

## POINT OF VIEW

# Harris Salutes Workshops for Warriors' Veteran Programs



*Workshops for Warriors has trained more than 700 veterans who have earned thousands of nationally recognized portable, stackable certifications and are working in every state.*

November has been declared National Veterans and Military Families Month in honor of the service members who have answered the call of duty for the United States. This appreciation is further emphasized by companies and organizations who offer special programs for veterans.

Just as they've helped our country, sometimes our comrades in arms need assistance when transitioning to civilian life.

The Harris Products Group, Mason, Ohio, and its parent company, Lincoln Electric, Cleveland, Ohio, have long supported veterans with established programs and also back several outside organizations that play significant roles in helping veterans.

One organization that is making a difference in service members' lives is Workshops for Warriors® (WFW), San Diego, Calif., a nonprofit organization that trains and certifies veterans and transitioning service members in welding and computer numerical control machining for careers in advanced manufacturing — Fig. 1. The organization's motto is "Rebuilding American Manufacturing, One Veteran at a Time®."

Since its inception, WFW has trained 700-plus veterans who have earned more than 6000 nationally recognized portable, stackable certifications and are working in every state of our nation.

## Meet a Graduate Who Welds

Gabriel Lara is one example of the hundreds of veterans who found a purpose with the help of WFW — Fig. 2.

Lara, 22, grew up near Los Angeles, often in the same room as his two siblings and mother. Because they didn't have much, they moved around a lot, often renting one room of an apartment where they would all live together.

At 17, after a recruiter from the





*Fig. 1 — Workshops for Warriors provides veterans and transitioning services members with advanced manufacturing training and industry-recognized certification for careers in welding, machining, and fabrication at no cost to the veteran.*



*Fig. 2 — After serving in the Marine Corps, Gabriel Lara found a purpose with the help of WFW. He graduated from its program and earned ten nationally recognized welding certifications.*

Marine Corps visited his high school, Lara enlisted. Eight days after receiving his diploma, he was in boot camp.

"It was a shock, a really big shock," he said. "But I knew I wanted to do something I could be proud of and my family would be proud of too."

Lara served in logistics and maintenance management, where he was responsible for inventorying and instituting preventive maintenance for his entire unit's gear. In 2017, he was chosen for a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force, which put him in Kuwait and Afghanistan.

Near the end of his service, Lara began tossing around the idea of returning home to Los Angeles and maybe using his G.I. Bill to enroll in college. Almost immediately after transitioning out, however, his girlfriend found out she was pregnant and suddenly, his timeline for finding a job got much tighter.

"Everything changed all of a sudden. With a pregnant girlfriend and a baby on the way, I knew I had to find a way to support them," Lara said. "I needed something I knew would give me financial security quickly. I needed my daughter to have more than I did growing up."

After attempting community college for a couple of months, Lara

found out about WFW.

"Before Workshops for Warriors, I felt lonely, like I didn't really have a purpose," he said. "Here, everyone is a veteran. I feel like I got some of that brotherhood back, and we are all learning a trade that will give us financial security and a future as America's manufacturing workforce."

Though faced with unforeseen challenges and adjusting to remote learning due to COVID-19, Lara graduated from the welding program on April 23, earning ten nationally recognized welding certifications. Now married with a daughter, Lara plans to move with his family to Nevada, where he hopes they can buy their first home.

## Sales from Metalworking Outfit to Make a Difference

A military history buff with several veterans in his family, Harris's industrial sales manager for North America Patrick Fagerquist learned about WFW several years ago. After spending time at its school in San Diego and seeing the significant contributions made by the organization, he suggested that Harris create a promotional program to draw attention to WFW and raise

funds for its operations.

Fagerquist took his idea to Greg Barnes, a graphic designer at Harris and a fellow veteran. Having served four years in the U.S. Navy before going to work at the company, Barnes recognized firsthand that military training does not always translate to a civilian job.

"I was a damage control petty officer in the Navy and was responsible for maintaining firefighting equipment on the ship," Barnes said. "That doesn't translate well into a civilian job, so I decided to go to art school. I am like most veterans — good with my hands. What Workshops for Warriors is doing is amazing because affording a veteran the opportunity to have a career in welding can be a perfect fit. That is why I was excited to be a part of this project. I wanted to develop a product that would pay homage to our military personnel and what they mean to this country."

Harris rolled out its new limited-edition Ironworker outfit in June and, for every outfit sold, will donate \$5 to WFW, with a goal of raising \$25,000. The company is also encouraging its distributors to donate \$5 per outfit sold.

The Ironworker outfit is packaged in a U.S. government-issued, 40-mm metal ammunition can with side-carry





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Fig. 3 — Harris Products Group is selling limited-edition Ironworker outfits to benefit the organization. They come in a U.S. government-issued, 40-mm metal ammunition can and feature Model 25GX gas regulators with a special digital-camo pattern.

handles and a removable lid — Fig. 3. It features Model 25GX regulators with a special digital-camo pattern. The regulators come with a seven-year warranty. The outfits are available in Harris Series and V-Series with either 300 or 510 CGA fittings. They also come with a cutting tip, shade 5 safety glasses, ignitor, and a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -in.  $\times$  20-ft twin grade “R” hose.



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## Parting Words

“We are extremely proud to support the efforts of Workshops for Warriors,” Fagerquist concluded. “This organization is providing a valuable service to our industry, as well as helping those who have served our nation and are looking for new ways to help it succeed.” 

Information provided by The Harris Products Group ([harrisproductsgroup.com](http://harrisproductsgroup.com)), Mason, Ohio.



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