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JOBS IN HEALTH CARE DOMINATE OCCUPATIONAL FORECAST

By Alaska Department of Workforce and Labor Development

Alaskans will find opportunities in a range of occupations over the next decade, but a disproportionate share will be in the health care arena. Of the 50 highest-growth occupations, 47 are health care-related — and this growing demand is largely driven by an aging population.

The needs of an older population and more retirements will boost other categories as well. In all, Alaska will add almost 39,000 new jobs between 2010 and 2020, and more than 96,000 additional job opportunities will come from replacements — that is, positions vacated by workers who retire, change careers, or leave the job market.

More need with aging population

Alaska, like the U.S. as a whole, is aging as a large group of baby boomers — those born between 1946 and 1964 — move into their senior years. The number of Alaskans age 65 to 79 is expected to almost double from 2010 to 2020, and the number of those 80 and older will grow by 46 percent. Higher demand for an array of health care services will follow.

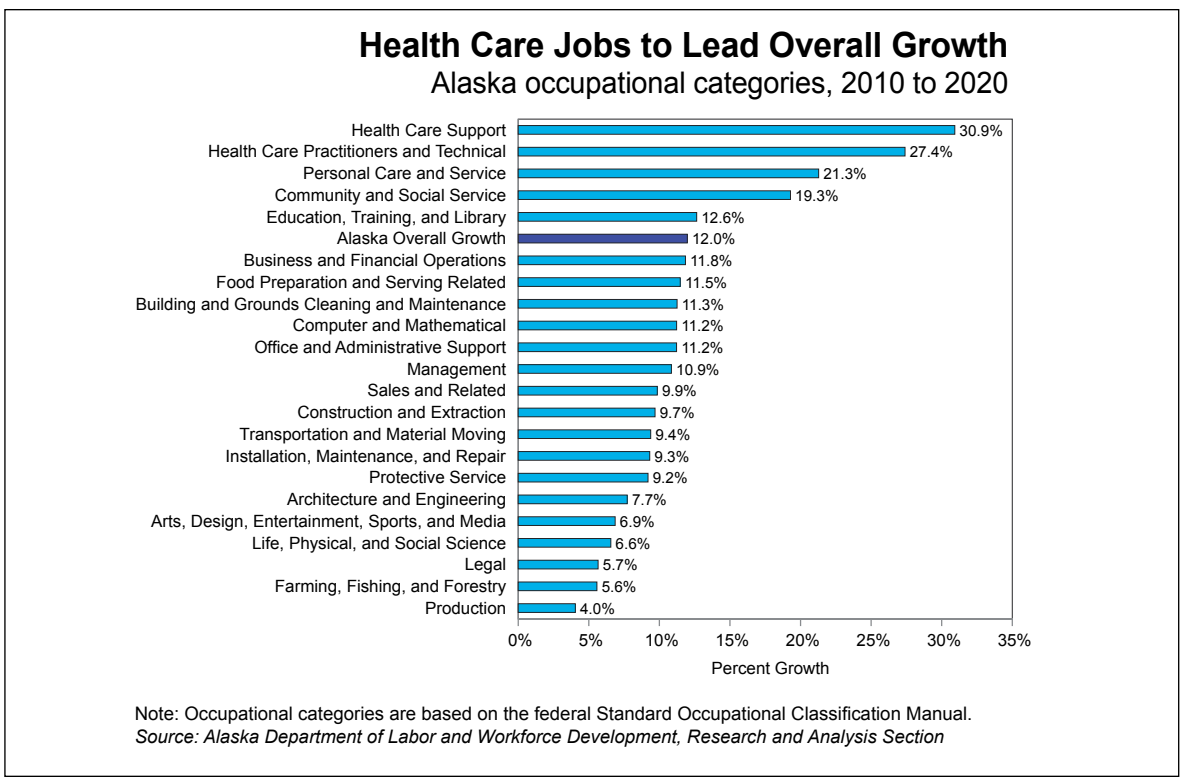
The hundreds of individual occupations are grouped into 22 broad categories. Of that 22, the two broad categories of 1) health care practitioners and technical occupations and 2) health care support occupations are projected to add more than 6,500 jobs by 2020, growing by 27.4 and 30.9 percent, respectively.

Besides the added jobs, the need for replacement workers in those categories is expected to generate around 5,000 openings — and this doesn't include a number of health care-related occupations in other categories, such as medical and health services managers, health care social workers, and nursing and health specialties instructors.

Of the top 25 occupations for percentage growth, 21 fall under the broad umbrella of health care — but three of the four remaining occupations are also health-related: personal care aides, health care educators, and medical secretaries.

PHOTO/FILE/AP

In this Aug. 1, 2012 photo, Taura Tate, left, a home care aide since 1999, folds laundry for Crell Johnson, 76, at Johnson's apartment, in Euclid, Ohio. An aging population in Alaska is projected to create needs not only for many health care fields to provide care, but also to fill the jobs a retiring generation will leave behind. Personal care aide positions such as Tate's are expected to grow 40 percent by 2020.



Other categories will also benefit

The personal care and service category and community and social service category will also get a boost from the needs of the growing senior population. Together, these two broad categories will grow by over 20 percent, well above the 12 percent expected for all occupations combined.

Personal care aides, often considered a health care-related occupation, fall into the category of personal care and service. They assist the elderly with general care and daily activities, a service that can often delay the need for a nursing home or other facility. Personal care aides are expected to grow by 40 percent, the highest growth rate for any single occupation.

In the community and social service category, occupations such as health care social workers, social and human service assistants, and community health workers also play a part in helping older Alaskans. In addition to their other clients, many social workers direct elderly clients to health services and support people and families dealing with chronic or terminal illness. Not surprisingly, these types of social service occupations are expected to grow at a faster rate than the whole.

The only other broad category expected to grow at an above-average rate is education, training, and library, at 12.6 percent. That leaves 17 categories below the overall 12 percent growth rate, ranging from 4 percent for production to 11.8 percent for business and finance.

Some outside health will also shine

When focusing on specific occupations, it's easy to lose sight of growing occupations in categories outside health care. Only one outlier made the top 25: personal and financial advisers. But, even outside the high-growth categories, many other occupations are expected to grow by 15 percent or more over the projection period.

The top 25 occupations outside health, personal care, and social services are shown in Chart 7. These occupations run the gamut from teachers to business and finance occupations to billing clerks to computer systems analysts.

