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Picture-perfect opportunity

by Rick Williamson

People looking for the easy life don't look for it in the military. The hardships of the military are many: long hours, low pay, and separation from one's family to name a few. However, many of the qualities that a person learns in the military - qualities such as leadership, discipline, team work and sacrifice - make veterans very attractive candidates to many businesses.

For TSS Photography - located in Duluth - those are qualities to be rewarded.

TSS Photography, which specializes in youth sports and school photography services, is giving away a franchise (which covers an area of approximately 250,000 people) to one deserving veteran. It is conducting a nationwide essay contest, the prize for which is a new career opportunity worth up to \$30,000.

TSS president Joe Lindenmayer knows what he looks for in a franchisee. "Leadership," says Lindenmayer. "Being part of a team. It's such a natural fit."



Of nearly 230 TSS franchises nationally, a total of 24 (just over 10 percent) are owned by veterans. TSS wants to increase the percentage of veterans that own franchises.

According to Lindenmayer, "The core character skills you learn in the military: integrity, attention to detail, delivering on expectations" are what make a great franchisee. "We tell them 'Don't worry about what you know about photography. Let us train you.'"

Lindenmayer joined TSS in 1993 and was named president in the fall of 2005. A former corporal in the Marine Corps, Lindenmayer can identify with the hardships and lessons of the military life. (Lindenmayer served from 1989 to 1996.) The Marine tank division to which he was assigned helped lead the breach into Kuwait - and assisted in that country's liberation.

The focus by TSS on veterans is just part of a national trend. According to the International Franchise Association, veterans are becoming highly sought after. Through the IFA's VetFran program, there are 160 franchise companies offering discounted franchise fees to veterans. Additionally, the IFA has established a veteran's scholarship fund through which companies and individuals can donate to help veterans enroll in business or entrepreneurial courses to go into business for themselves.

Legislation currently being proposed by U.S. Rep. Richard Baker (R-LA) would also make it easier for some veterans to own their own franchise. The "Veterans Self-Employment Act," would establish a five-year pilot program to allow American service members, veterans, national guardsmen, reservists, and qualified others to use part of their Veterans Administration educational assistance to defray training costs associated with obtaining a franchised small business.

Another veteran - both of the military and TSS - is Harry Baird, who owns five TSS franchises (including Gwinnett County.) An Army veteran who served from 1965 to 1967 - including a tour in Vietnam - Baird bought his first TSS franchise in 1985.

TSS provided Baird his picture perfect opportunity. "I enjoyed children. I enjoyed sports. This tied them together." Prior to joining TSS, Baird was on his own in the insurance business.

Baird, who likes to "stand on my own," enjoys the freedom of his own business. "You can be your own boss, set your own hours," Baird says. "Anything you earn comes from your own efforts. That appeals to me."

Named as one of the judges for the essay contest, Baird knows what he's looking for: "Someone who is self-motivated, is dedicated to children, and likes sports." For Baird, a bonus is "someone who is giving back to the community."

Open to any honorably discharged veteran - or anyone about to be discharged - the contest's deadline for essays is June 1. The winner will be notified in mid-June so he or she can attend the TSS national convention July 9 - 12 in Atlanta. There, the winner will be introduced as the newest TSS franchisee and receive a franchise and \$5,000 in equipment, along with training and promotion.