

LMC lauded for veterans efforts

Enrollment on rise for those with military past

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — When Nicholas Streeter finished his four-year U.S. Navy enlistment this year, he decided that college was the next logical step — but he needed some encourage-

ment to get past the first hurdle.

Streeter had chosen Lake Michigan College. But first, he needed to take the ACT Compass test to determine where he stood academically and what kinds of classes he'd take.

"I came in, took the test, and didn't score as well as I could have," he said.

But Linda Pliml, LMC's veterans and international student specialist, wasn't about to let Streeter leave

it at that — and today he's glad.

"She's extraordinarily helpful when it comes to motivating you toward doing things. She pushed me to go back, and study a little bit, and try again. I scored higher, and it got me out of taking some extra classes that could have ended up being redundant for me," he said.

Streeter, 25, of Bangor, spent four years in San Diego, where he was stationed

on the USS Ronald Reagan. He's studying to become an X-ray technician.

"I find it a very interesting field because you can see inside someone's body, and I can actually help someone," he said.

He's among a growing number of veterans taking advantage of an array of programs and services that LMC has created to help them translate their

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military experience into their future education and career paths.

Recognition in higher places

Those services include veteran-specific advising and career services, as well as a full-time veteran specialist, a veteran's web portal, and acceptance of military transfer credits.

Veterans can take advantage of those services at Liberty Hall, a special resource room and study space that's in Room D-120 of LMC's main campus along Napier Avenue in Benton Township.

The space, which is only accessible with a keycode, features computers and printers, as well as a microwave oven, refrigerator and TV.

As of the fall semester, internal statistics showed 153 veterans enrolled at LMC. That's a steady growth from fall 2005, when 59 veterans were taking classes, figures show.

Those efforts have not gone unnoticed in higher places, as well.

Last month, LMC earned a gold-level status rating from the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's Veteran-Friendly School program.

LMC was the only Southwest Michigan college to make this year's list, according to Doug Schaffer, vice president of student services.

"It's really important to us to provide high-level service to community members who have served in the armed forces," he said.

The college received a bronze rating from the department last year.

"They continue to see that we invest in our veteran students – some of these things, we've done for a long time. Some of them have evolved recently to enhance the experience for our veterans, like Liberty Hall," he said.

Helping vets succeed

Schaffer said he feels honored by the gold status recognition, which shows that LMC's attention to veteran students is paying off.

"It starts with daily service to our students by our coordinator, Linda Pliml, who's been with us for a long time. She brings a lot of

experience, but most importantly, passion for serving veteran students, and doing everything she can to help them be successful," he said.

Pliml has been with LMC since July 1994.

Other services offered include scholarships and assistance for veterans and their dependents through the Veterans Education Assistance Fund, which is set up for that purpose, Registrar Sarah Skinner said.

"Veterans with a need for books, education or transportation, whatever the case may be, we have funds that they can access with an application," she said.

Veterans also get priority in class registration, as well.

Schaffer said that the fund has a \$100,000 balance, of which it's already awarded \$5,000 this term.

"We continue to search for veterans that could utilize this benefit," he said.

Ready for improvements

Guy Rayon, a U.S. Navy veteran enrolled at LMC's South Haven campus, is another area resident who doesn't plan on waiting for a chance to improve himself.

Rayon is pursuing an associate's degree in business administration, with the long-term goal of getting a bachelor's degree – and becoming a counselor for other veterans.

Having worked in construction since 1977, Rayon decided it was time to make a move, after going on unemployment.

"I can build you a house, I can read the blueprints, and everything else. But because the economy is so slow, construction's not doing so well," Rayon said.

Although it's a major commitment, going to school is almost a matter of simple economics, in Rayon's view.

"I'm qualified to be in construction, but not qualified to be in business – and I can't work for a regular guy because he knows I know too much, and I'm not going to stay," he said.

With those factors in mind, "the best thing for me to do is, get educated, so I can get up with the big boys," Rayon said, with a smile.

For more information LMC's veterans' services and programs, visit online at lakemichigancollege.edu/veterans, or call 927-8626.