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Vermont VFW partners with Excelsior College

By Courtney Parker

CORRESPONDENT

John Lombardo of New York knew he wanted to further his education upon returning home from his time in the U.S. Navy. But due to his economic situation he had limited options.

After doing some research, he chose to register at Excelsior College, a regionally accredited, nonprofit, distance-learning institution in Albany, N.Y., known for being veteran-friendly. During the enrollment process Lombardo learned of the benefits offered by the college to veterans, such as reduced tuition and allowance of military training credits, which significantly reduced the time needed to graduate.

The program alleviated the financial burden of college debt, allowing him to more easily support his family while still obtaining his degree.

Excelsior College is now offering the same services to members of the Vermont Veterans of Foreign War, along with their spouses and domestic partners, presenting reduced tuition and fees under a new statewide education partnership agreement.

"Finding out about the discounts was a huge relief," said Lombardo, who would have been strapped financially if not for the reduced tuition for VFW members.

Lombardo will graduate this spring with a bachelor's degree in science and liberal studies, and plans to continue with his education.

"Today, unless you have that piece of paper it's difficult to get a job," he said. "This has been the most rewarding experience I've had so far in the classroom."

As of Feb. 1, the nearly 6,600 members of Vermont VFW will be eligible for the program and be able to take part in Excelsior's distance-learning program.

The undergraduate degree programs at Excelsior include the liberal arts, health sciences, business and technology, and nursing, as well as several transitional classes for soldiers.

"There's not a lot of jobs out there and this will help them to earn a degree and better support their families," said Rutland VFW Commander Ed Warner, adding that without such programs many veterans could not afford to further their education.

Excelsior accepts credits earned through military training, which can count toward academic credits based on recommendations from the American Council on Education's Military Evaluations Program.

More than 50 percent of Excelsior's student body consists of veterans and active service

members.

"We as a society (owe) a tremendous debt to our veterans," said Excelsior President John F. Ebersole. "It's been part of our mission since the founding of the college to serve the military."

Ebersole himself is a U.S. Coast Guard veteran who served in Vietnam and knows firsthand the struggles soldiers face when returning from war.

"We know that their main concern is getting a job," he said. "And we want to help them do that."

The partnership between Excelsior College and the Vermont VFW is part of a national VFW goal to encourage younger veterans who are returning home to consider their higher education options.

Many of the eligible veterans who enroll in the college's online program will also qualify for educational cost reimbursement through the Veterans Administration.