Three of the top 25 in this group are preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers (except special education). These occupations will grow roughly in lockstep with the projected population growth for the relevant age groups.

Personal financial advisers will gain clients from the expanding number of retirees, and are expected to grow by over 35 percent. Securities, commodities, and financial services sales agents could reap similar gains, at about 17.5 percent.

The three computer occupations in this group — applications software developers, systems software developers, and computer systems analysts — will be bolstered by increasing reliance on technological

*See **Forecast**, Page 4*

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ON THE COVER:
U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO/AIRMAN TY-RICO LEA
JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – Tech. Sgt. Eddie Campbell, 611th Civil Engineer Squadron electrical systems craftsman, embraces his daughter Aiko at Orion elementary school on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Sept. 26. Campbell surprised his daughter and son, Nolan, after serving a six-month deployment in an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia.

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SERVICES FOR VETERANS, TRANSITIONING SOLDIERS

Alaska Job Centers

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development provides "Priority of Service" for veterans and eligible spouses in all qualified job training programs funded in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Labor. Priority of service means that veterans and eligible spouses are given priority over non-covered persons for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services.

For more information go online at Jobs.Alaska.Gov and Jobs.Alaska.Gov/veterans.

Priority of Service also includes:

- Dedicated veteran employment staff
- Jobs posted on ALEXsys are viewable only by veterans for the first 24 hours
- Several job centers have computers reserved solely for use by veterans
- Limited training funds go to veterans before consideration of non-veteran trainees

Employment Services

Alaska Job Centers offer a variety of services to help Alaskans find a job, or a better job.

Services include:

- Resource rooms with Internet-ready computers, copiers, fax machines, phones
- Workshops to enhance your job search, resume, cover letter, interview, and networking skills and many more
- One-on-one assistance from a career counselor to aid you through any step of the employment process
- Referrals to other partner agencies (you may qualify for programs for which you are unaware).

Information about Alaska Job Center job fairs, recruitments and workshops is available online at jobs.alaska.gov/jobfairs/index.html.

Unemployment Benefits

Members of the Armed Forces are considered employed. Immediately upon separation, members of the armed forces are considered unemployed and may qualify for unemployment insurance benefits. To apply for unemployment benefits go online at my.alaska.gov.

Business Ownership

There are many resources available to veterans considering starting a business or expanding an existing one. Please visit the following sites for more information: aksbdc.org, www.va.gov/osdbu/veteran and www.sba.gov.

GI Bill Education and Training

This program assists veterans and their dependents by allowing them to use their education and training benefits. Benefits can be used to learn a trade or skill through participation in apprenticeship or on-the-job training rather than by attending classes. For more information go online at www.gibill.va.gov.

Helmets to Hardhats (H2H)

Helmets to Hardhats is a free one-stop shop for the best construction industry jobs nationwide. America's employers and trade organizations come to H2H looking for America's best workers. H2H accepts active military, those in the National Guard and Reserves and veterans who want to join the building and construction trades.

Helmets to Hardhats can provide information on how to access the construction industry. The first step in finding a great career in building and construction is to register at www.helmetstohardhats.org. Users need to complete a profile and can learn about the different trades and what it means to be a part of them.

Alaska's H2H Coordinator Alexis Crabtree can be reached at 866-993-8181 or by email at alexisc@AlaskaWorks.org.

Troops to Teachers

Troops to Teachers is a U.S. Department of Defense program that helps eligible military personnel begin a new career as teachers in public schools where their skills, knowledge and experience are most needed. For more information go online www.proudtoserveagain.com.

Job Boards

State of Alaska
Alaska Labor Exchange (ALEXsys)
alexsys.labor.state.ak.us
Home to public and private jobs available in the State of Alaska.

Workplace Alaska
doa.alaska.gov/dop/workplace
Home to State Government jobs available in the State of Alaska.

Alaska Department of Workforce and Labor Development

For a list of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development job fairs and workshops go online Labor.Alaska.Gov

National sites, US.jobs
Home to public and private jobs available throughout the country.

USAjobs.gov
www.usajobs.gov
Home to Federal Government jobs available throughout the country.

Hero 2 Hired
h2h.jobs
Home to public and private jobs available throughout the country and designed specifically for Reserve Component service members.

Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs

The Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs help veterans and their families to improve the quality of their lives. The office can help veterans file claims for education, medical or other benefits, and assist in obtaining earned military awards. For information call 888-248-3682 or go online veterans.alaska.gov.

FEDERAL TAX CREDITS FOR VETERAN-HIRE, SOME NON-VET GROUPS EXTENDED THROUGH 2013

Employers who hire veterans and members of some non-veteran target groups are eligible for federal Work Opportunity Tax Credits through 2013.

Non-veteran target groups are vocational rehabilitation referrals, recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, recipients of Supplemental Security Income and ex-offenders.

Employees must work at least 120 hours in the first year of employment for employers to receive credits of up to $9,600.

For more information go online at **Jobs.Alaska.Gov/wotc.htm**, or contact the WOTC program coordinator at 907-465-5952 or **dol.wotc@alaska.gov.**

TOP 10 REASONS TO HIRE A VETERAN

Accelerated learning curve: Veterans have the proven ability to learn new skills and concepts. In addition, they can enter your workforce with identifiable and transferable skills, proven in real-world situations.

Leadership: The military trains people to lead by example as well as through direction, delegation, motivation, and inspiration. Veterans understand the practical ways to manage behaviors for results. They also know the dynamics of leadership as part of both hierarchical and peer structures.

Teamwork: Veterans understand how genuine teamwork grows out of a responsibility to one's colleagues. Military duties involve a blend of individual and group productivity. They also necessitate a perception of how groups of all sizes relate to each other and an overarching objective.

Diversity and inclusion in action: Veterans have learned to work side by side with individuals regardless of diverse race, gender, geographic origin, ethnic background, religion, and economic status as well as mental, physical, and attitudinal capabilities.

Efficient performance under pressure: Veterans understand the rigors of tight schedules and limited resources. They have developed the capacity to know how to accomplish priorities on time, in spite of tremendous stress. They know the critical importance of staying with a task until it is done right.

Respect for procedures: Veterans have gained a unique perspective on the value of accountability. They can grasp their place within an organizational framework, becoming responsible for subordinates' actions to higher supervisory levels. They know how policies and procedures enable an organization to exist.

