

Business / Personal Finance

# Veteran uses military skills in limo business



U.S. Army veteran Zach Morgan is seen in Coral Springs in his limousine, Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2014. (Joe Cavaretta, Sun Sentinel)



By **Marcia Heroux Pounds • Contact Reporter**  
Sun Sentinel

JANUARY 8, 2015, 12:35 PM

**Z**achary Morgan started Elevation Limousines after attending a workshop last year by Edge4Vets, a Fordham University program that helps veterans transfer their military skills to civilian jobs.

When stationed in Iraq, Army Sgt. Zachary Morgan found himself driving around the top brass. So when he was looking for a civilian role last year, limousine business owner seemed to fit.

Morgan, 25, is now the proud owner of Elevation Limousines in Coral Springs. He has operated the business since June

2014, starting it soon after attending a workshop last year by Edge4Vets, a Fordham University program that helps veterans transfer their military skills to civilian jobs.

The program has benefited many in South Florida. Army veteran Delanor Nurse, 47, attended Edge4Vets in South Florida in the fall and in December got a job offer from Bank of America in Coconut Creek. Natasha Hedrington, 34, is a case manager in Supportive Services for Veterans by the Broward Regional Health Planning Council in Hollywood.

But, sometimes, a business is born.

After Morgan got out of the Army in 2011, he entered **Broward College** to study supply-chain management. He's still pursuing his degree. But when he's not in the classroom, Morgan is in his eight-passenger black Lincoln limousine taking passengers to an airport or event.

When asked to write a vision statement for his future in the Edge4Vets workshop, Morgan found himself describing Army vehicles he had driven in Iraq: Humvees, forklifts, 48-passenger buses and 5-ton vehicles that carried officials.

He realized: "I've carried a lot of higher-ups in the military. I can drive a personal vehicle and carry anyone," he said.

After connecting with business executives participating in Edge4Vets' workshops, Morgan said his confidence grew. He turned to his uncle, a real estate agent in South Florida, who helped him write a business plan. Then he invested his savings — pay from his Army days — in a used limo.

Morgan said customers comment on his good manners and punctuality, for which he credits the military. To attract business in a competitive market, he initially dropped his prices below the going rate. Elevation Limousines is gaining new business each month, he said.

"He's dedicated, disciplined," said Michael Necolettos, operations manager for Imperial Transportation, a **Palm Beach County** limousine company that occasionally works with Morgan. "He doesn't cut corners. In this business you have to be on time. He understands that."

Barry Birkenholz, a partner in a South Florida wellness center, said he started using Elevation Limousines because he likes to support returning military. But he also enjoys riding with Morgan for the conversation.

"He has been all over the world," he said. "I find him a very engaging guy. You're stuck in traffic and he takes the pain away."

In the second month of his business, Morgan was put to the test when a rear air bag inflated while he was driving

passengers. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Morgan calmed the passengers and called for back-up transportation from partners he had established in Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties.

The air bag has since been replaced — a costly but necessary expenditure.

"Nothing ever goes perfect," he said. Just like in the Army, "you do what you're trained to do. You handle the situation."

Morgan is licensed to operate in Broward and Palm Beach counties but can pick up clients in either county and take them elsewhere, such as Miami International Airport.

He hopes to add more limos and hire new drivers, especially other veterans. But Morgan is working to build a larger market base before making a bigger investment.

Besides his uncle, Edge4Vets workshop organizer Tom Murphy has been a mentor to him. "I talk with Tom once a week," he said.

*[mpounds@sunsentinel.com](mailto:mpounds@sunsentinel.com) or 561-243-6650*

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