

Military retirees at ease in Central Texas

Austin firms have much to gain from trend

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At first glance, Austin's "Keep Austin Weird" mantra and roster of jeans-and-T-shirt companies like Google, Apple and Facebook doesn't seem to beckon military retirees.

But for retirees, who have their moving expenses following their final tours of duty paid by the government and are seeking civilian careers, Austin is often attractive, according to officials at Bradley-Morris Inc., an Atlanta-based company that provides job-placement services for people leaving the military.

Officials there confirmed what Military.com reported earlier this month, when the site listed Austin as the No. 3 most attractive city, at-large, in the country for military retirees.

Retirees are classified as military members with 20 or more years of service.

"We ask a lot of the vets who are transitioning out what their location priorities are, and we get a great number of people who seek Austin as the number one choice," said **Gary Waterfield**, Bradley-Morris' regional operations manager in Austin.

According to the Texas Veterans Commission, about 90,000 military veterans live in Travis and Williamson counties combined.

Comparatively, 159,700 people live in San Antonio's Bexar County, 190,200 live in Houston's Harris County, and 123,600 live in Dallas County, within the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area.

The Military.com report surprised Texas Veterans Commission spokeswoman **Lisa Waddell** because the other Texas population centers far exceed Austin in veteran populations.

"I would never have put Austin nationally high for military retirees," she said, but added, "Austin is consistently rated as the top one or two cities people want to live. From that point of view, whether you are military or not, I can see that."

Bradley-Morris' Austin office, which employs about 25 people, covers the entire Midwest but is located here because of its proximity to large military hubs like the Army's Ft. Hood in Killeen and Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, and the Air Force's multiple installations in the San Antonio area.

While the private sector has become increasingly aware of hiring retirees, Bradley-Morris is constantly adjusting how employers view the military, company officials said.

“In the civilian sector there is misconception that all military members carry guns and march through jungles, but they have great skill sets,” Waterfield said.

While some employers might have perceptions of stodgy military people with crew cuts, experts said the reality is career military people are well-traveled and accustomed to working cooperatively in different cultures — be it Baghdad or Bazaarvoice Inc., an Austin-based company known for its congenial workplace.

Military retirees with engineering and technical skills are in “very high demand,” said **Bill Scott**, Bradley-Morris’ corporate communications director, adding that military retirees have not only technical know-how, but also management skills.

Retirees with “great communication skills that are super A-type competitive ... go right into sales,” Scott said. “They love to be on the leader board.”

At the same time, some ex-military don’t know how marketable they can be in the private sector, Bradley-Morris officials said.

Driving a tank, for example, doesn’t scream “hire me.”

But in reality, Scott said, the tank driver must understand mechanics, managing a team and succeeding under pressure. Corporate America calls that person an “operations manager.”

Courtesy of JB Goodwin