Technology and globalization: Because of their experiences in the service, veterans are usually aware of international and technical trends pertinent to business and industry. They can bring the kind of global outlook and technological savvy that all enterprises of any size need to succeed.

Integrity: Veterans know what it means to do "an honest day's work." Prospective employers can take advantage of a track record of integrity, often including security clearances.

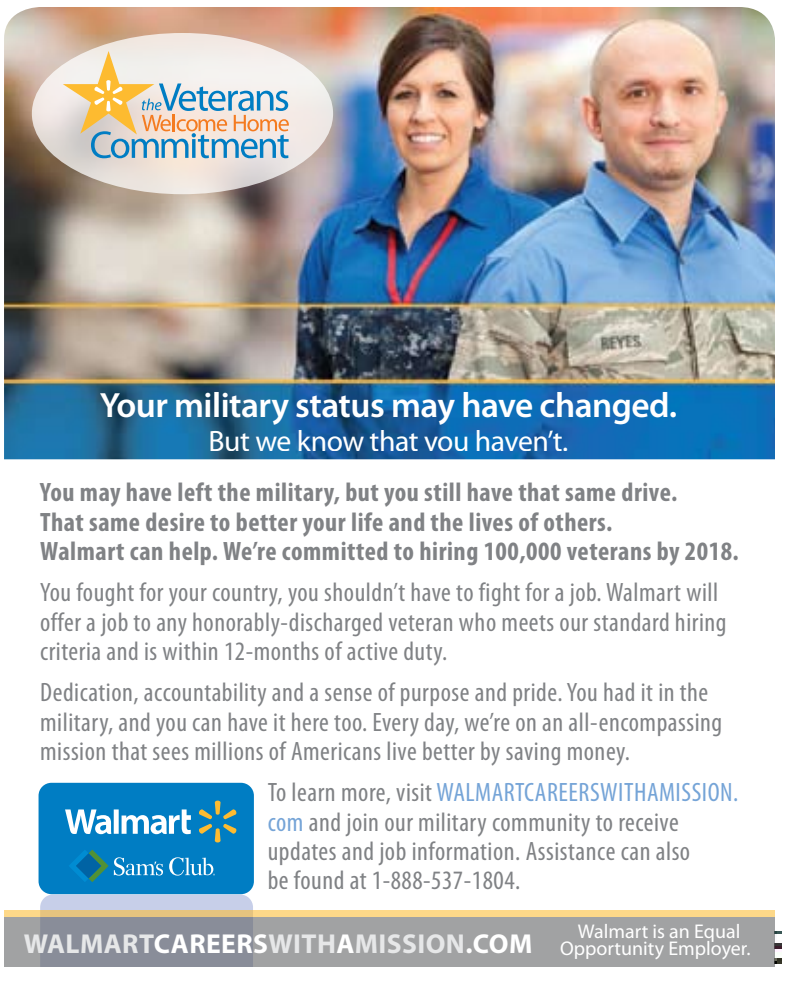
Conscious of health and safety standards: Thanks to extensive training, veterans are aware of health and safety protocols both for themselves and the welfare of others. On a company level, their awareness and conscientiousness translate into protection of employees, property, and materials.

Triumph over adversity: In addition to dealing positively with the typical issues of personal maturity, veterans have frequently triumphed over great adversity. They likely have proven their mettle in mission critical situations demanding endurance, stamina, and flexibility.

Source: Capt. Benjamin Jones, Veterans Today, Jan. 25, 2010.

Photo/Justin Connaher/U.S. Air Force

Parachute infantryman Sgt. John Hately, a native of Fort Belvoir, Va., assigned to D Company 3rd Battalion (Airborne) 509th Infantry Regiment, calculates his next move during the day land navigation course as a candidate for the Expert Infantryman Badge on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson April 22, 2013. The Expert Infantryman Badge was approved by the Secretary of War on October 7, 1943, and is currently awarded to U.S. Army personnel who hold infantry or special forces military occupational specialties.



Forecast: *Continued from Page 2*

solutions to industry needs.

A small number will be in decline

Out of more than 500 occupations with employment of at least 50 in 2010, only 18 are expected to decline over the 10-year forecast period.

The Alaska Railroad has hit hard times due to the loss of fuel hauls from the Flint Hills Refinery in North Pole and reductions in federal dollars. More than 50 positions were eliminated this summer, and unless the outlook improves, railroad workers could be vulnerable. Four of the 18 occupations projected to decline are in railroads.

Four U.S. Postal Service occupations and two logging occupations are also projected decliners, part of industries that are expected to lose ground. Other declining occupations, such as sewing machine operators and file clerks, are becoming obsolete.

Replacements to eclipse new jobs

When determining the long-term outlook for occupations, it's important to consider replacement openings as well as new jobs. In fact, over the projection period, replacements are expected to generate more than 96,000 openings — more than 2.5 times the number of forecasted new jobs.

Replacement openings are vacancies left when a worker permanently leaves an occupation, commonly through retirement, leaving the labor force, leaving the state, or changing careers. They do not include turnover from workers changing jobs in the same occupation. For example, if a person left a job as a baker at Bob's bakery and went to work as a baker at Jane's bakery, that wouldn't count as a replacement opening.

Despite the exclusion of this type of job turnover, many of the occupations with high turnover also have the highest replacement openings, as they often employ younger Alaskans who move on to other careers.

A good example is cashiering, where over 90 percent of the 5,600 projected openings will be from replacements. Many of the workers in this occupation are young, and a high number of cashier jobs are also seasonal. Although not all cashier jobs are the same, for many young workers it isn't a lifelong career choice.

On the flip side, occupations with higher-paying jobs that offer stable, year-round employment tend to have more openings from job growth than replacement. For example, only 27 percent of openings among personal financial advisers will be from replacements.

High openings in office, sales

The three broad categories with the most projected total openings will be office and administrative support occupations, sales and related occupations, and food preparation and serving related occupations.

The office and administrative occupations category will get about two-thirds of its openings from replacements while the other two categories will get over 80 percent. The difference is largely due to the dominance of lower-paying and seasonal jobs in sales and food service.

Alaska Department of Workforce and Labor Development

A variety of programs are available to veterans and transitioning soldiers including Hero2Hired, Troops to Teachers, and Helmets to Hard Hats. For more information go online **Labor.Alaska.Gov**

Openings vary by education level

Three-quarters of all projected openings will come from occupations that typically require a high school diploma or less. However, these will mostly be low-paying jobs.

