

## TROOPS TO TEACHERS

Free program helps veterans transition to a career in teaching.

BY AMANDA GILLOOLY

**J**ohn Griffiths said transitioning from a career in the military to one in the private sector is confusing, and working your way toward a master's degree is a pricey enterprise – one he thought was almost impossible. Almost.

“Basically, I wouldn't have been able to do it without (Troops to Teachers) because it offered some financial incentives,” he said. “It was money for books and day care. That really made the difference.”

### GUARDSMAN'S GUIDE

Griffiths said he can't say enough about the services offered by Troops to Teachers, a U.S. Department of Education and Department of Defense program that helps eligible military personnel begin new careers as teachers in public schools.

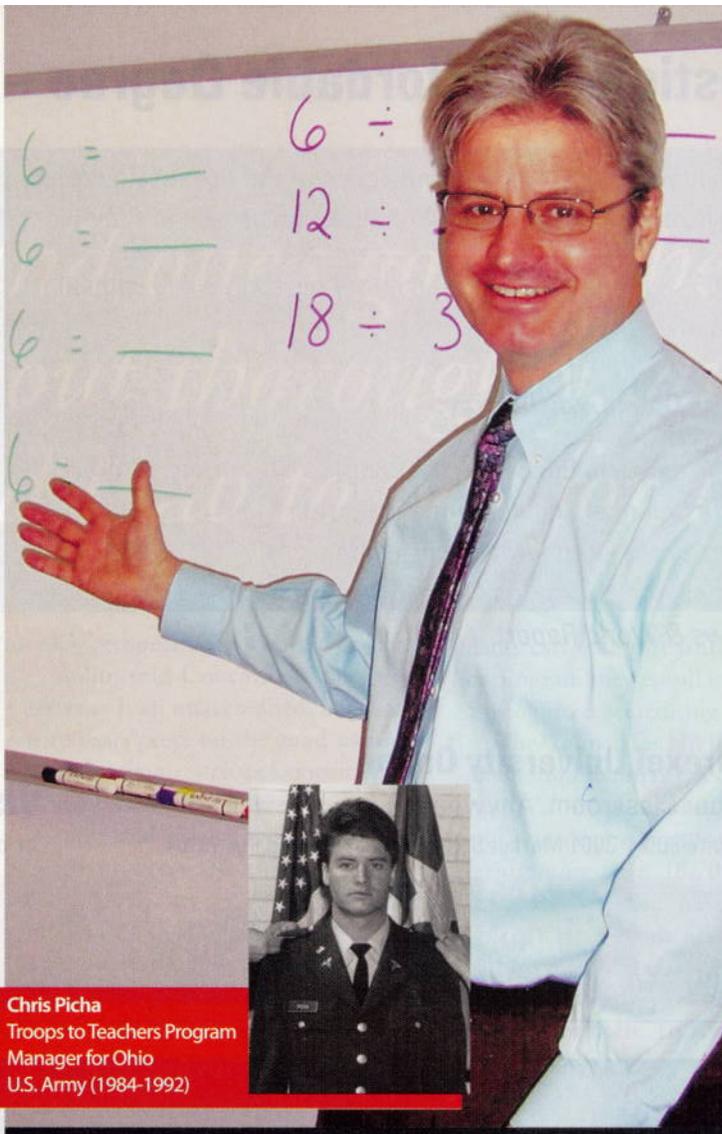
After graduating from Cleveland State University with a bachelor's degree in urban studies, he entered the Air National Guard in a civilian accounting position. But Griffiths, now 42, of Toledo, Ohio, said the dull nature of the work led him to explore options in teaching.

While making that transition, he said he sought out Troops to Teachers, a program that helped give him guidance about everything from the required certifications to seeking out job opportunities.

For Griffith, the advice and help he received from the Ohio branch of the program culminated in him being offered a full-time position with the Tolito Public School System before even graduating from Bowling

Green University in 1999 with a master's degree in education and social studies.

The degree allowed him to teach grades seven through 12 in Ohio, which he did at several high schools for 10 years before becoming an administrator. Now dean



**Chris Picha**  
Troops to Teachers Program  
Manager for Ohio  
U.S. Army (1984-1992)



of students at Scott High School, he was selected to complete a program to earn the proper certifications to be an administrator – something for which the Toledo Public School system is footing the bill.

“It's just one more example of how military experience helped me,” he said, explaining that cornerstones of a successful career in the Air National Guard – discipline and accountability chief among them – go a long way in the teaching field.

### A NATIONAL MARRIAGE

**Chris Picha**, 50, who manages the Troops to Teachers program Ohio, called Griffith “a dynamo” and agreed that men and women with prior military experience are helping to fill a void in the public schools where at-risk populations are highest.

In Ohio, for example, there are more than 700 schools with such populations.

The ex-U.S. Army medical logistics officer utilized the Troops to Teachers services prior to accepting the position he now has – and agrees that former mili-

tary folks and the public school system is a natural marriage.

“A veteran is generally someone who is dedicated, does a good job, endures hardships and rises above challenges,” he said.

Picha explained that all of the services offered to veterans are free, and the program even offers a \$5,000 stipend to help offset the expenses associated with certification. In return, candidates agree to teach at a high-need school for three years. Once hired, the client receives a \$5,000 bonus.

Last year Picha helped place eight people in full-time teaching jobs – and provided countless more with advice or referrals.

And it's that kind of support that Griffiths credits for helping him break into the teaching field.

“With the national dialogue about the state of public education, I'd love to see this program expanded,” he said. “There are so many talented ex-military men and women out there. Maybe they can help be part of how to improve the public education system.” **GI**



## TROOPS TO TEACHERS

Troops to Teachers is a U.S. Department of Education and Department of Defense program that provides counseling and referral services to military personnel interested in beginning a second career in public education as a teacher. The DANTES Troops to Teachers office will help applicants identify teacher certification requirements, programs leading to certification and employment opportunities.



**John Griffiths**  
Dean of Students  
Scott High School  
Major, Ohio National Guard  
(1986-Present)