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Navy commander fills a need with JobsiteJoe Web site

By Devon Hubbard Sorlie | Military Newspapers of Virginia

With 19 years under his belt, Navy Cmdr. Michael Crockett is already beginning to prepare for his eventual retirement. Last December, he attended a week-long session of the executive Transitional Assistance Program offered by Fleet and Family Support Centers.

He found it interesting to learn how to dress for success, such as when to wear pleats in his pants, and when it isn't appropriate.

"I hear it's best to go through the program twice, and I would agree with that," Crockett said. "It's so good, they had Coast Guard officers flying in from Great Lakes to attend the class."

He was found fascinated was when members of Service Corps of Retired Executives spoke to the class.

"They were all former corporate heads and they came by to give their small business pitch," Crockett said.

While restaurants have an 80 percent failure rate, those with skills in the plumbing and electrical businesses have a far better chance of succeeding, they said.

"That part of it was really good," Crockett said.

That's because Crockett already had a little insight into the world of entrepreneurship that dealt with both electrical and plumbing businesses, although he knows little about either. During the summer of 2006, he started a Web site called Jobsite Joe. And as with most cases, it all started with a simple need: How to find an honest repairman.

Crockett is a former Marine infantryman, chief engineer, and executive officer the destroyer USS Porter. He's devised a plan if terrorists attack the United States with chemical, biological, radiation, nuclear or explosives. He's now with the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command's Riverine and Maritime Expeditionary Security Force Warfare Requirements department at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek.

But the 19-year Navy veteran freely admits he's no Mr. Fix-it. After buying his first home in the Ghent neighborhood of Norfolk in 2001, Crockett needed help repairing a tile shower floor. New to the area, he didn't know any contractors or repair companies. He'd make phone calls, but wouldn't get called back. If they did make an appointment to stop by and give an estimate, sometimes they wouldn't even show up.

"I really found out then just how hard it is to find good help," Crockett, said.

Frustrated, Crockett thought how nice it would be to have a Web site where property owners could meet reliable contractors and repairmen.

Then he thought again: Why not me? So during the summer of 2006, Crockett launched , a Web site that marries up people who need work with people who want to do it.

"It's a combination of , Monster.com, and ," Crockett explained. "I don't have to be a subject matter expert. It's sort of an electronic Starbucks to provide a venue where people can meet.

"The Web site is designed for homeowners, small businesses and home and garden enthusiasts," Crockett added.

After a quick free registration, users may post requests for estimates through Joe's Estimator. Contractors who peruse the Web site may contact the homeowners to set up appointments by either e-mail or telephone.

Testimonials tout the success of the site: "As for responses, I have gotten about 6-10 different contractors. I loved the site, and will definitely use again. Already gave out two jobs from this round of estimates. Keep up the good work, JobSiteJoe works, and it works well," wrote Jason from Virginia Beach.

The Web site has a voracious appetite. Crockett gets up at 5 a.m. to start updating fresh information into The Buzz, a collection of lawn and garden columns and news stories, such as how to hire contractors, Crockett has gleaned off the Internet. He often works on it until well past midnight, trying to keep up with current events.

One day, after he retires from the

Navy, Crockett hopes his Web site will provide additional income with advertising space on the Web site, or better yet, corporate sponsorship from businesses like Home Depot or Lowe's on the site's banners.

"It's a lot of fun and interesting,

especially as we get more estimates and people coming to the site," Crockett

said.

And just like the information provided to him from the TAP classes, working with the Web site has shown him that life after the military doesn't always have to be defense contracting work.

"This has opened the door to a lot of possibilities," Crockett said. "It has shown me there are other options available to me once I retire."

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