On average, positions requiring a high school diploma paid about $47,000 annually, and those requiring less than a high school diploma paid a little over $29,000. However, these figures are based on a 40-hour work week year-round, and many of these jobs are part-time or seasonal.

The remaining 25 percent of openings will come from occupations that require at least an associate degree or other post-secondary nondegree award. The largest percentage of these openings are in occupations requiring at least a bachelor's degree. Openings in these occupations pay higher average wages, and more of them offer full-time, year-round employment.

Alaska's Top Jobs, 2010 to 2020

Long-term occupation projections are a vital tool for workforce development agencies, job placement and counseling professionals, job seekers, and education and training providers — but it can be hard to determine which occupations should get the most attention.

To help answer this question, economists at the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development developed Alaska's Top Jobs list.

The list focuses on occupations projected to fare well and pay well over the forecast period. Although there's no way to consider every angle in what makes one occupation a better prospect than another, the top jobs list is a good place to start.

To make the top jobs list, an occupation must meet two criteria. First, its average wages must rank in the top half of all occupations. Second, the occupation must either: 1) have projected growth of at least 75 jobs and percentage growth that is higher than the growth for all occupations combined, or 2) be among the 50 occupations with the most projected openings.

Top jobs list includes wide range

The occupations on the top jobs list are an elite group. Out of more than 600 considered occupations, only 53 made the grade. Although health care is well represented, the majority of the top occupations are in other categories.

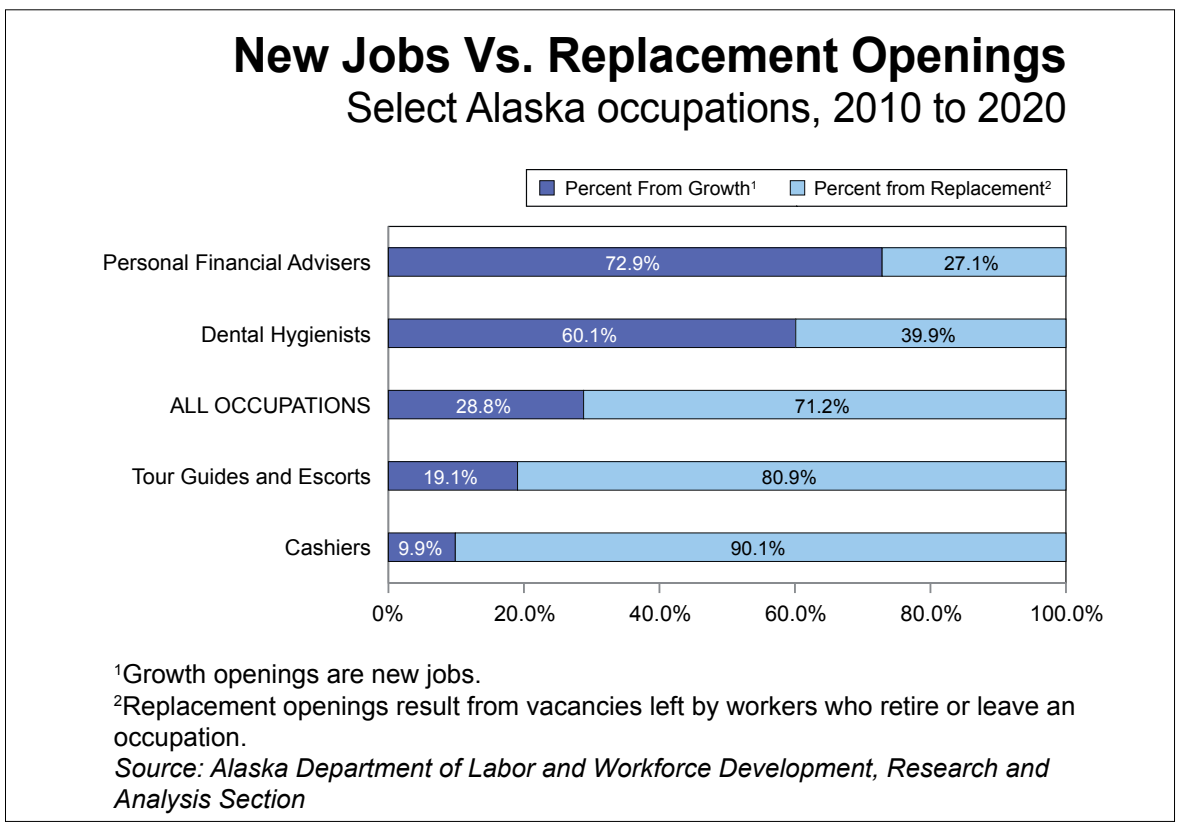
Teachers, accountants, computer professionals, pilots, captains and mates, probation officers, lawyers, and wildlife biologists are just a sampling of what made the list.The top jobs list is heavy on more stable, career-oriented occupations.

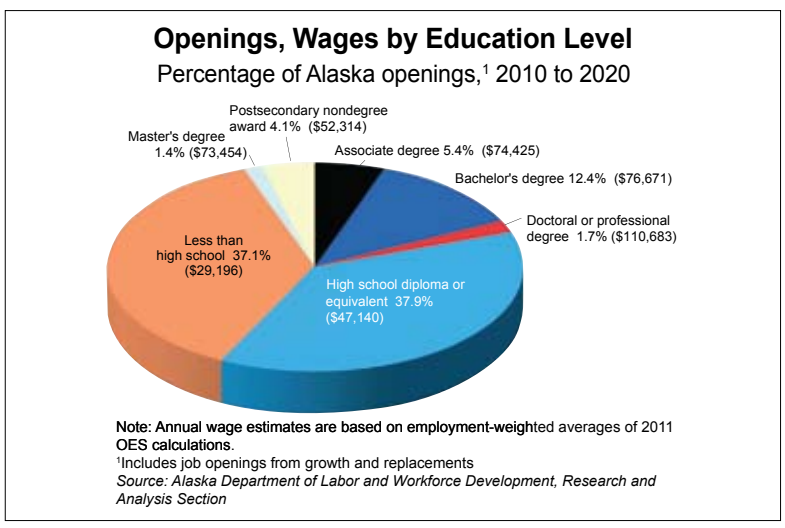
Twenty-seven typically require at least a bachelor's degree, and another 10 require an associate degree or a nondegree postsecondary award such as a vocational certificate.

