

## ***Vets seeking work find help at job expo***

*James Goodman, Staff Writer    Democrat and Chronicle    September 25, 2008*

Hundreds of veterans and more than 60 employers packed the Eisenhart Auditorium of the Rochester Museum & Science Center Thursday, exchanging resumes and applications at the 8th Annual National Veterans Job Expo.

The expo focused largely on connecting area employers to veterans seeking entry-level positions. This year's crowd was the largest in the history of the event.

"More and more employers are realizing the values (veterans) bring to the work force," said Peter Blind, vice president of workforce development at the Veterans Outreach Center, which hosted the event. "They show up on time, they work hard, they're flexible and they're willing to work overtime to get the job done."

Linda Freeman of Rochester, who served in the U.S. Air Force from 1979 to 1983, was attending the expo for the first time. Freeman, who said she's currently looking for clerical or office work, stopped at the Preferred Care stand, as well as a few of the temporary employment booths.

"I dropped off some resumes and got some contacts," she said. "It's been a good experience for me."

Overall, veterans had a slightly lower unemployment rate — 3.8 percent to 4.4 percent — than nonveterans in 2007, though the trend is reversed among those who have served recently.

In 2007, veterans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces since September 2001 had an unemployment rate of 6.1 percent, according to statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor. The unemployment rate for these "Gulf War-era II" veterans increases to 12 percent for 18- to 24-year-olds, 2½ points higher than the nonveteran rate for the same demographic.

Some of these younger veterans were on hand at the expo, including Shane Slaton, an army veteran who still serves in the National Guard. Slaton, 24, of Penfield, found an appealing job prospect right away.

"The first thing I ran into up there, the Monroe County Ambulance, that was pretty good," said Slaton. "It's a little beneficial to be a veteran and walk in there."

Regenail Thomas, a Marine Corps veteran who was recruiting for the Hillside Family of Agencies, where he works as an HR partner, said that veterans tend to possess certain characteristics that make them attractive hires.

"They bring above-average to excellent fundamentals, work ethic, dependability and they are easily trainable," said Thomas. "And veterans tend to be the individuals that'll step up when something is wrong and have the courage to say something."

Although Blind was unsure how many veterans had found jobs through the expo in the past, the Outreach Center is planning to gather statistical feedback from employers for the first time this year.

But many have found work through the event. A handful are now employed by the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill Industries of Rochester Inc. and C.O.P. Security Inc., which were both named "Employer of the Year" by the Outreach Center because of the companies' devotion to hiring veterans.

Randy Moore of Rochester attended the expo last year and got a job as a shipping clerk with ABVI Goodwill.

"I had to learn a little bit about their routine, but it's just learning how to shuffle things," said Moore. "It's been a good year... I don't have any plans on moving."