



Drones AND Good Jobs

AND

Two Companies Team to Place Vets in the Commercial UAS Industry

By Rich Tuttle

Two companies have joined in a unique mission: training and placing military veterans in jobs in the commercial unmanned aircraft industry — and charging the vets nothing.

One of the companies, DroneBase of Santa Monica, California, provides veterans identified by the other, Drones & Good of San Francisco, with free training and makes sure each vet gets one job at no cost.

In an Aug. 2 listing of “new commitments to speed the safe integration of unmanned aircraft systems” into a variety of commercial endeavors, the White House notes the enablement of “job placement for veterans with free drone pilot training” and says the partnership provides transitioning vets “with training programs and apprenticeships to start a career in the commercial drone industry.”

It says Drones & Good qualifies the vets and sends them to DroneBase, which gives them “10 hours of free in-person and remote training in basic and advanced commercial drone tasks on the most commonly used unmanned aircraft systems, and will commit to providing each Drones & Good team with one real-world commercial job in their area with waived fees.”

DroneBase uses unmanned aircraft for real estate and construction jobs. Here, one of the company's DJI Inspire One vehicles inspects a construction site.

DroneBase and Drones & Good began their partnership about a year ago. DroneBase CEO and cofounder Dan Burton says he reached out to Drones & Good because it's a good fit with his company. DroneBase was already working with experienced unmanned aircraft operators who had been in the military, and Drones & Good was identifying veterans with an interest in unmanned aircraft. DroneBase needed a more reliable way of contacting vets, and Drones & Good had already established a pipeline.

DroneBase is “probably the biggest drone service company in the United States, working in all 50 states” and abroad in real estate and construction, says Burton. He says his company aims to “provide every business in America with their own personal air support” and be “like Amazon for drones.”

Typically, a customer books a request for imagery and/or data with DroneBase, which does the flying and then edits and produces the result in a few days. The customer pays only for the bandwidth it uses. “If the airspace is clear, we can get to basically any address in the United States in under a week,” overnight in some cases, and do the job “for under \$500, sometimes much less.”

DroneBase pilots are a little like Uber drivers, but with an emphasis on “steady, reliable work,” Burton says. “For example, we're based in Los Angeles and the TV-film industry is a good potential user of drones. That work tends to be good on a per-day or per-hour basis. But it's very lumpy. You may work on a film set for a day or two, but then you're off for three days. We're much more interested in work that's repeatable, recurring and reliable.” Real estate work, for instance, “tends to be very high volume.”

For Burton, linking vets and drones is a calling. “It's a passion of mine,” says the former Marine Corps infantry officer. He empathizes with “a lot of the enlisted folks” who leave military service and may not have “a perfect plan for what's next.”

Burton says that as the military operation of unmanned aerial systems migrates increasingly to smaller units — the Marines, for instance, are planning to give the job of UAS operator to an assistant squad leader — the opportunity for vets in the commercial world is increasing.

“I'm really eager to get folks on an accelerated career path, or just get them started in the burgeoning commercial drone space,” Burton says. “What we want is for people to be able to build this as a profession, to have a business, to be able to support themselves and their families by working for DroneBase.”

DroneBase's ultimate goal, Bur-



Drones & Good is committed to placing vets in the commercial UAS market. In this photo, taken in California's Central Valley in May 2016, are Stephanie Parrish, a trainee, left; Sarah Burgaud, a Drones & Good team member, center; and a representative of the client, a utility surveying company, right.



ton says, “is for people to build a business and a career solely on our platform. That would be my goal for veterans anywhere on the continuum of people trying to build a side business to having this as a whole profession.”



Similarly, vets are the focus of Drones & Good, a unit of a 501c3 non-profit enterprise called Calso that, through several divisions, trains the unemployed for jobs in high-demand industries. Calso describes Drones & Good as “a workforce development program” for vets. “We capitalize on the high potential growth of the commercial drone industry to empower unemployed populations and provide

career paths to the ones in need,” says the company’s website.

“We strongly believe in the power of new technologies to tackle the unmet social and environmental challenges of the 21st century and improve the lives of millions,” the site says. Nicolas Hazard, Calso’s founder, says Drones & Good’s “social mission” is part of Calso’s DNA.

Hazard says there are two parts to Drones & Good’s business. In the first, it uses its own funds to train those who are struggling. In the second, companies support these people in externships during training, and also pay for job placements.

Burton says DroneBase isn’t a non-profit, but even with free training for vets from Drones & Good, the com-

pany “will be fine.” Just putting vets into the job market is satisfying, “and makes our end customers happy.”

DroneBase always gets good results with vets, he says. “They’re reliable, always on time and always do an excellent job.” They are “happy to work in rough, austere environments, know how to use sophisticated gear in harsh conditions and have a good sense of how to report things and how to pass data back and forth.”

Drones & Good “is a good partner for us because they put a lot of thought into identifying people, getting them started and getting them in our pipeline. That’s why this makes total sense.”



Drones & Good says that while there are about 22 million men and women who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, more than half face a period of unemployment within 15 months of separation, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. It adds that it's "committed to making former and transitioning service members valuable assets in the civilian economy."

Quoting AUVSI, Drones & Good says the number of UAS jobs in the U.S. — in agriculture, energy, utilities, mining, construction, news and media, and film production — is

estimated to hit more than 100,000 by 2025.

California is expected to generate the most total jobs, more than 18,000 by 2025. Under a pilot program in the first nine months of 2016, Drones & Good placed jobs for 20 vets in several industries at \$20 an hour in California's Bay Area.

"It's really a booming industry and it's very important" to have a partnership like the one with DroneBase, says Hazard. He says it "gives you the ability to spread the word that there is a future in this industry, first of all for the veterans, of course," but also for the industries that will hire them — that the advent of commercial UAS is

serious, and that well-trained operators will allow them to safely and productively use the vehicles. Hazard plans similar partnerships on "the American model" in other countries with local partners. He is launching two such operations in France.

Burton says the whole commercial UAS industry is in its early days, so while vets, even those with extensive military experience, may have an edge, they are still in a sense just starting out. "This is square one of this industry" and "in the commercial context you're kind of starting again" because there's much learn. "It's a level playing field for everybody." ■

Photo: Drones & Good.

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