

**Constant Contact Newsletter 2011-04-27**  
**Project Opportunity**

Hello Everyone!

A few weeks ago we asked the NxLevel network to share Partnership and Veteran success experiences. We received an email detailing an amazing story from Maryland that I think you will find inspiring.

*"Project Opportunity is a free entrepreneurship training program designed solely for veterans who want to start their own business. The prerequisite for veterans who wished to be considered to participate was that they had to have a solid idea of what business venture they wanted to start because the course is designed to develop and complete a business plan instead of just exploring the possibility of entrepreneurship."*

*Joe Giordano*

Joe Giordano, Workforce Development Coordinator with the Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Inc., in Maryland sent a detailed final report for a program he spearheaded called Project Opportunity. When Joe decided to offer entrepreneurial training for Veterans, he was not aware of NxLevel. As a retired US Army member he wanted to provide other veterans with an opportunity to utilize the skills and training they had received while in the military. Over the course of three years, Joe worked to prove the need, develop community partners to support his idea and plan his marketing strategy. He made contact with Certified NxLevel Instructor, Kristin Bacon, who works with Maryland Capital Enterprises. Joe and Kristin just happen to work in the same building. Kristin brought NxLevel into Joe's program.

*Project Opportunity* has three phases:

Phase I - Orientation

Three outreach orientation sessions were held. These two-hour workshops were titled "Exploring Entrepreneurship."

Phase II - Screening Assessments were done to determine the applicants with characteristics that would make them good candidates to complete the training and actually start their own businesses.

Phase III - NxLevel's Micro Enterprise called "Business Plan Bootcamp" was taught over 11 weeks.

Joe had 34 veterans attend the three orientation sessions, with 26 indicating they had a desire to attend "Bootcamp." The screening assessments filtered the number down to the top 16.

The program's success has a lot to do with Joe and his dogged determination to raise funds and to market Project Opportunity.

Financial support came from seven sponsors who collectively donated approximately \$10,000, or \$625 per veteran. About \$700 was invested in the graduation ceremony. The ceremony was an event in itself. In addition to catering the event, the diplomas were framed for the participants. Family members of program participants, guest speakers, and representatives from the various funding organizations were all invited.

As you can see from the figures, Joe spread the contributions across the community by asking for relatively small amounts of money from each sponsor. While it took more time and patience on his part, the end result is the "buy-in" from more people and organizations who took an interest in the success of *Project Opportunity*.

Joe met with Veteran Employment Representatives who sent out information letters to everyone in their database. Forty recruiting posters were printed and placed where Veterans would see them, like the VFW, Veteran Affairs Offices, etc., and of course press releases to all the media.

Joe told us that many of the speakers who were from the Salisbury Rotary Club not only volunteered as speakers but offered to mentor the veterans after they completed the class. This is not a surprise to me -- our NxLevelL Instructors are masters at creating this connection for their class participants. And maybe we have grown to expect it, knowing that the guest speakers are such a key and enthusiastic component of the NxLevelL experience.

Joe and Kristen are sharing with NxLevelL everything they did so that it can be easily duplicated. We will post Joe's final report and the orientation slide show on the [nxlevel.org](http://nxlevel.org) website in a few weeks. If you are interested in the information immediately, email [donna@nxlevel.org](mailto:donna@nxlevel.org) and she will forward the info to you.

Of course, the best part is that this story lives on -- well at least in Salisbury. Joe told us, "Due to the input from the participants, the level of support from sponsoring agencies and veteran organizations, and the initial success of the program, we will be offering *Project Opportunity* again this September."

Joe & Kristen, thank you for collaborating with the NxLevelL Network in this innovative and valued project.

*Mike*