

At Toyota, Gratitude for Military Men and Women is Part of the Mission

November 11, 2020



On a warm October day in 1990, Tony Hendrichs stepped out the back of a C-130 Hercules and was greeted by a swift gust of dry desert air. Dammam, Saudi Arabia is 7,123 miles from Hendrichs' home in Danville, Ky. He was a long way from everything he knew. An assistant detachment commander in the Kentucky National Guard's 217th Quartermaster detachment, Hendrichs deployed to support Operation Desert Shield—the lead-up to what would soon be known as Operation Desert Storm.

In Kentucky, Hendrichs had left behind family, friends and a new job at Toyota's Georgetown, Ky., plant, which he had started just six months earlier. While deployed, he recalls the phone calls, care packages and letters he received from his Toyota colleagues, offering him meaningful encouragement and a way to stay connected.

During his eight-month deployment, Hendrichs had plenty to worry about, but his job at Toyota was not on that list. His paychecks and benefits arrived right on time, and when he returned to Kentucky in June 1991, Hendrichs found his job still waiting for him.

"Toyota went above and beyond to ensure my family was supported during my deployment," says Hendrichs. "I

was very thankful to be with the company during that time, and I am proud that since then, the company has increased its support of our veterans.”



Tony Hendrichs

Since returning to Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky (TMMK) almost 30 years ago, Hendrichs has held numerous roles across the plant, sharing his knowledge across multiple processes. Still, according to him, his most important role has been supporting fellow veterans.

“I am proud to have served our country and proud to be at Toyota, where I have an opportunity to give back,” Hendrichs said. “More than anything, I enjoy being a resource for veterans, helping connect them with the resources they need and informing the community of the great opportunities for veterans at TMMK.”

One way in which Hendrichs has given back was his pivotal part in starting the Toyota Veterans Association (TVA) at TMMK in 2011 – the first formal organization for veterans across Toyota’s North America operations. Today, 15 chapters exist, working to connect veterans with benefits and resources, assist their families during deployment, and provide support as they transition back to civilian life.

While employee-based support is at the core of TVA’s activities, the TMMK chapter is also a proud sponsor of Honor Flight Kentucky (HFK). Completing their fourth flight last year, this event is a highlight for many members as they have the unique opportunity to escort veterans to Washington, D.C., to view national memorials built in honor of their heroic service. While the event was impacted by COVID-19 this year, HFK transported 74 Vietnam veterans to the nation’s capital last year—marking their third all-Vietnam veterans flight.

“Our actions could never appropriately express our thanks for all that our veterans have sacrificed,” said Susan Elkington, president of TMMK. “With over 600 employees who have served or are serving in our nation’s armed forces, it is important for us to continue supporting them and honoring their service to our country.”

That support is demonstrated largely through its commitment to hiring veterans. And to recognize and honor those that have served, TMMK includes each of their veterans on the Wall of Honor at the plant.

The goal of TVA is to advocate for the consideration of talent with military experience at Toyota, and in the community. In support of that goal, TVA recently partnered with Talent Acquisition, Marketing and Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Alabama, to design an event targeted at transitioning service members and veterans.



During a first of its kind event for Toyota, plant leadership and TVA members discussed how military experience can bring value to emerging high-tech positions within advanced manufacturing. The event was promoted among current and prospective employees through LinkedIn and Toyota's partnership with Hiring Our Heroes.

"Hiring veterans isn't just the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing," said Dave Finch, Toyota Alabama president. "The extensive training military veterans receive translates into a dedicated and highly-skilled workforce, with unparalleled resiliency and adaptability. Toyota is committed to providing support and opportunities to the men and women who have and are serving our country."

Toyota's support of veteran's organizations, including HFK and Hiring Our Heroes is embedded as part of the workforce development mission. Investing in America means investing in its people, including the continued focus on recruiting, retaining and promoting a diverse workforce. As a foundational belief, respect for people is at the heart of Toyota's culture.

On nearly every Veterans Day for close to 20 years, TMMK's production lines have come to a stop for a moment. The constant movement of people and parts and the sound of machinery is replaced by stillness and silence as more than 10,000 employees stop to say thank you. A flag-raising ceremony is typically hosted outside the plant, and the MIA/POW flag is flown over each of Toyota's nine plants in the United States.

While this Veterans Day will look different due to the ongoing effects of COVID-19, a virtual flag raising will still be hosted at TMMK on November 11. The ceremony will be broadcast across the plant, providing employees the opportunity to, once again, mark the moment and show their appreciation and thanks to people like Tony Hendrichs and all those who have sacrificed in service to our country.