

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT



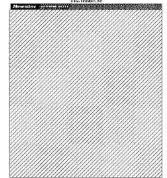
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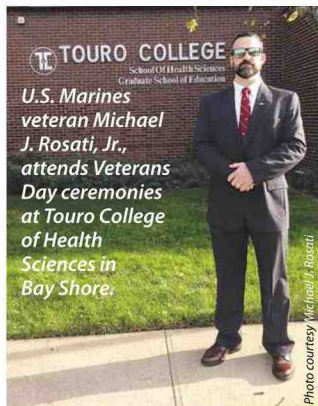


Resources for Veterans Expand at Long Island's Yellow Ribbon Schools

By Jim Merritt

Decorated Iraq veteran Michael J. Rosati, Jr., will be taking a major step in his transition to civilian life when he graduates this spring with a bachelor of science degree in biology from Touro College of Health Sciences in Bay Shore, where he's studying under the federal Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program.

"I have found a home here at Touro," says Rosati, 38, of Hauppauge, who was wounded in combat while serving in the U.S. Marine Special Operations Community from 1997 to 2006. Under the Veterans Benefits Administration program sometimes referred to as Chapter 31, tuition, a housing allowance and stipends for supplies are covered for veterans who were honorably discharged and have service-connected disabilities. (For details about the program visit benefits.va.gov.)



Rosati, who plans to continue his education in Touro's physician assistant program, says at Touro he's found "a small veterans community that welcomes you with open arms." He volunteers his time serving with the Touro Student Veterans Affairs support organization and participates in the annual campus Veteran's Day tribute. He's also coauthoring a book with other veterans about, he says, "our fallen brothers in the Marine Special Operations community."

If you're a veteran thinking of returning to college, you'll find a welcoming atmosphere, as well as financial assistance, support groups, resource centers and administrators dedicated to helping you succeed, at private and public schools across Long Island. The Post-9/11 GI Bill, an education benefit program for individuals who served on active duty after Sept. 10, 2001, can cover all in-state tuition and fees at public degree granting schools. The federal Yellow Ribbon Program provides additional support up to the full

cost of tuition and fees at private schools and in graduate programs.

Generous Transfer Credits

To help veterans earn a degree and get into the job market faster, credits are often accepted from previous college attendance or your military training.

"We work hard to maximize the amount of credit that transfers from their military experience," says Erin D'Eletto, director of the Office of Military and Veteran Services at St. Joseph's College in Patchogue. Based on an evaluation of military transcripts and prior college attendance, veterans receive on average 30 transfer credits, and as many as 64 credits, D'Eletto said. That means a veteran could be graduating with a bachelor's degree in as little as two years.

While on campus, veterans can relax in St. Joseph's recently opened Veterans Resource Center and lounge, where they can refill their mugs at a coffee-maker or borrow one of three 15-inch Dell laptops. "It's a space of their own," says D'Eletto, who previously worked for 11 years as a military and veteran affairs senior U.S. Congressional aide.

D'Eletto said St. Joseph's also helps veterans develop job skills with resume-writing workshops and career counseling funded by a \$14,000 grant from proceeds of the 2015 and 2016 Suffolk County Marathons.

Veterans resources are also expanding at [Suffolk County Community College](#), where one of the region's largest military-affiliated student bodies includes 700 veterans, active duty service members and their families.

Shannon O'Neill, director of veterans affairs, said the two-year old Veterans Resource Centers on the Selden and Brentwood campuses are now fully staffed, so veterans can drop in for advice on how to access benefits or stand out from the crowd in a job interview.

Focusing on Jobs

Reinaldo Romero, 44, who suffered combat injuries while serving in the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, is also pursuing civilian career goals, under the Yellow Ribbon program. He's studying in the health and wellness program at NYIT's Old Westbury campus.



U.S. Army veteran Reinaldo Romero

"The opportunity to go back to school was great because I wanted to have that formal education that would enable me to have more control over my future and my earning potential," Romero says.

Nancy Borchers, associate registrar, says, "We offer priority registration for all our veteran students to

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ensure they will be able to use their Post 9/11 GI Bill to ensure maximum benefits in the time frame they've been given." Borchers says NYIT waives the application fee for veterans and defers tuition payments until VA benefits are posted.

