veterans feel connected, and that's another beauty of franchising. The military is all about teamwork, one of the skills—along with discipline and commitment—that fits well with franchising, says Rick Moreno, SVP of administration and strategic planning for Little Caesars, the fastest-growing pizza chain in the country. Little Caesars, which started its veterans program six years ago, has franchised about 50 veterans since then.

Interest in franchising is currently up, says the IFA, and the industry is stronger economically now than it was 12 months ago. There's something for everyone in the business, and there's one thing about franchising on which everyone agrees: Veterans are a great fit.

"If a vet buys your franchise, he or she is going to put in the effort to succeed," says Tom Portesy, president of MFV Expositions, which will be producing the International Franchise Expo in New York City in mid-June. "Franchisors are leading the charge to help them." ●

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