

Connecting military families with civilian jobs in Maine is a full-circle passion

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“I’m helping people grow to their greatest potential, and I get a lot of satisfaction in that,” says Disa Chadwick, of Naples, who helps active-duty military personnel transition to civilian life in Maine as a military transition specialist with Boots2Roots. *Photo by Amy Paradysz*

Like any Air Force spouse, Disa Chadwick knows a lot of military acronyms – something she’s now putting to good use. As a military transition specialist with Boots2Roots, she helps retiring military personnel find meaningful work in Maine through a network of more than 200 companies, including Bath Iron Works, Pratt & Whitney and MaineHealth.

“We help translate their military experience into civilian terms for the employers to relate the candidates’ experience to their company,” she said. “We tailor their resumes and ‘hang’ them in a portal where businesses are looking for military talent.”

Working for Boots2Roots is meaningful for her, too, because the nonprofit helped her husband, Scott Chadwick, find a civilian job at the conclusion of his 20 years in the Air Force.

“I’m helping people grow to their greatest potential, and I get a lot of satisfaction in that,” she said. “We get to know them and they get to know us so we can see their strengths and pull from that. This can be important if they’ve never written a resume. We work with spouses, too, and their resumes, like mine, don’t say why they relocated several times.”

Boots2Roots provides a spectrum of free services – resume, interview, career and financial coaching – as well as networking assistance. At any given time, the nonprofit might have 70 active clients – or “teammates” – going through the process of transitioning to civilian life within the next year and a half.

“We prioritize them based on their arrival in Maine,” Chadwick said. “Our goals are to have the teammate employed within 60 days of their arrival to Maine and for them to hold the position for at least 12 months – which keeps employers coming back to us for reliable talent. Many teammates even find work before they arrive in Maine. The companies understand that they’re transitioning out of the military. They do interviews via Zoom, (Google) Teams or by phone, and may schedule a flight out for an in-person interview if they’re extremely interested.”

Chadwick starts the process with an introductory call during which the teammate prioritizes three things: salary, job and location. They specify minimum salary requirements. And they share about their background, their interests and the needs of their family members.

“With all this, we can look for the best fit for them,” Chadwick said.

For some types of jobs there’s a lot of demand. For other types of work, Boots2Roots sends out targeted emails saying that they have someone with a particular skill relocating to Maine. And that often works.

Air Force veteran Dave Hickey and his Bath Iron Works co-worker John Manganello founded Boots2Roots based on the idea that early personalized preparation and networking would allow Maine’s newest active-duty veterans (and their family members) to hit the ground running. Since 2016, that has been true for more than 500 teammates.

For the state, the ripple effects of even one post-military family finding a home in Maine are significant.

The Chadwicks both grew up in Saco. Disa Dennison and Scott Chadwick were high school sweethearts from the Thornton Academy class of 2001. During his 20-year Air Force career, they and their growing family lived all over the country – Alaska, Virginia, Delaware, Nevada and Illinois.

“After being all over the world,” she said, “we were kind of up in the air about what we wanted to do and where we wanted to live.”

They were interested in returning to Maine in 2021, but needed to know they’d be able to support their family of six. They got that reassurance when Boots2Roots connected Scott with a job offer from Silvex, a Westbrook-based business that specializes in defense-related platinum plating.

The Chadwicks considered returning to their hometown of Saco, but his sister had half of a duplex for rent in Casco. The Chadwick boys flourished in the Lake Region schools. So, after six months, the Chadwicks bought a house in Naples. And, after two years at Silvex, Scott Chadwick started a logistics career with MaineHealth that more closely matches his military specialty.

This fall, Grayson, the youngest of the Chadwicks’ four sons, is in kindergarten. Keston is in fourth grade, Colby is studying physical therapy and playing football at Husson University, and Joshua is a nursing student at Southern Maine Community College.

Disa Chadwick – who had always worked in some sort of mentoring capacity until the next change of duty station – was ready to find a career of her own. She was job searching on Indeed this past summer when she came across a posting from Boots2Roots.

“I have a passion for helping people, and I love what they did for us,” she said. “And now I’m doing what I love.”

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