For some time, NRCA has been reporting about the acute labor shortage facing the U.S. roofing industry. The shortage is a result of a number of factors, most notably:

• The demographics of the U.S. population. Simply put, we’re getting older, and there are fewer entrants into the workforce.
• The number of high school students being coached to attend college. In many parts of the U.S., high schools are rewarded for the percentage of their graduates who attend college. As a result, few high school guidance counselors talk about careers in construction.
• Our national immigration policy, which severely limits the number of people who can enter the U.S. legally to fill jobs Americans are not filling.

NRCA members are looking to find new and better sources of labor, and one that seems to be a natural fit for the roofing industry is the military—men and women on active duty and planning to enter the private sector workforce or men and women who serve in the reserves and National Guard. Here’s what we know about this segment of the population:

• There currently are about 1.4 million people on active duty.
• Another 850,000 men and women serve in the National Guard or one of the military reserve components.
• More than 550,000 veterans currently are unemployed, and the unemployment rate among members of the National Guard is nearly 10 percent—significantly higher than the general population.

There are a number of organizations working to find jobs for servicemen and servicewomen looking for work. Some organizations work within the government structure; others work outside of it. Many are industry-specific, including some in construction, and almost all have developed some structure to match employers with prospective employees. The following organizations are the most promising organizations for the roofing industry.

**Center for America**
The Center for America describes its mission as helping to educate and empower Americans to expand skills, entrepreneurship, prosperity and freedom. One of its key programs is called American Jobs for America’s Heroes, which includes free job listings for employers who are interested in hiring veterans and members of the National Guard.

For more information, visit centerforamerica.org/pledge/ng/ajah_team.html.

**Helmets to Hardhats**
Helmets to Hardhats is a national, nonprofit program that connects National Guard, reserve, retired and transitioning active duty military service members with skilled training and quality career opportunities in the construction industry. Most career opportunities offered by the program are connected to federally approved apprenticeship training programs. The training usually is provided by various trade organizations at no cost to the veterans; no prior experience is needed. Because the training programs are regulated and approved at federal and state levels, veterans can use their Montgomery GI Bill benefits to supplement their incomes while they are in training.

Helmets to Hardhats also includes a supplemental Wounded Warrior Project® program for disabled veterans. The program connects disabled veterans with employment opportunities in the construction industry and careers that support construction.

For more information, visit www.helmetstohardhats.org.

**Hero2Hired**
Hero2Hired (H2H) is a program operated by the Department of Defense. Its mission is to find jobs for members of the reserves and National Guard. Every state and territory, as well as the District of Columbia, has an H2H employment coordinator who can assist members of the reserves and National Guard to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Employment Center to help match prospective employees with local employers.

For NRCA members, working with these employment coordinators is key; they are aware of people actively looking for work and can help match them with the right employers.

For more information, visit www.h2h.jobs.

**Hiring Our Heroes**
Operated by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Hiring
Our Heroes attempts to match prospective employees with employers by helping veterans and members of the reserves and National Guard develop their resumes and learn how to look for jobs while matching prospective employees with employers.

Hiring Our Heroes also conducts a series of job fairs around the U.S. with the goal of matching prospective employees with local employers.

For more information, visit www.hiringourheroes.org.

**Veterans Employment Center**

The Veterans Employment Center is a more traditional program operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs through a Veterans Employment Coordination Service program. The department also manages a program called Warriors to the Workforce, which assists wounded returning veterans find employment.

For more information, visit www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs or www.warriorstotheworkforce.com.

**Some observations**

NRCA staff members have had a good deal of interaction with all these organizations, and we have learned quite a lot about them, such as:

- With all these programs, passive involvement generally will not yield any results. Don’t expect to simply post a job on a website and get a lot of applicants. Instead, meet with the people who work for these organizations, develop personal relationships and tell the stories of the career opportunities your jobs offer.

- Many veterans previously have not had to look for a job. They joined the armed forces at age 18, completed their tour of duty and now are faced with the daunting challenge of finding a career. Many have never prepared a resume or thought about relocation, and a majority come from modest beginnings. It is a good strategy to arrange for face-to-face meetings whenever possible.

- When we’ve talked to the heads of these organizations about careers in roofing, many of them think such a career involves only hammering shingles. It helps to try and overcome this stereotype by talking about the types of jobs that may be available in your company—and the way a career path is developed.

There are clear opportunities for the roofing industry to become more engaged with these and other organizations, and NRCA intends to continue to work with all of them.

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**Bill Good, CAE**, is NRCA’s CEO.