

CSI honored for its support of military employees

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Part of the CSI Aviation team at the company's headquarters at the Albuquerque International Sunport. (Photo courtesy of CSI Aviation)

CSI Aviation Inc. is one of 15 companies nationwide to receive this year's Employer Support Freedom Award from the U.S. Department of Defense.

The award recognizes businesses for their support of employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve. The Albuquerque firm was selected from 3,000 companies nominated this year.

"It's a huge honor that recognizes a basic theme in our company," said CSI founder and CEO Allen Weh. "Many of us are very proud to serve and proud to do our share to help those who continue to serve. We take care of people who do great things for our nation."

Weh is a retired colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve who served two tours in Vietnam and was recalled to active duty in the Persian Gulf war and in Iraq. He formed CSI Aviation in 1979.

The company provides a range of aviation services from its base at the Albuquerque International Sunport, including air charters, aircraft leasing, aircraft purchases and medical flights in New Mexico and elsewhere. It employs 49 people, including 19 veterans and military members, many of them in senior management positions.

Broad support for its military employees are written into CSI's policies, plus support for their families, Weh said.

"We provide a pay differential to ensure that compensation while on active duty is no less than if the

employee was working here, and when they're deployed to combat zones, we don't count combat pay against the differential," Weh said. "Our employees don't take any financial hit while serving."

The company also provides paid time off for its Guard and Reserve members to participate in military training, said CSI President and Chief Operating Officer William "Rock" Collins, a major general in the Marine Corps Reserve.

"Our company deals with aviation and aviators, and many of our Reservists do multiple drills every month," Collins said. "Some folks have taken extended time to complete their education."

Since Desert storm, at least eight CSI employees have been called to active duty, with three deployed now.

"I've been blessed to be with this company since 2001, and I've served three deployments during that time," said Senior Vice President Thomas Dunn, an active Guard member. "I don't think there's another company out there as supportive of military members."

Guard member and CSI pilot Araceli Saunders said CSI not only supported, but encouraged her to prepare for an eight-week training at the end of June.

"I know my job is not at risk when I go," Saunders said. "It gives real peace of mind."

Contact the writer.