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## Recognizing Service

The many ways in which Ford Motor Co. supports our veterans

|| by Kip Hanson, senior editor ||

**F**ew automobile owners would be surprised to learn that Ford Motor Co. builds millions of cars and trucks annually. What's less well-known is the tremendous commitment the automaker has made over the past century to America's military veterans and their families, providing millions of dollars of support each year in the form of scholarships, training, transportation and jobs.

### Enabling veterans

That commitment began early in the company's history. Ford began hiring disabled veterans in 1919, just

six years after founder Henry Ford's introduction of his now famous assembly line. Today, the company employs approximately 6,000 veterans as well as hundreds of active duty and reserve service members.

In 1922, Ford worked with Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to arrange cross-country transportation for veterans wishing to attend their national convention in San Francisco. That 95-year partnership continues to this day. Over the past two decades, Ford has donated hundreds of vehicles to DAV, ultimately helping more than 17.3 million veterans reach medical care.

Ford also invests heavily in training programs and academic scholarships. The company is active in the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship, which rewards students who have volunteered at VA medical centers.

Recognizing that many veterans leave military service with limited career choices, Ford supports the American Red Cross by funding >



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Blue Oval nursing scholarships to military members and their spouses. And for those veterans with an interest in manufacturing, Ford sponsors students in the San Diego-based Workshops for Warriors (WFW) program, which helps service members transition to one of several careers in metalworking.

## Black Knights

One of these veterans is Heidi Riegel. A Minnesota native, Riegel served more than five years as an airframe mechanic with the U.S. Marine Corps F/A-18 Hornet fighter attack squadron 314 (VMFA-314), the “Black Knights.” She was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps in 2008 with the rank of sergeant and soon enrolled in WFW where she applied for and received a scholarship from Ford.

Riegel attended WFW’s one-semester (16 weeks) long basic welding program and returned for a second semester of advanced welding. With two WFW semesters under her belt, she became certified in seven metal joining processes, including shielded

metal arc welding (SMAW), gas metal arc welding (GMAW) and flux-cored arc welding (FCAW).

“I learned how to lay weld beads in multiple positions using different kinds of rod and weld metals such as carbon and stainless steel as well as aluminum,” Riegel says. “I also learned short circuit and spray arc welding. Because I finished ahead of my class, the instructor allowed me to get some hands-on experience with gas tungsten arc welding (GTAW). All of this made me much more employable in my field.”

After graduation, Riegel went to work as a diesel technician at GATR Truck Center in Elk River, Minn., where she repairs heavy-duty diesel trucks. She says her welding skills are a big part of her daily job, but adds that WFW provided much more than that, helping her become proficient in resume writing, networking and public speaking.

“Thanks to Workshops for Warriors, I am more confident in my ability and worth to prospective employers,” Riegel says.



Thanks to a Ford scholarship, Marine Corps veteran Heidi Riegel attended the Workshops for Warriors welding program and now has a good job as a diesel technician in Minnesota.



Without the opportunities afforded to her through Ford’s sponsorship and the WFW program, Riegel’s transition to civilian life may have been more difficult.

“I would have been unable to take the course without Ford’s help,” she says. “My partner and I were struggling financially and the scholarship gave us the breathing room we desperately needed. It allowed me to focus on my welding career instead of getting a second job to make ends meet. And looking back, it also allowed me to discover

a love of welding and fabrication. I’ve found that I enjoy fixing things, taking something that’s broken and useless and joining those pieces together again. It’s just a great program.” ■

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WORKSHOPS FOR WARRIORS →