

Education offers big options for veterans: New careers help vets with transition

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The U.S. nation is continually looking for new ways to [help veterans](#), and it appears that access to higher [education](#) can offer some very beneficial opportunities. A new report from the [New York Post](#) reveals this Monday, Feb. 23, 2015, that education can provide a sense of stability and the advanced or technical skills required for [vets](#) to succeed in the workforce. With transitions being understandably difficult for many veterans, finding a niche back into normalcy can perhaps be better achieved through learning and academic development.

One such veteran who feels that education gave her a significant boost upon her return to the public life was Ms. Fontasha Brown. After serving time on the search-and-rescue team for the US Coast Guard, Brown pursued a degree back home in the culinary arts. She describes the very scent of what she would bake at night as giving her some much-needed constancy even before working towards her certificate.

“I used to have nightmares after Hurricane Katrina,” the determined 29-year-old woman from Brownsville shared in a statement. Brown was stationed in Guam, South Carolina and New Orleans; she also served during Hurricane Katrina, Haiti and Japan’s earthquake. “I would wake up in the middle of the night and bake. The smell was calming — it was enjoyable to see something pretty that you baked versus the look of a body you picked up.”

Unfortunately, Brown suffered an unexpected injury and was forced to leave the Coast Guard almost a decade earlier than expected. She decided to turn her interest in baking into a fresh [career](#) choice, and

knew that education was her way to accomplish that goal. “I wanted to learn from people, not YouTube,” notes Brown. “It was stressful at first, but then I remembered my 9/11 GI Bill — that’s been a blessing.”

After working hard and learning the ropes, Brown has successfully earned her professional pastry arts diploma from the International Culinary Arts Center in Soho. She said she is not certain where her degree or career will take her, but she ultimately hopes to own her very own dessert bar someday in the future. The Center for American Progress adds that nearly 650,000 veterans were members of some form of higher education or school program, according to statistics from a 2012 survey.

While Brown had a bit smoother transition to public life thanks to the love and support of her family, Mr. John Dugan had a difficult time. The 33-year-old veteran and former Marine corporal says his transition was challenging, but thanks to his efforts in higher education, he is now the executive sous chef in an upscale Oceana seafood restaurant. He shares that he had mind-playing tricks shortly after his return from service.

“I remember walking across 23rd Street holding my keys in my hand, thinking everyone around me was going to attack me,” he says. His mantra to get him through the hardest days? “Failure is not an option. Suck it up and deal.” Dugan added that he applied to a variety of jobs before finding his career location. “I literally took the train to a different spot of the city every day to hand out my resume. I must have handed out at least 500 resumes, scoured Craigslist.”

He eventually got a call back from a downtown Italian restaurant for a worker in the kitchen. For almost nine months, Dugan worked long hours all the while attending a culinary education program at ICC. “Cooking’s always been natural for me,” the Harlem resident said. “It’s always been my go-to.” He notes that his history working in pizzerias as a young man helped with the work transition. “I knew this sauce needed celery, carrots and onions because the chef told me ... I didn’t know that’s the classic combination base flavor of certain things.”

His diploma he earned from the professional culinary arts program paved the way for him to find a higher-end position down the line. Dugan truly believes his time in school and the networking opportunities he found there played a major role in him finding a current “dream career.” “Schooling definitely helped me network. The career services center told me about an opening at Convivio, which then got me a job at Oceana.”

Even at the higher education levels, effective teaching is important. A [recent study pointed to the idea](#) that it isn’t necessarily the number of hours within a classroom that matter to student growth, but the planning, preparation, and instructional techniques of the teacher. Sometimes, the movement back to the general public for veterans that have served is a tough leap, but good education helps fill in the gaps.

According to Mike Starich, who works as active president of the military recruiting firm Orion International, vets can find success through education. The learning skills and abilities one acquires provide valuable experience and an important addition to any resume. "Any civilian education that solves that equation is helpful. Hard, translatable skills are still important to employers," said Satirch. Ultimately, if they can "demonstrate strong intangibles that come with military experience, they will be successful."

<http://www.examiner.com/article/education-offers-big-options-for-veterans-new-careers-help-vets-with-transition>