

met with Chesonis today in informal sessions at Paetec's Perinton headquarters
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Colleges aim to attract vets after new GI Bill

By NATE DOUGHERTY

Laura Stradley's position as military coordinator at Bryant & Stratton College was so new that she helped to write the job description when she joined the organization in October 2008.

Stradley was hired to help the school establish a military-friendly atmosphere and assist students who are veterans or on active duty in dealing with their benefits. Though her position is relatively new, it is part of a growing trend as colleges beef up support and recruitment efforts for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

There was a 60 percent jump in veteran

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Artisan Work

Non-profit art space begins push to create new year-round area

By NATE DOUGHERTY

After 10 years, Artisan Works is ready to branch out.

The non-profit art space is poised to post a surplus for the first time in its history this year as it reaches out to other communities to replicate its model. The organization also is embarking on a project to renovate a rooftop lounge and create a year-round event space.

Louis Perticone, Artisan Works founder and creative director, said that for the first five years of operation, Artisan Works "didn't do too well" in terms of revenue. Three years ago it bought the

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enrollment in the most recent semester at Bryant & Stratton. Stradley said she expects that rate to fall off, but she does predict that more veterans will look at continuing education as an option after being discharged.

The trend is being driven by a generous benefits package for post-Sept. 11 veterans. The Post-9/11 GI Bill took effect Aug. 1, offering increased benefits, including tuition up to that charged by the most expensive public college in each state, a monthly housing stipend and \$1,000 toward books and school supplies. It also includes the Yellow Ribbon program, which matches funding provided by private colleges to cover any amount of tuition exceeding the public level.

Patrick Taricone, director of the newly formed Academy for Veterans' Success at Monroe Community College, said the program will greatly expand the number of veterans able to afford college and the extra expenses that come with it.

"This has been described as the most significant GI bill since the end of World War II," Taricone said. "That bill literally changed how society looked at college and who could go. It went from a more privileged class of people to someone who was now the average person, and this bill will give even more people the opportunity to go to college and survive without worrying about paying the bills."

Attracting this new crop of potential students has taken a high priority for local colleges. Few have done as much as Bryant & Stratton. It is a Servicemembers Opportunities College, part of a group of 1,800 colleges and universities that offer benefits such as common degree requirements and guaranteed transfer of credits among schools.

Bryant & Stratton also participates in the GoArmyEd program, which allows students who are enlisted to perform functions such as applying for tuition assistance or enrolling in courses through a common online portal.

"That makes it a very streamlined process for active-duty members," Stradley said. "We upload our courses onto the Army portal, and it's basically three clicks and they're done. They're easily accepted into college and don't have to go through the same rigorous process as others might."

Between the new GI bill and support offered by colleges, benefits can be so generous that in many cases veterans end up being paid to attend college. After VA benefits, federal grants and the school's participation in the Yellow Ribbon program, students at Nazareth College of Rochester can receive up to \$15,000 more than the cost of tuition, to be used for living expenses.

Because the new benefits went into effect only last week, there is some difficulty for colleges in determining students' eligibility. At Nazareth there are approximately 15 new transfer students who qualify for the benefits, but it may not always be best for students to use them.

"A lot of the challenge for us is because everything is so new and happening so quickly," said Samantha Veeder, financial aid director. "The biggest challenge for veterans right now is if they're currently receiving benefits under the old chapter, like the Montgomery GI bill, to decide if they should exhaust that eligibility or use the new benefits."

Working on strategy

been meeting informally to discuss strategies for issues facing veterans and ways to increase support services on campus. The consortium evolved from the Rochester Area Colleges group and now involves roughly 11 schools.

"Some of what was talked about was having people do training for faculty and staff," Taricone said. "We also talked about basic issues of what it's going to take to recruit military members and veterans into colleges, what it's going to take to make it attractive for them to come to school."

One idea proposed was waiving admission fees, Taricone said. Though a small gesture, this would create a more welcoming atmosphere especially for veterans who may have recently left the service, he added. The consortium also discussed ways to better screen veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety disorders.

Taricone predicted that the work will

help schools gain a larger share of returning veterans. He learned at a recent conference that 3 percent to 5 percent of veterans with education benefits will use them, he said.

Schools also receive outside help in their quest to attract more veterans. The Veterans Outreach Center Inc. used grant funding to start a Web site that directs veterans to support offered throughout the community, including continuing education services. The center also partners with Nazareth to help veterans with registration and orientation.

Other services

Enrolling students is the first step for colleges. Once they have brought veterans or current service members to their campuses, schools still have to deal with issues not normally seen in the general student population.

The National Technical Institute for the

Deaf, a college of Rochester Institute of Technology, offers in-class support such as note taking and real-time captioning to veterans with hearing loss. The Military Veterans with Hearing Loss Project at RIT/NTID provides counseling to deal with the social and psychological issues that come with hearing loss.