Many of the remaining occupations — those requiring no postsecondary education — are well-paying construction trades and mechanics occupations such as carpenters, operating engineers and construction equipment operators, plumbers and pipefitters, and mobile heavy equipment mechanics.

Although these occupations don't require postsecondary education, many require apprenticeships or considerable on-the-job training.

See more at labor.alaska.gov/trends.





SEE THESE EMPLOYERS NOVEMBER 8

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- ALASKA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
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- ALASKA DEPT OF CORRECTIONS
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- ALASKA REGIONAL HOSPITAL
- ALASKA SHRM STATE COUNCIL
- ALASKA STATE TROOPERS
- ALASKA TAGS AND TITLES
- ALASKA VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM/VR&E
- ALASKA VETERANS MUSEUM
- ALASKA WORKS PARTNERSHIP
- & HELMETS TO HARDHATS
- ALSCO
- ALYESKA PIPELINE SERVICES COMPANY
- ALYESKA RESORT
- ANCHORAGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
- ANCHORAGE NEIGHBORHOOD AHEALTH CENTER
- ANCHORAGE POLICE DEPARTMENT
- ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
- ARC OF ANCHORAGE
- ASRC AES EPT
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- ASSETS, INC.
- AT&T
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- BP
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- CARLILE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES, INC.
- CARRS/SAFEWAY
- CH2M HILL
- COALITION FOR ALASKA'S SERVICE MEMBERS, VETS & FAMILY
- CONTINENTAL AUTO GROUP
- CROWLEY
- DENALI ALASKAN FCU
- DOWL HKM
- EDWARD JONES INVESTMENTS
- ENSTAR NATURAL GAS
- ESGR & HEROES TO HIRED
- FAIRWEATHER, INC.
- FIRST COMMAND FINANCIAL SERVICES
- FIRST NATIONAL BANK ALASKA
- GCI
- GEO GROUP
- GREEN CONNECTION
- HALLIBURTON
- HILCORP
- HOME DEPOT
- HOME INSTEAD SENIOR CARE
- HOPE COMMUNITY RESOURCE INC.
- HOTEL CAPTAIN COOK
- JACK WHITE REAL ESTATE
- JBER NAF
- KELLY SERVICES
- KID'S CORPS, INC.
- KTUU-TV
- LYTHIA
- MARSH CREEK LLC
- MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
- MORRIS COMMUNICATION
- NANA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
- NANA MANAGEMENT SERVICES
- NEIGHBORWORKS ANCHORAGE
- NEW YORK LIFE
- NEW YORK LIFE
- NORTHERN AIR CARGO
- NORTHERN INDUSTRIAL TRAINING
- NORTHSTAR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
- NORTHWESTERN MUTUAL FINANCIAL
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- OLGOONIK DEVELOPMENT LLC
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- RICOH-ALASKA
- SHELL OIL COMPANY
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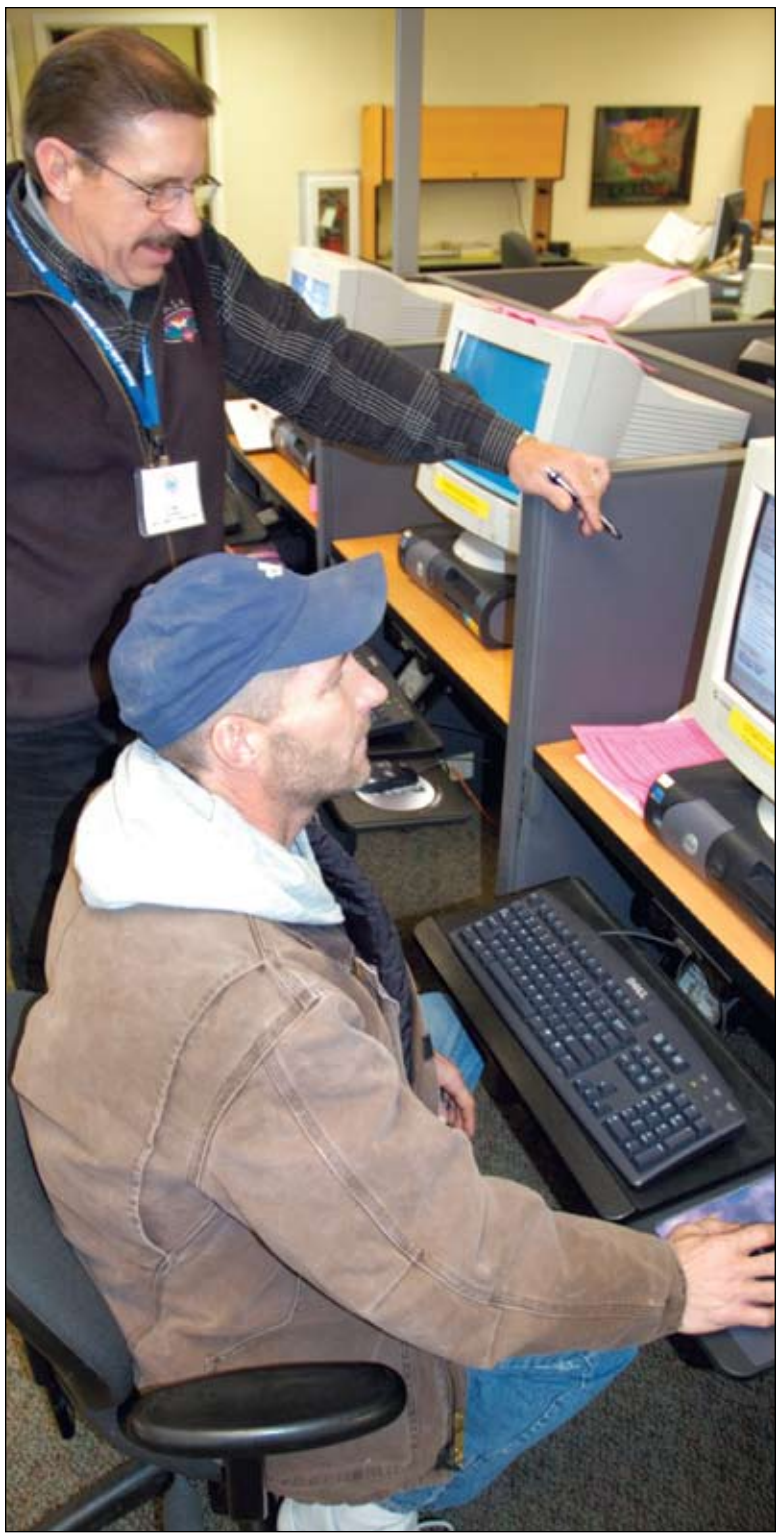

HIRING OUR HEROES

CAREER COUNSELING & WORKSHOPS

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WE CAN HELP PROVIDE THE TOOLS!

