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Jul. 31, 2014

Army Sgt. Jody Thrasher had a lot more to worry about than a tough job market when he got back from Iraq in 2007. The first step was finding his place in the civilian world.

He eventually went back to school and studied accounting, and he now works as a CPA with Aldridge Borden & Co. in Montgomery. But it wasn't easy.

"It took me a year to get going," Thrasher said. "It's a struggle when you get back, becoming a civilian in general. Over there, you're with your buddies and you think you have the most important job in the world. When you come back it's difficult to motivate yourself. You don't have your support group."

Many of his fellow veterans are facing the same challenge.

Each year about 300,000 people leave the military, and the unemployment rate among those who served since Sept. 11, 2001, stood at 7 percent in June. That's about one point higher than the national average.

The problem of helping veterans enter a civilian workplace will only grow as more veterans than ever leave the Armed Services as part of the military drawdown.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel's reported plan would scale back the U.S. Army to the smallest number of troops since before World War II. The Army, which already has been reduced from a post-Sept. 11 high of 570,000 troops to the current number of about 490,000, would be further reduced to between 440,000 and 450,000.

Thrasher said he didn't feel like most of the skills he learned in the infantry would

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share their stories while connecting them to resources. One of those, an online “military skills translator,” helps turn military job titles into the language of the business world.

“Sometimes the job skills in the military don't match up precisely with the title of the job or the perfect skills in a corporate world,” said Rick Plaskett, director of Defense Technology Development for the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce.

“A guy says, 'I don't have any skills I could use.' You delve a little bit deeper in figuring out what this guy actually does, and you may find out that he's a communicator of some kind or that he has great leadership skills.”

Plaskett is working with WVAS and others to organize a massive Montgomery job fair for veterans in September. It's part of the Hiring Our Heroes program, which puts together events like that across the nation.

Last year's event in Montgomery was held in a small space at a hotel, but Plaskett said 17 veterans were hired on the spot.

This year it will be at the new Cramton Bowl Multiplex, which Plaskett said will offer more room, more parking and more flexibility for what he expects to be a wide range of employers.

Before the job fair even begins, there will be a workshop to teach veterans better resume writing and interviewing skills.

“These young people are way ahead of those who haven't gone to college, or the ones who have just gone to trade school,” Plaskett said. “What we're trying to help them do is translate the life skills and business skills to what people are looking for (in the civilian world.)”

Meanwhile, WVAS is traveling across the state to talk to veterans about their

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