Romero, who is married and has two sons, and is currently working as a personal trainer at Sage Fitness in Whitestone, Queens, says he was attracted to the school's ties with future employers in the region. He is interested in an internship with an employer such as Northwell Health, which he says can lead to "full-fledged careers when you

graduate."

The Northwell Health Military and Veteran Liaison Services program assists veterans in translating military experience into marketable skills in the health care field. At Northwell Barracks to Business workshops, veterans can learn how to prepare for job interviews. Online, veterans can find a career to match their skills, by military occupational specialty code, at northwell-veterans.jobs.

VETERANS ON CAMPUS

Did you know that ...

More than a million veterans nationwide are using GI benefits to pursue advanced educational opportunities, according to the Veterans Administration.

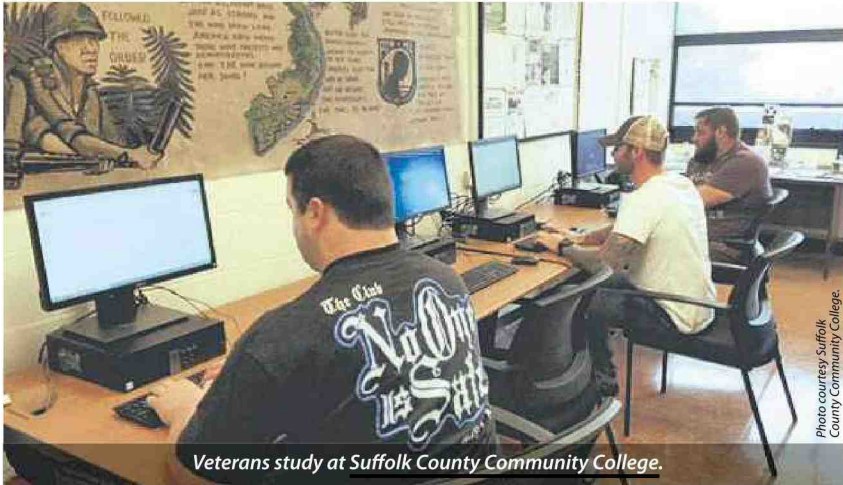
Three-quarters of these students are male; approximately 25 percent are female. Most are older than the traditional student population -- between ages 24 and 40 -- and also stand out in other ways:

47% have children.

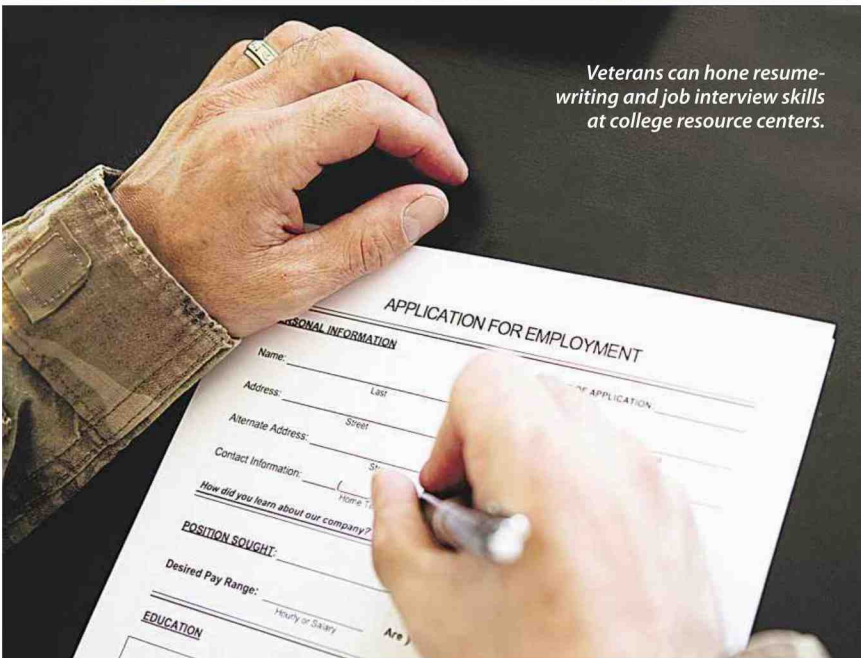
47.3% are married.

62% are first-generation students.

Source: va.gov



Veterans study at Suffolk County Community College.



Veterans can hone resume-writing and job interview skills at college resource centers.