

Derrick Middleton works for Materials and Chemistry Laboratory Inc. while studying chemical engineering as part of the "America's Veterans to Tennessee Engineers Program."



# Program Provides Education, Training

Earn an engineering degree while you work in the field.

BY DAN FAZIO

**A**fter six years of forecasting weather in the Air Force, Staff Sgt. **Mark Dellaquila** was at a crossroads: Should he re-enlist or separate to pursue a college degree in engineering?

"There was an on-going battle inside of my head about whether to separate or re-enlist," Dellaquila said. "I had a pretty good six-year enlistment in the Air Force, and I enjoyed it. I also received invaluable experience and training. But I knew I wasn't going to finish a degree in engineering while on active duty with both the long work hours and the constant unknowns about where I'd be stationed in the future."

A work force development program launched last year in the Tennessee Valley helped Dellaquila make up his mind. Called "Vets to the Valley," the initiative offers technically trained veterans the opportunity to earn an engineering degree while working for partner employers to

gain hands-on experience in the field. The program offers graduates priority consideration for full-time positions.

"The initiative includes two slightly different, but locally tailored programs designed to bring talented, military veterans together with the region's top technical organizations and employers," said Erin Koshut, program manager for Vets to the Valley. "These highly trained ex-military personnel can help our nation fill the ever-increasing gap in engineering to keep us competitive, while at the same time providing a financially secure plan for them and their families." >>



**Mark Dellaquila**  
U.S. Air Force (2003-2009)  
Staff Sergeant (E-5)



## THE NEW-STEM PROGRAM

### HOW TO APPLY

Candidates who want to participate in either program may find out more about the requirements and qualifications needed, as well as apply at [www.tennvalleycorridor.org](http://www.tennvalleycorridor.org).

### NEW-STEM

While pursuing their degree, NEW-STEM students participate in a co-op program offered by either a Department of Defense (DoD) command on Redstone Arsenal or a private sector company in Huntsville, Ala. Participating organizations include:

- DoD's Missile Defense Agency
- Northrop Grumman Corporation
- Raytheon Company
- Intuitive Research and Technology Corporation
- Lockheed Martin Corporation

») “Vets to the Valley” focuses on two areas within the Tennessee Valley corridor: Huntsville, Ala., and Oak Ridge, Tenn. Participating employers provide a paid co-op/work-study program that allows participants to work in an engineering job while in school, and then be given priority consideration to permanently fill that position upon graduation.

## NEW-STEM Plugs the Gap

The Non-Traditional Emerging Workforce in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (NEW-STEM) initiative is designed to attract technically trained non-commissioned officers and warrant officers who are leaving the military to the technology-rich Huntsville region. NEW-STEM provides these veterans with the opportunity to earn their engineering degree at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

As one of six members of the inaugural NEW-STEM class, Dellaquila started the co-op work program in summer 2009 and school in Huntsville in the fall. He

is working for Northrop Grumman while pursuing a degree in aerospace or industrial engineering.

“The program literally addressed and answered every hesitation or reservation

I had about leaving the Air Force,” said Dellaquila, who monitored global weather conditions affecting daily operations of the Air Force’s largest Air and Space Operations Center. “It would provide me with the opportunity to receive a top-notch education in engineering and also a job in the same area to not only pay the bills but to give me hands-on, real-life experience in the courses I would be studying.

The second NEW-STEM class began its co-op and classes in January. Veterans are now being recruited for the fall 2010 class, and applications will be accepted until April 2, 2010. About 20 positions are open.

“This is a great initiative to help veterans transition from the military way of life to a rewarding career as a civilian while furthering their education in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field,” Dellaquila said. “I hope more NCOs who want to pursue a civilian career in a STEM field will see what a great opportunity this is and apply. It can really be a life-changing experience.”

## America's Veterans to Tennessee Engineers

NEW-STEM’s counterpart in Oak Ridge, Tenn., “America’s Veterans to Ten- »)

## AMERICA'S VETERANS TO TENNESSEE ENGINEERS

### Participating agencies include:

- B&W Y-12
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- Bechtel
- UT-Battelle (Oak Ridge National Laboratory)
- Pro2Serve
- Energy Solutions
- Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC)
- GEM
- B&W Clinch River
- Information International Associates, Inc.
- ExergX
- Tetra Tech
- U.S. Enrichment Corporation (USEC)
- Materials and Chemistry Laboratory (MCL), Inc.
- Ingenium Professional Services, Inc.
- URS Corporation

### Participating educational organizations include:

- Roane State Community College
- Pellissippi State Technical Community College
- The University of Tennessee
- Tennessee Technological University

» Tennessee Engineers,” focuses on attracting veterans and wounded warriors. The program, which launched in May 2008, is geared to attract veterans interested in nuclear, chemical, electrical, mechanical or civil engineering.

One of the first participants in the program was Derrick Middleton, a Marine Corps infantryman who served in Iraq. After learning about America’s Veterans to Tennessee Engineers, Middleton decided to pursue a chemical engineering degree.

“The transition from military to civilian life is a very difficult one,” said Middleton, who is working part time at Materials and Chemistry Laboratory Inc. (MCLinc) while studying at Pellissippi State Community College. “This program has already greatly benefitted me in the aspect of allowing what is normally a significantly hard and uncertain period of time to be more of an exciting time. It has provided the perfect opportunity for a somewhat immediate job placement, in an environment that encourages and expects an education too.”

The program holds three selection boards each year. The selection board comprises senior members of the participating corporations and universities.

For Middleton, the resources available to help him complete the program – tutoring, mentorship, advice and encouragement – were one of the main reasons he chose to participate.

“I would encourage all veterans to look into this program,” Middleton said. “I am sure glad I did. It has turned out to be a life-changing opportunity. This program has opened up many doors for me. I believe it would open up many for others.”



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