NOV. 8, 11 A.M.-3 P.M., UNIVERSITY CENTER

The Alaska Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) State Council will be hosting a career counseling workshop at the Hiring our Heroes Job Fair from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Nov. 8, 2013. This event is being held at the University Center and is free to the public.

Human Resource professionals representing multiple industries will be available to serve as "Advisors" to participants of this workshop. These HR professionals are the best of the best in Anchorage and will offer participants advice and insight regarding resume preparation, interviewing skills and industry specific careers.

Participants will meet one-on-one with an "Advisor" as well as receive a variety of educational materials regarding finding and securing an ideal career.

Participants are encouraged to bring a copy of their resume so the "Advisor" can offer his/her suggestions for improvement!

In addition, participants may bring a recruitment bulletin and/or job description of the "ideal job" so the Advisor can offer specific assistance to help secure an interview for the position.

Three workshops will also be presented:

- **11 a.m.–12 p.m.: Recruitment Panel, What Employers are Looking For**
- **12 p.m.–1 p.m.: Getting the Job: Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce**
- **1 p.m.–2 p.m.: Recruitment Panel, What Employers are Looking For**

Alaska Job Centers provide resources to find a job or find a better one. To find an Alaska Job Center near you go online Jobs.Alaska.Gov

VETERANS' ISSUES ADDRESSED AT SENATE FIELD HEARING

By Elwood Brehmer
Alaska Journal of Commerce

The discussion at an Aug. 23 Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs field hearing chaired by Sen. Mark Begich in Anchorage focused on how state and federal Veterans Affairs officials can work around logistics and seasonal challenges common in Alaska.

Southcentral Foundation President and CEO Katherine Gottlieb began testimony by discussing her organization's agreements with the state Veterans Affairs office to expand health care coverage to rural communities.

An Alaska Native organization, the Southcentral Foundation manages Indian Health Service programs in its namesake Southcentral region of Alaska through the Nuka System of Care.

Gottlieb said the new agreements allow for Native and non-Native veterans to receive primary care at non-VA clinics across the state. She said the challenge is getting the word out to veterans that live in rural Alaska and making sure they identify themselves as veterans when they seek care.

Begich, who serves on the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, questioned how long it will take to determine the positive and negative aspects of the program, such as whether or not all the groups involved are effectively communicating.

He added that the option is a "great addition" to the health care system in Alaska for veterans who may otherwise have to fly to Anchorage or Seattle for covered treatment they could have received closer to home.

Gottlieb said the Southcentral Foundation is proficient at collecting data to make any adjustments deemed necessary to streamline the program, but that it will also take time to raise awareness about the program itself.

"It's going to take six months to two years to get the word out to make sure everybody knows they have (local) access," she said.

Under Secretary for the federal Veterans Health Administration Dr. Robert Petzel said the Anchorage Veterans Affairs Regional Office has reduced its number for pending benefit claims and improved claims processing accuracy in recent months.

In January, the Office of the Inspector General issued a report that found Anchorage regional office staff had erred in processing 18 of the 38 disability claims it reviewed. The report, conducted in June 2012, stated that a "lack of management oversight resulted in staff delays in gathering evidence and processing old claims" at the Anchorage office.

In April 2012, 948 of the 2,004 disability claims pending at the office were older than the VA's goal of handling claims within 125 days, according to the report.

In his testimony, Petzel said new quality assurance procedures that include an internal Quality Review Team have improved the accuracy of claims decisions from 81 percent in fiscal year 2012 to 83 percent today in Anchorage. The team conducts in-process reviews to prevent errors from negatively affecting a claimant's benefits, he said. It also helps identify error trends, which can improve training methods for processors.

The agency's goal for compensation rating-decision accuracy is 87 percent.

Also, as of May 15 of this year, VA made overtime mandatory for all claims processors and support staff to eliminate claims pending longer than one year, Petzel said.

"With (Veterans Benefits Administration's) recent initiative to focus on the oldest claims in our backlog, I am pleased to report that the Anchorage regional office has no claims pending over two years and is on track to be one of the first offices in VBA to have no claims pending over one year," he said.

Anchorage resident and Iraq War veteran Brandon McGuire provided insight to how the GI Bill could better serve veterans earning on-the-job training or an education in a professional trade.

McGuire is now a representative for the United Association's Local 367 Plumbers and Pipefitters union in Anchorage. He testified that while enrolled in on-the-job training with the union he found the cyclical "feast or famine" nature of summer versus winter construction work in Alaska did not provide him with a steady income based on GI Bill requirements.

PHOTO/STAFF SGT. MATTHEW E. WINSTEAD/U.S. ARMY

Victoria Fraser sings the national anthem at a Memorial Day ceremony this year in Anchorage, alongside Berkley Ide, commander of the Staff Sgt. Archie Van Winkle Memorial Chapter 288 of the Korean War Veterans Association, and Brig. Gen. Leon "Mike" Bridges, assistant adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard. Fraser's brother died in 2005 while serving overseas.

To receive full benefits a veteran must work for a minimum of 120 hours per month. Active duty veterans can earn up to $1,100 per month for the first six months of training and pay decreases for every six months of training after. If 120 hours is not reached in a month the pay is prorated for the time worked.

"There were several months where I would put in 220 hours and there were several months where I would put in zero," McGuire told the senator.

He suggested a change to the bill to allow for work hours to accumulate over a longer period of time or be averaged per month so veterans could count on an income while training.

McGuire noted that college students receiving GI Bill aide do not track their class hours, but are paid if they meet grade standards.

Begich said McGuire's suggestions are important because veterans entering the construction trades in other northern tier states almost certainly encounter similar challenges.

