

Northeast Ohio hospitals recruiting Army reservists

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Summa Health System of Akron and other Northeast Ohio hospitals are looking for a few good men and women to fill thousands of secure, good-paying jobs.

And the U.S. Army Reserve is looking for opportunities to boost recruitment to its ranks.

Now the hospitals and armed forces together have found a possible cure for their needs.

Representatives from the U.S. Army Reserve and the Northeast Ohio Health Science and Innovation Coalition are meeting at Summa's Akron City Hospital campus Wednesday to sign a work-force development partnership agreement.

Under the partnership, hospitals in the coalition will give preferential hiring status to reservists who have completed training through the Army Reserves in medical-related fields.

"We think this kind of partnership really honors not only what the soldiers are doing in the reserve, it also creates a path for them to serve our country and build a successful life at home," said Thomas J. Strauss, Summa's president and chief executive.

The coalition was started about two years ago by six Northeast Ohio health systems to boost regional work-force development initiatives.

The coalition now includes seven hospitals and health systems with locations in 17 counties: Summa, the Cleveland Clinic, EMH Regional Healthcare, Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, MetroHealth System, Southwest General Health Center and University Hospitals Health System.

Together, the members have more than 3,000 job openings because of a regional and national shortage of skilled medical workers, Strauss said.

Many of the openings are for physical therapists and assistants, occupational therapists and assistants, medical technicians, registered respiratory therapists and other skilled jobs, said coalition Chairwoman Gayle Agahi, director of public sector initiatives for the Cleveland Clinic.

Starting wages for these positions can range from \$16 to \$28 or more an hour, she said.

The new partnership "is an opportunity to fill jobs where we have acute vacancies," Agahi said.

"The beauty of it for us is they're already trained and they get valuable experience in the Army Reserve," she said. "The in-depth screening process that they go through with the reserves is a help to us as well. They go through a very rigorous background check. You have a person who is clean, has a good work ethic and is dedicated to this region."

The new agreement is part of the Army Reserve Employer Partnership, a public-private venture launched last year by the U.S. Army Reserve.

More than 100 partnerships have been developed with national corporations, state agencies, local police departments and industry associations, according to the Army Reserve.

The deal with the Northeast Ohio hospitals is the second health venture and the first regional coalition partnership for the Army Reserve under its employer partnership initiative.

Some of the Army reservists complete a year of medical training after basic training, said Maj. Gen. Robert J. Kasulke, a physician who is deputy surgeon general for mobilization, readiness and reserve affairs for the U.S. Army Reserves.

With the new partnership, he said, enrollees can receive free medical training and then get access to good civilian jobs while fulfilling their reserve obligation, which usually lasts at least four to six years.

"What we found is a lot of the folks who are interested, particularly in the medical training, are young, relatively recent graduates or folks in their early 20s who want to do something different but they don't have the wherewithal to go to the community college to do it," Kasulke said. "This offers them a way to get the same exact skill set and training they would get for free."

All Army Reserve soldiers in good standing are eligible to participate in the employer partnership programs after completing their basic training and earning the required certifications.

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