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Franchised companies are looking for a few good veterans to run their businesses.

Through *VetFran*, the veterans outreach program of the International Franchise Association (IFA), more than 200 organizations—including The UPS Store, Sport Clips, Inc. and Dunkin' Donuts—offer veterans special deals for becoming franchise owners.

These businesses may give veterans discounts on franchise fees, waive certain start-up costs or provide extra training. And while this may seem like a nice-to-do charity, corporate executives have watched their profits grow as veterans deploy military tactics in the business world.

"Some of those basic military skills that [service personnel] receive are very transferable entrepreneurial skills," says franchise consultant Jack Pearce, member of the IFA and certified franchise executive. "Being a franchise owner primarily centers around discipline and taking action. Veterans tend to be action-oriented guys and gals."

Most important, Pearce said, veterans "get the job done."

Little Caesars Vet Program

In November 2004, billionaire Michael Ilitch picked up a copy of *USA Today* and saw a picture of Staff Sgt. Robbie Doughty, a former military intelligence soldier, learning how to walk on prosthetic limbs. Ilitch, a former Marine who served on Hawaii during the Korean War era, read about how Doughty lost his legs in an ambush in Iraq, his road to recovery and why the Paducah, Ky., native had so much to be thankful for.

Doughty's story touched Ilitch so deeply that he called the Iraq vet.

"I was impressed with his attitude, which really came through in the article I read," said Ilitch, who owns the Detroit Tigers and Detroit Red Wings and founded Little Caesars Pizza.

Ilitch related to Doughty's situation. A former Major League Baseball prospect, Ilitch was forced to quit baseball after a career-ending injury.

"My injury was nothing like Robbie's," he said, "but it caused me to have to answer the question: what now? It was a hard time, and I could relate a little bit to Robbie's situation."

Franchises

Many companies offer veterans special discounts and help them own a business. They say vets 'get the job done.' Here are several examples from the owner and franchisee perspectives.

Want You

by Fred Minnick

So he offered Doughty a Little Caesars franchise store. "He was also concerned about my physical health," Doughty said. "He thought it might be smart if I got a partner in the business."

Doughty brought in retired chief warrant officer and Iraq veteran Lloyd Allard, and the two have been operating their Little Caesars store since January 2007. What's more, the two were the inspiration for the Little Caesars Veterans Program, which provides all qualified, honorably discharged veterans a \$5,000 reduction of the franchising fee, financing benefits and a \$5,000 credit on the equipment order for the first store.

Service-disabled veterans like Doughty get the franchising fee (\$20,000) waived, additional financing options and benefits, a \$10,000 credit on the initial equipment order and grand opening marketing support from leading national companies.

"As I thought about the businesses I own, I thought what better way to say thank you to the men and women who have given so much for our nation than to provide them with a business opportunity: becoming a Little Caesars franchisee," Ilitch said.

Since launching its program on Veterans Day 2006, the company said it has had more than 1,100 inquiries, and 13 veterans have been approved to become Little Caesars franchisees. In September, Ilitch received VA's Secretary's Award.

As for making pizzas, it's literally a piece of pie, Doughty said. "The military really prepared us for something like this," Doughty said. "You put pepperonis on a pizza like this, you put cheese on like this, you make dough this way. All the tasks are simplified like that. We're working within a system just like the military."

CMIT Solutions Veteran Program

CMIT Solutions, a leading information technology solutions provider for small and mid-size businesses, announced on July 30 it will offer a 20% discount on franchises for qualified veterans, a savings of nearly \$8,000. CMIT enacted this program in hopes of providing honorably discharged veterans with a solid, high-growth busi-



PHOTO COURTESY LITTLE CAESARS

Robbie Doughty, who lost his legs in an ambush in Iraq in 2004, is a beneficiary of Little Caesars Veterans Program. He operates a franchise in Paducah, Ky.

ness opportunity.

“Many veterans often have a strong technology background that comes from years of service in our increasingly sophisticated armed forces,” said Jeff Connally, president and CEO of CMIT. “Not to mention that veterans possess unparalleled drive and dedication. We are honored to provide them with this discount in exchange for their years of sacrifice and service to our country.”

Jerry Munger has always been a computer wizard. After Munger enlisted in the Navy in 1967, the military bypassed his post-basic computer training because of his college education and sent him straight to sea near Vietnam, including the Coral Sea, where he spent two years maintaining ship technology.

Forty years later, the techie veteran is still at it. Only now he’s not repairing spying equipment; he’s providing networking and computer solutions for clients as a franchisee for CMIT Solutions.

Munger has been with CMIT since June 2005, and said the company gives veterans a 27% discount on fees.

“CMIT is trying to help out veter-

ans,” Munger said. “There’s a lot of experienced people getting out of the service and having problems figuring out where they want to go.”

He worked for Panasonic Industrial for nine years, and now that company is his client. “I left [Panasonic] because it was outsourcing all of our functions to other organizations,” he said. “My particular function in an automated warehouse, it turned around and outsourced about 25% right back to me.”

Munger admits he’s not quite operating at a profit yet, as he’s putting most of the revenue back into the company. He said running a company is much more complex than simply working.

“You’re constantly hitting the road and searching for customers,” he said.

Navis Packing & Shipping

Steve Smith, a retired Army sergeant major and 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran, loves logistics. After spending much of his military career coordinating the beans and bullets for high-speed units, such as the 101st Airborne Division and 10th Special Forces Group, Smith had a

hard time finding good jobs when he retired in 2002 after 24 years of service.

“It’s very hard for people who are retired military to work for somebody else,” Smith said.

Instead of possibly working for a young college graduate with little experience, Smith decided to buy a franchise. He sought help from FranChoice, a franchising consultancy firm, and looked for logistic solutions companies. He found Navis (Latin for navigate), a specialized custom-packing and shipping company that has a steady demand for services with the billions of people using eBay and other e-commerce Web sites.

“Navis specializes in fragile, large, awkward and valuable items,” said Smith, who received a 20% discount off of Navis’ franchising fee. “That really resonated with me, and the fact I could provide customer service meant a lot, too.”

These days, Smith is operating one of the company’s more successful stores, with annual revenues of \$500,000. In 2005, he was named Navis’ *Franchisee of the Year*, which he attributes to skills gained in the military. “Navis said ‘Here’s the franchise model. Follow it,’” Smith said. “So, I did.”

His fellow franchisees across the country call Smith the “Kool-Aid Kid” because he so firmly believes in the Navis business plan.

He implores other veterans to find a franchise like he did and “drink the company’s ‘Kool-Aid.’” With so many franchising options available for veterans, Smith believes it’s one of the best veteran benefits available. However, he encourages veterans to be realistic when looking at opportunities and to choose one that matches their skill sets.

“Why pick a franchise you’d be miserable with?” he said. “Pick one you’ll be passionate about, because there will be bad days. But I’m driving the train here, so I have nobody else to blame if I fail.”

Editor’s Note: For info on franchising opportunities, visit www.veteranfranchisecenter.com or call (757) 446-2929.

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