

UTAH PLANNING JOB FAIR FOR RETURNING SOLDIERS



As the war in Iraq comes to an end, hundreds of soldiers are returning to Southern Utah, and there are support organizations that are aiming to help those soldiers find work. On January 28, 2012, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) along with other organizations, have scheduled an employment fair at the Dixie Convention Center. The goal of the fair is to help soldiers, reservists, veterans and their spouses meet with employers from the area. Mark Harrison, the program support specialist with ESGR, said that the fair is needed because hundreds of soldiers are returning home early from deployments that were expected to last longer. The soldiers returning home are from the Utah National Guard's 2nd Battalion, the 222nd Field Artillery and the 213th Forward Support Company, according to thespectrum.com. "We knew when they were leaving that we were going to be faced with some unemployment problems when they got back and of course things escalated when it was cut short," Harrison said. There are 474 members of the 222nd returning home, with 125 of them interested in receiving help with finding employment. The majority of those 125 interested do not have a job at all lined up upon returning home. In Utah, close to 14 percent of National Guard members are unemployed, compared to the state's unemployment rate of seven percent. The ESGR changed its focus last year from helping those who already have a job hold that job to helping soldiers who do not have jobs find a job. Harrison said that the majority of the soldiers coming home are younger, who did not have established careers when they signed up to join the military. The battalion likely will not be redeployed for at least another three years, more likely another five, so getting soldiers back to their jobs, school, and civilian lives is necessary. "I think we started pushing on it in August and September, when we found out they might shut us down," Battalion Commander Brad Fuller said. "We really want to make sure all the soldiers are OK. I think a lot of these kids, what they found out is how they have to support each other and be selfless. They also had to get their butts out of bed and get work." The goal is to have at least 50 employers at the job fair, according to Harrison, stating that Southern Utah usually shows a lot of support to its service personnel. Harrison said the ESGR is working in conjunction with the Department of Workforce Services and other agencies to bring as many employers to the fair as possible. "We're pulling at the heartstrings of America to help these young soldiers out," Harrison said. "Anything we can do to help out these soldiers and their families."

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