Allen Ford, an assistant professor at RIT's E. Philip Saunders College of Business and the project's coordinator, said the school expects to enroll 10 qualifying veterans by 2010. Because hearing loss is the leading disability of returning veterans, Ford is trying to expand efforts beyond RIT. He has worked with various audiologists and veterans groups to discuss how schools can meet the unique needs of returning veterans.

Ford said that as the number of post-9/11 veterans increases in the coming years, schools will face a crisis if they do not act

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Paetec to expand division

By WILL ASTOR

In the second-quarter conference call with analysts, Paetec Holding Corp. chairman and CEO Arunas Chesonis outlined plans to expand the company's small energy division.

Paetec Energy, a six-employee division of the \$1.6 billion competitive local exchange carrier, advises some 100 New York clients on how to cut their gas and electric bills. The division would not be likely to overtake Paetec's telecommunications business but would grow as one of several strategies Paetec would employ to offset declines in traditional phone use, Chesonis said.

Despite a string of bottom-line losses that have dogged the company since it started trading publicly in 2006, Chesonis and other officials painted an upbeat picture of Paetec's prospects and current performance. On Wednesday the company reported a \$16.5 million second-quarter net loss on revenue of \$395.2 million. The results compare with a net loss of \$14.7 million on revenue of \$405.3 million in the second quarter of 2008.

Lower operating, interest and depreciation expenses were offset by a drop in revenue, the company said. Red ink for the quarter also reflects a onetime \$10.3 million expense related to the company's early repayment of some \$300 mil-

lion in debt. During the quarter, Paetec opened new markets in Northern California and a data center in Pennsylvania, Chesonis said.

Chesonis outlined plans for Paetec to add or expand data centers—to provide outsourced or hosted Internet and voice services—in the Southwest, Midwest and New England over the next 12 months. The company plans to add two to three centers a year over the next several years, spending \$400,000 to \$1.5 million per facility, he said.

Data-center customers typically also buy network services from Paetec. Such "pull-through" is substantial. Data-center users that pay \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month may spend an additional \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month on network services, Chesonis told analysts. Other strategies include moving more aggressively into Internet telephony.

Paetec's revenues most likely will continue to lag and profits remain elusive for the next year to 18 months, but the company believes it is positioned to ride out the economic downturn, Chesonis said. It has maintained cash flow adequate to fund operations and expansions and pay off debt.

Paetec is on the hunt for further acquisitions, large or small, though it has not found the right fit, he said.

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quickly to determine what support services will be needed.

"For a lot of these guys coming back, hearing loss might be the most inconvenient disability, but they could also have polytrauma or amputations," said Ford, a veteran who suffers from hearing loss. "No one really has experience dealing with that on campuses, and no one really knows who is going to show up."

From what he has seen, he said, many schools feel unprepared.

"The research I've been doing shows that a lot of schools are panicking," Ford said. "Even if they don't have a lot of hearing-loss veterans coming back, the ones who do will have issues transitioning back to civilian society... and to academic settings specifically."

Easing this transition is also a top priority for schools. Bryant & Stratton holds events for its military students to foster camaraderie, including catered lunches. The school also puts out a monthly newsletter.

At MCC, the Academy for Veterans' Success offers classroom support and helps refer veterans to other support agencies in the community. The academy also partners with the Rochester Vet Center, a branch of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to provide counseling services.

"Our intention is to look at a military member as a whole person who has needs more than just academic ones," Taricone said.

In late August, the academy plans to hold a two-day conference that will help professionals serving military members be more attuned to their needs. It also held a camp for children of military members who are or have been deployed.

Other services focus on keeping military students away from the sticky process of identifying and applying for benefits. Stradley uses her expertise in benefits to help Bryant & Stratton students find which are

best for them and guides them through the application process. She even helps students get honorable discharges when needed.

Most of her work is in cutting through bureaucracy. She recalled the case of one student who, after a series of phone calls to the VA, had gotten nowhere in receiving her benefits. The start of the semester was approaching, and the student had grown frustrated with the backlog at the VA.

"I called the VA, and within five minutes I had an answer," Stradley said.

What most veterans need is someone who can act as a liaison between agencies supporting them, to prevent being bounced from person to person, Stradley said.

RIT's Ford noted that current problems with the VA are similar to those when he left the military 29 years ago. Though the people and attitudes have improved since then, he said, the bureaucracy has not. So in his work, Ford stresses networking between campus groups to identify hearing-loss veterans and let them know what other programs are being offered.

Colleges that offer extra services to veterans could see a boom in these students in coming years, Stradley said.

"The military community is a tight-knit group, and referrals and word of mouth go a long way," she said. "As we develop a genuine military-friendly and supportive environment for them, it will encourage even more to attend school here."

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presentation of results is planned for November.

Nocera, 51, whose gray beard and hair and full professorship mark him as a well established scientific researcher, was not invited to this week's mixer.

"This is a chance for Arunas to meet the young people," he said. "If I came, they'd probably throw me out."

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