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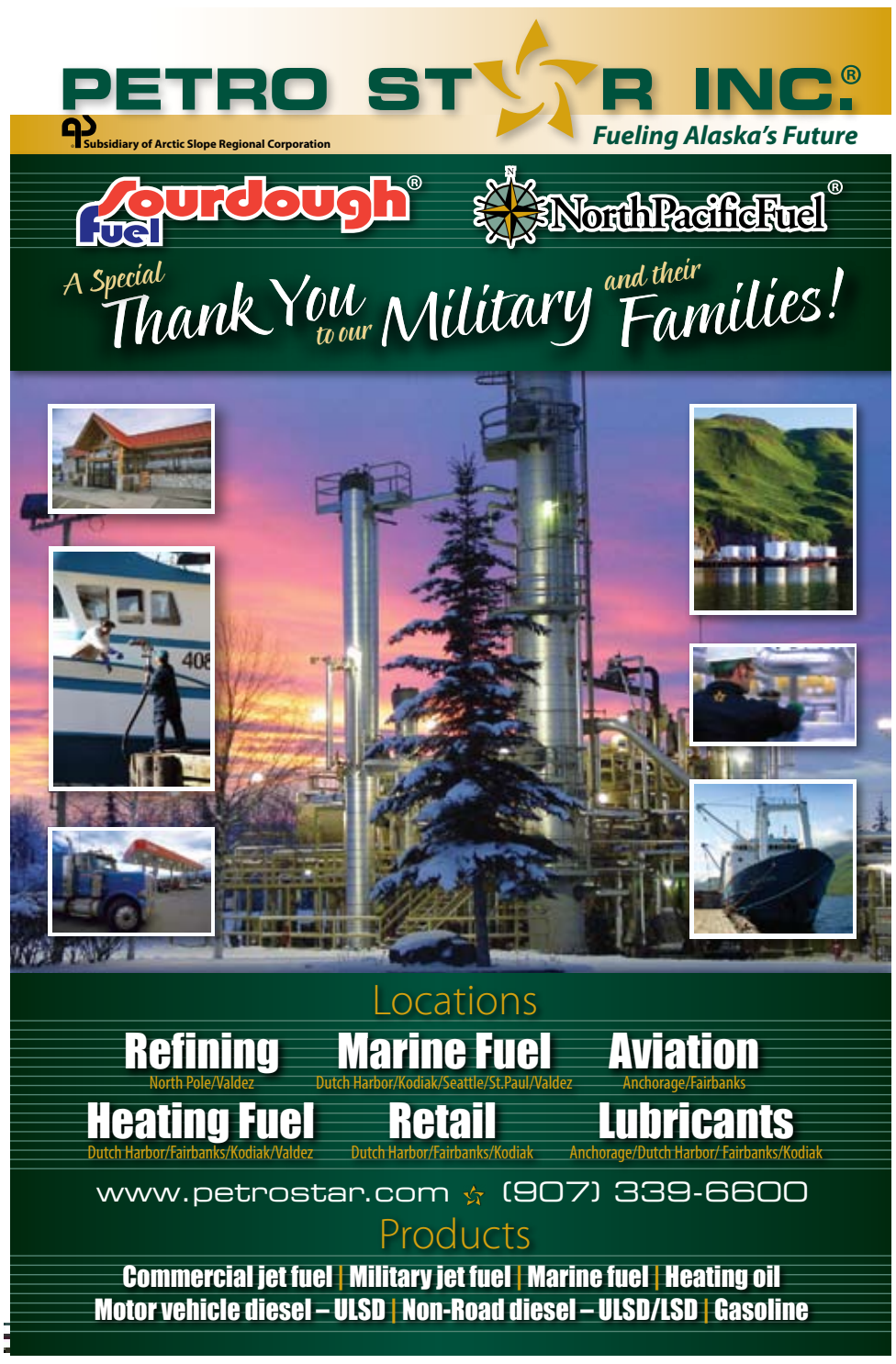

IN WAR WIND-DOWN, VETERANS' NEW MISSION IS COLLEGE

By Kevin Freking
Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — Many veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have embarked on a new mission, but this transition from battlefield to university classroom isn't always easy.

Colleges and universities are offering an array of services, from tutoring to setting up vets-only lounges, to help them succeed.

Some of the challenges that the veterans face are medical.

Adam Fisher, a freshman at the University of Toledo, deals with post-traumatic stress disorder by participating in group therapy.

"It's hard for me to be around so many people," he said.

Other challenges are academic. Veterans often have to sharpen their math, reading and study skills after being away from school for so long.

They face cultural hurdles too.

While many other freshmen are testing their independence after moving away from home for the first time, some of the veterans back in school are supporting a family, working evenings and weekends.

Veterans also must navigate the Department of Veterans Affairs' bureaucracy to ensure that their tuition and other aid, such as housing or disability benefits, are paid on time.

The University of Toledo has about 400 veterans on campus.

"I understand the pain and suffering some of these men and women have experienced," university President Lloyd Jacobs said. "It's huge. It's heartrending. On the other hand, people who do have that experience bring strength to our culture, bring strength to our university that's unparalleled."

"It's both a terrible thing and a great gift to have had that kind of experience," he said.

The American Council on Education says about 71 percent of some 700 colleges and universities responding to a recent survey had an office or department dedicated exclusively to serving veterans. Before the Post-9/11 GI Bill kicked in, a 2009 survey put that percentage at 49 percent.

About two-thirds had clubs or organizations composed of veterans, double from the 2009 survey.

Student Veterans of America, a coalition of student veterans groups on college campuses around the world, has branched out from fewer than 20 campuses to more than 880 in recent years.

Michael Dakduk, the group's outgoing executive director, said colleges have adjusted to the wave of veterans by hiring people exclusively to serve them and their dependents. Schools also are establishing peer mentoring and tutoring programs. The extra resources give veterans the sense they don't have to face the challenges of college life on their own, he said.

The VA has placed counselors on 92 college campuses. The counselors connect students to local VA medical care and help them apply for other benefits.

About 500 veterans attend Florida State University, an increase of about 40 percent from the previous fall.

The school offers a class just for veterans called "strategies for veteran success." It's designed to boost their confidence and allows them to meet other veterans. The university holds a job fair for all students but opens it up a day early for veterans on campus. It also allows students to defer many expenses, such as their books and meal plan, because of the time it takes to get VA payments processed.

