Werner Enterprises’ military recruiting commitment is and has been a featured workforce development program for more than a decade, resulting in a total of approximately 25,000 new driver hires. Assistant Vice President Jim Morbach explained to Intermodal Insights how and why Werner’s driver program works, and why it was developed.

“We feel it is our American duty to take care of the men and women who served the country once they leave the service,” Morbach said, outlining the reason behind the pioneer driver hiring program.

When it was launched in April 2006, Werner became the first transportation company to work with the Veterans Administration and the Department of Labor to establish an approved apprenticeship program for drivers. Two years ago, a diesel mechanic apprenticeship was added.

There are several financial advantages in Werner’s program. Through funding from the post-9/11 GI Bill, the costs of truck driving school are paid, Morbach said. In addition, once they are on board at Werner, drivers can earn an additional $24,000 over two years, tax-free, over and above their regular paychecks. For mechanics, the additional income on that basis is $28,000 over 36 months.

From the carrier’s standpoint, there are multiple advantages. One is that Werner’s retention of drivers with a military background is much better than for other drivers, leading to a lower turnover rate. That result addresses one of the trucking industry’s long-standing concerns.

Werner also benefits through a broad range of connections with about 800 truck driving schools which are the source for most of the veterans who are hired. During 2013 and 2014, Werner acquired two driving schools to enhance its internal hiring capabilities.

Morbach emphasized that Werner remains committed to its military hiring program even though there appears to have been a lull in the driver shortage. The consistent pressure to attract more drivers has been another persistent industry issue. The carrier is building a full team of staff focused solely on military hiring.

‘Career Path’

“We offer a career path to veterans because we are such a large organization and a global company,” Morbach said. “They may start as a driver, and move to the safety department, become a fleet manager or obtain another position. Our goal is to educate them about trucking and provide opportunities, just like the type of choices they had inside the military.

“Ours field recruiters have a high work ethic,” the Werner executive said. “We are boots on the ground. It’s a big step to get into trucking. We want to make sure they are prepared. We have a structured presentation that we give to all students that is very detail oriented.”

There also is a finishing program for a new driver to work with a certified trainer on the road.

There are additional benefits and features for the ex-military worker. Werner has a “Freedom Fleet” of trucks that have military themed decals on the side of the trailer to show the carrier’s support. Veterans drive all of those trucks. Every veteran who drives for Werner is issued a decal for the side of the tractor recognizing their military service and veteran status. Drivers can receive a truck with an automatic transmission if they wish. There also are networking programs to provide support from other Werner ex-military workers.

As a direct result of the program, which has earned Werner multiple recognitions as a military-friendly employer, Morbach said 20 percent of the carrier’s workforce comes from the ranks of veterans, and 16 percent of drivers served in the military.