Warrior power: ONR, veterans plugged in on alternative energy

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An innovative Office of Naval Research (ONR) program is looking to Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard veterans for the cutting edge in alternative energy-and is highlighted this week in a new video released during the Navy's Warrior Care Month.

The Energy Systems Technology Evaluation Program, or ESTEP, answers the call for renewable energy made by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, providing student veterans with internships in Navy organizations using advanced technologies.

"Finding reliable, alternative sources of energy is an essential component of naval strategy moving forward," said Dr. Richard Carlin, director of the Sea Warfare and Weapons Department at ONR. "ESTEP uniquely places student veterans interested in engineering and technology into working internships, where they gain hands-on skills and experiences as they advance energy research for the Navy and Marine Corps."

Examples of such work include evaluation of smart grid and solar energy use at Camp Pendleton; development of cyber-secured energy management systems; enhancing wind-resistant rooftop photovoltaic panels; and more.

The program kicked off last year, and is a partnership between ONR, San Diego State University (SDSU), SPAWAR Systems Center Pacific, the Naval Postgraduate School and the Naval Facilities Engineering and Expeditionary Warfare Center.

SDSU, experts note in the video-titled "Warrior Power: ONR, Education and Energy"-was a natural fit for ESTEP partnership, as its Troops to Engineers program is specifically designed to help student veterans find productive internships and future employment. The ESTEP program helps those students find high-level, meaningful Navy and Marine Corps opportunities in energy-related fields.

"Here we have student veterans recently out of the military, with a great technical background, looking to get a major in engineering and science," said Eric McElvenny, assistant director of Troops to Engineers and a retired Marine Corps captain.

McElvenny's story is particularly inspirational for his fellow Marines and other warfighters during Warrior Care Month, designed to recognize wounded warriors and those who care for them. McElvenny lost his right leg below the knee in December 2011 while serving in Afghanistan.

Student veterans in the program say McElvenny is a natural leader and advocate-and role model. He recently ran the Ironman Triathalon in Hawaii, using a prosthetic leg, training with former all-pro wide receiver Hines Ward.

McElvenny emphasizes the importance of developing alternative energy sources on the battlefield and at sea.

"I can tell you from personal experience that the need for alternative power and energy in theater is huge," he said. "From lightening the load carried by individual Marines in the field, to lessening the need for exposed fuel conveys, the ESTEP effort provides real benefits for our Sailors and Marines, and the nation."

Officials hope that the partnership example set by ESTEP will help shape other technology demonstration efforts in the military.

"ESTEP is a win for vets, a win for universities and industry, and a big win for the Navy/Marine Corps team," said Carlin. "This is the kind of approach that will help solve the nation's most important energy challenges."

Provided by Office of Naval Research

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