Officials at Florida State and Toledo say they hope other students will learn from the veterans.

"They bring life experiences, they bring leadership skills, they bring discipline, they bring a maturity to the campus," said Reinhart Lerch, communications director for Florida State's student veterans center, which opened in 2011.

Toledo also opened its veterans center in 2011. It's basically a one-stop clearinghouse for veterans and their dependents. At Toledo, they have a go-to person in military liaison Haraz Ghanbari, a lieutenant in the Navy Reserve.

When Mick Grantham, 43, enrolled at Toledo after back and neck problems forced him out of the Army, he plowed through his savings waiting for his disability benefits to kick in. Ghanbari, a former photographer for The Associated Press, arranged for the local American Legion to provide Grantham with a $500 grant. He pointed Grantham to a job opening with the university's grounds crew. He also nominated Grantham to be honored as the hero of the game at a recent Toledo football game.

Grantham is representative of the age and cultural divide that some student veterans face. He strongly believes his time in Afghanistan served an important purpose, and it has bothered him to hear some of the younger students criticize the war during his government studies class.

"I told them, 'You know, I lost nine friends. I've lost two since I've been home. Those guys didn't complain. We did our job. You can't tell me there's no reason for us to be there, '" he said.

The VA is working with Student Veterans of America to study how well veterans fare upon returning to college. To date, there is little data on the issue.

One study, conducted in 2009, just before the Post 9/11 GI Bill took effect, found that veterans entering college in the 2003-04 school year were more likely to have left school without getting their degree or certificate. But the difference was narrow — 39.5 percent for veterans versus 35 percent for nonveterans.

Veterans at Toledo said the transition always involves some adjustment.

John McCarter, 33, a former Army staff sergeant who left with a medical discharge after serving 13 years, said memory loss is a problem. He has a traumatic brain injury and wears a hearing aid as a result of a roadside bomb that exploded under his vehicle.

"I usually have to write things down," said McCarter, who hopes to become a sports journalist. "If I don't write them down, I'm probably not going to remember it."

While there are adjustments they've had to make, many veterans also believe their military service gives them an edge in the classroom.

"I work 10 times harder than what I did in high school," said Fisher, who wants to get into the medical profession, perhaps as a pediatric nurse. "The Army gave me a sense of self-respect and confidence, and they really show you hard work does pay off."

> "I work 10 times harder than what I did in high school. The Army gave me a sense of self-respect and confidence, and they really show you hard work does pay off."
> — *Adam Fisher*

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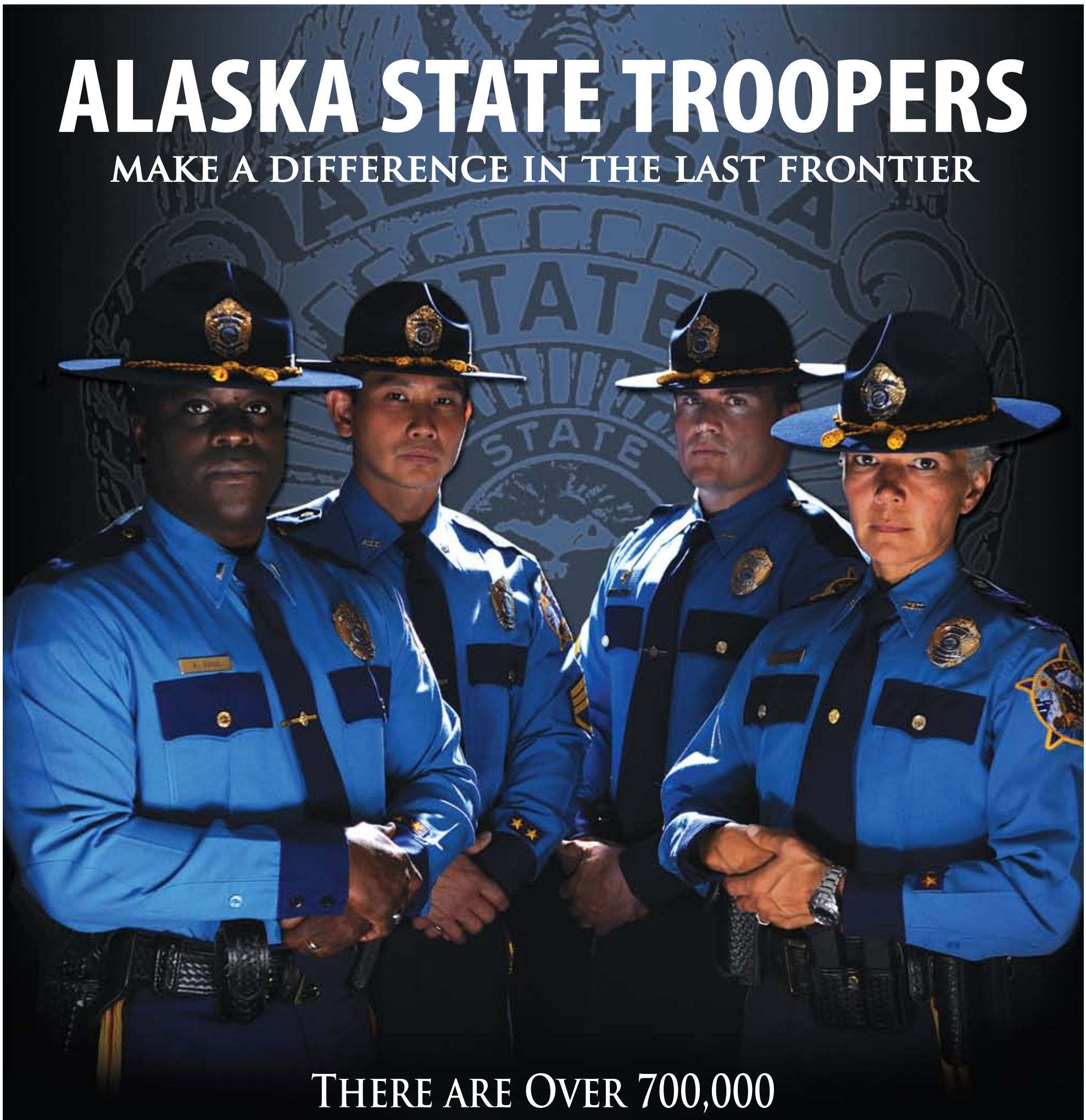

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