

## Employers work to help employees in the military

By MARK NEWMAN Courier staff writer (September 12, 2007)

OTTUMWA — There is more to supporting an employee deployed by the National Guard than simply following rehiring laws.

That's was one of the messages Martin Graber hoped to convey to employers who came to a "Lunch and Learn" meeting Wednesday in Ottumwa. He's a volunteer with the Iowa Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. The national and local organizations were started by the U.S. Department of Defense to help companies understand their obligations to civilian soldiers and veterans.

Some of the speakers Wednesday, said Graber, would help businesses be in compliance with the law, which says employees can't be discriminated against because of their military service.

"But we also want them to go above and beyond what's required by law," Graber told The Courier.

There are ways to make the transition from battle conditions to civilian life easier on a worker. One part of that is being able to understand what the soldiers are going through when they are gone.

"The training time is very, very serious. The 833rd is now at Camp Anaconda, ready [for operations] in Iraq. Their training has prepared them for a life or death [situation] there every day," Graber said.

To help employers understand, the ESGR recently took a group of business leaders to Fort McCoy, Wis., flying them there in a military helicopter. There, civilian supervisors witnessed weapons training and practice clearing runways.

"Annual training is not a two-week vacation," Graber said.

The ESGR organization is an educator of soldiers and employers, not an enforcer of the law — the Department of Labor handles that, and along with the Iowa ESGR, one of their representatives spoke Wednesday. But when Graber talks about going "above and beyond," he said he's not asking for anything "big" from businesses.

"Just because the soldier is gone, they've left behind a family. A care package, or even a phone call [to a spouse] from a supervisor [or] manager can mean so much, so they can see that someone cares."

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