

Coding for Veterans Career Caravan makes a stop in North Bay

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Alana Pickrell

It was a career fair like no other as the Coding For Veterans Career Caravan made a stop in North Bay with the goal of showing retired military troops that they have another option in the IT field.

"The veterans serve all of us so gallantly really, and this is an opportunity to give back in a way," said Coding for Veterans executive director Pat Shaw. "As they transition out of their military careers, there's almost 8,000 people that leave the Armed Forces each year, there will be a number of those who will look to the IT industry as a potential future employer."

"We want the IT industry to recognize the talent that a veteran brings to an organization and ensure that as they come into the industry they have the right kind of skills that employers are looking for," Shaw added.

The Coding for Veterans program has been up and running for just more than a year now at the University of Ottawa. It is an eight-month program that is fully online, giving veterans more flexibility.

'I don't have a math background'

That was a positive for retired military sergeant Iain Matheson, who never considered a job like it before.

"I don't have a math background, I'm an outdoors guy, I do things with hands, but I never thought that an office job was for me," Matheson said.

"It sounds like I could do something from home in spite of what's going on ... I have a lot of things going on with my life right now and this sounds like it can be done from anywhere."

Shaw said the online aspect helps draw in more people to the program, which currently has 50 members.

"Many of our students want to be able to work remotely or in the part of the country that they're in, and that's another beauty about the IT industry, and especially today, is remote work is so available," he said.

Successful program

Tuition for the program is generally covered by the provincial government's Veterans Affairs program, and so far, it has been quite successful.

"People have had jobs when they've started the program, and as they get the credentials and the skills in the program, they've experienced promotions and opportunities to learn more advance cyber security skills in their employment," said Shaw.

The main goal is to let veterans know that they have another option.

"As you can imagine, being in the Armed Forces, there are a lot of people who have been injured somehow and there is a bias, I'm going to say, generally in society that if you've worn a uniform and carried an arm, that you should be a border guard, or a prison guard, or a security guard of some sort," said Shaw. "We wanted to make sure that those who wanted an IT job were well equipped to succeed in that kind of work."

The Career Caravan Tour started earlier this week and has a number of stops before Remembrance Day.