

INSIDE SAN DIEGO'S TOP COMPANIES

LOCAL COMPANIES SHARE THEIR STORIES OF SUCCESS, LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Veterans and Solar Energy: A Good Match



Semper Solaris team installing SunPower panels, which will produce 70% more energy.

Semper Solaris is a locally and veteran-owned company, who use only American products. Their business is closely tied to military values. One of the co-founders, Kelly Shawhan, was a Captain in the US Marine Corps. Though Semper Solaris does not exclusively hire former military, many of their team members are veterans, and employee David Fox notes that the military values of the business “rubs off on everybody, former military or not.”

One member of the team, Joshua Odom, has seen how his experience in the military has positively influenced his work with Semper Solaris. Mr. Odom served with the United States Navy for five years directly following the 9/11 attacks. He grew up in New York, enlisted at seventeen, went to boot camp in Chicago, and was then sent to the naval base at 32nd St. in San Diego. He shares, “When I enlisted, it was at a young age and I was just a kid. I had to mature, because when you’re tasked with certain things in the military you really have to learn how to think on your feet.”

Mr. Odom is certain that the values he learned in his service carry on into the rest of his life, especially into his work. “I think the value that has helped me the most in my life now is commitment—and with that, courage, because it’s not always easy to follow through on your commitments. In a market like the solar industry, which is so competitive, it’s key to be able to always follow through.”

Now serving as the construction manager for the San Diego branch of Semper Solaris, Mr. Odom has again and again seen the value of his military background. “While I was on the ship in the Navy, you didn’t really

have any other option but getting the job done. There was no ‘I want a break’ or ‘I’m going home.’ You stayed there until it was over. That type of mindset transfers over into a company like this. Many guys just want to show up, work their nine to five, and leave. But we want to stay until the job gets done and gets done right.”

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Naval base San Diego is principal home port of the Pacific fleet

Beyond personal values and strengths, serving with the Navy also built skills for Mr. Odom that translated well into the workplace. In fact, the structure of the workplace was surprisingly similar to that of the military. Before becoming the construction manager for the San Diego branch of Semper Solaris, Mr. Odom saw the company go through a structure transformation. He notes, “I worked with a few other

solar companies in the past, and some of them did less than par work when it came to communication, especially with the homeowners. At Semper Solaris, we set up a structure of command that aids the communication process. Just like there’s a chain of command in the military, we have a chain of command in the solar world. The people at Semper Solaris—especially the military personnel—they understand chain of command. Each person in the system has their own responsibilities and they know what those responsibilities are.”

Now that he’s been working for Semper Solaris for about two years, Mr. Odom has been more than happy with his choice. He’s had an opportunity to relate to other veterans, use the skills he learned during his service with the military, and abide by a code of ethics that he believes in. Beyond that, he shares, “From day one, everyone was very welcoming. The biggest thing is that the upper management always puts the customer and the employee first. They push the mentality that happy employees want to be there, and will then work harder for you. It’s a win-win for everybody.”

For many veterans, employment can be hard to come by, which is exactly why Semper Solaris is happy to have so many veterans on staff. The co-owners of Semper Solaris have seen the benefit of hiring veterans, who come with military experience and values that make them stand out from other candidates. Semper Solaris trusts their team to get the job done, and to do it well, so that customers can rest easy. For quality installations, dedicated employees, and dramatically reduced energy bills, trust Semper Solaris.

NABCEP CERTIFICATION: Essential to Solar Success

Semper Solaris, one of the fastest-growing solar companies in California, stands out in the solar industry because of great customer service, skillful installations, and high quality materials. But they also stand out for another reason: the NABCEP certification.

NABCEP, or the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners, is a non-profit organization that began in 2002. Their mission is to support the energy industry while helping to develop industry professionals, and in that to promote customer confidence in the service that they receive. In NABCEP’s own words, they are “the most recognized and esteemed certification the solar

industry has to offer.”

Robert Bessler, the Executive Director of Operations at Semper Solaris, is NABCEP certified, and he also takes the certification into consideration when interviewing and hiring new employees. “Those who pass the test are considered experts,” he notes. “If you don’t know what you’re doing, you definitely won’t pass. The certification tests aren’t just multiple choice—you have to do your own calculations and have working industry knowledge.”

When Bessler was originally NABCEP certified, he estimated that there were only about 200 other professionals in the nation with the certification.



Robert Bessler, Executive Director of Operations. NABCEP certified.

In order to take the NABCEP certification exam for Solar PV Installation Professionals, all candidates need a large amount of experience in the field, an OSHA 10 hour construction industry card, and at least 58 hours of advanced training in PV systems. They must also provide information for

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three or five installations they’ve supervised. For Bessler and others, this meant at least four years of experience in the solar industry.

Bessler had been working in the solar industry since 2000, and he heard about NABCEP when it was first beginning from the creators themselves, who shared about NABCEP at industry conferences and trade shows. Right away, Bessler was interested: “NABCEP appealed to me because I knew I was committed to the industry. I wasn’t going to be industry-hopping.” For those who want to be in the solar industry for the long haul, certifications like these can certainly add credibility. He added, “The closest analogy I can think of is the ASE certification for auto mechanics. Some are certified and some aren’t, but the certification means

something. It’s the same thing for solar.”

Now, Bessler interviews potential employees for Semper Solaris. He shares, “When I’m interviewing, if applicants have their NABCEP certification, it shows that they really put in the effort. For lack of a better word, it shows that you’re legit!” Now, Bessler is also certified by IREC, the Interstate Renewable Energy Council, to teach and train others in NABCEP courses. He’s been teaching for two to three years now, and shares his NABCEP solar expertise with the new solar employees.

The NABCEP is an excellent indicator of solar expertise. It is because of values and strengths like these that Semper Solaris is having such successful growth.

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