

Operation: Entrepreneurship

John Reed served tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan in the U.S. Army before combat injuries forced him to retire. Today, he wants to learn the skills required to start his own business. The Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) program is designed to help Reed and other disabled veterans do just that.

Launched by Syracuse University in 2007, the EBV offers free business training to veterans to help them make the transition from battlefield to business. Since its first 20-student cohort, the EBV has expanded to include a consortium of four schools, including Syracuse University's Whitman School of Management in New York; Texas A&M University's Mays Business School in College Station; UCLA's Anderson School of Management in Los Angeles; and Florida State University's College of Business in Tallahassee. All EBV programs accept applications on a rolling, first-come-first-served basis.

The schools in the consortium offer the program in three phases. Phase I is a self-directed online study session. Phase II is a nine-day workshop that requires students to travel to their participating EBV university. Finally, Phase III is a 12-month process of faculty support and mentorship to help each student bring his or her business plan to life. Faculty give participants a foundation in topics such as innovation, marketing, sales, and strategy. Vets also visit local small companies and hear guest entrepreneurs speak about the challenges of running real-world businesses.

The EBV curriculum was designed with the help of Syracuse University's Burton Blatt Institute, which pro-



Texas governor Rick Perry walks through an arch of swords in a graduation ceremony to commend participants in Mays Business School's Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities.

The EBV program helps veterans fight yet another battle—the battle for their own economic freedom.

—Mike Haynie, Syracuse University

notes the civic, economic, and social participation of persons with disabilities. For EBV participants, these disabilities can range from hearing loss and amputation to anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Reed came to Mays' EBV program with hearing loss, damaged knees, and emotional scars. In spite of these difficulties, he hopes to turn his 30-acre horse-and-cattle ranch in

Gatesville, Texas, into a refuge for soldiers and their families. Natasha Espinoza, a young Purple Heart recipient, hopes to open a "sneaker boutique." And Donald Martinez, who recently left the Army with injured wrists and post-traumatic stress, wants to open a financial advisory business that helps young soldiers plan for financial security after their service.

After these soldiers return home, many need help in fulfilling their dreams and potential, says Mike Haynie, assistant professor of entrepreneurship at the Whitman School. Haynie also is a former major in the U.S. Air Force and the creator of the EBV program. "By offering veterans with disabilities the tools to create and grow their own businesses, we are helping them fight yet another battle—the battle for their own economic freedom," says Haynie. **Z**