



Honoring Our Veterans June 09 Newsletter

Honoring Our Veterans Purpose

- Honoring Our Veterans is an educational and public benefit corporation formed to assist wounded and disabled military veterans. The educational and public benefit purposes of the Corporation include: educating the public on the needs of wounded and disabled veterans; organizing citizen volunteers to help meet and administer those needs through therapeutic activities including recreational therapy; working with other public charities involved with therapeutic activities in order to directly assist wounded and disabled veterans with activities such as fishing trips, fly-tying, horseback riding, paddling/kayak instruction, and national park tours, educating wounded veterans themselves on life skills that will aid in the transition from military careers and war trauma to civilian life; and, building citizen networks to participate in providing free recreational therapeutic activities for wounded and disabled veterans.

Our Mission

-Our mission is to improve the quality of life for disabled veterans by offering them therapeutic activities that strengthen their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social functioning levels.

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Where our Disabled Veterans Come From

-Honoring Our Veterans works with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration and Enable America's VetConnect Project for the USSOCOM Care Coalition Recovery Program in order to find the disabled veterans who will benefit most from our recreational therapy programs.

Recreational Therapy Sessions

-Our September 2008 trip was such a huge success that we decided to offer more sessions per year. This spring we were thrilled to welcome four disabled veterans to Jackson Hole. All four were wounded in either Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. Eddie came to us from Massachusetts, Eric from Tucson, and Manny and Victor from North Carolina. We were also pleased to have with us as an aid, Rob LeBlanc, a disabled veteran himself who volunteers with the Cheyenne VA Medical Center.

The veterans who participate in our programs have a wide range of injuries, including but not limited to: TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), partial paralysis, PTSD, neck and back injuries, lower extremity amputations, and a variety of internal injuries.

The following pages provide a description of the spring session we just completed. Our next session will be September 20-27, 2009. Once again we will be working with Nick Strelchuk, a retired Navy and airline pilot. Nick is the Executive Director of the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club. He also volunteers extensively at the VA Medical Centers in California, offering disabled veterans fly fishing trips and classes. Our program was actually the brainchild of Nick and Jack Dennis, who met at a fly fishing function in California. It was such a wonderful idea, so we expanded on it, formed a non-profit and started to offer multi-sport recreational therapy opportunities to disabled veterans in Jackson Hole.

Meet our June Veterans



Walt Farmer

Eddie



Bobbie Laughlin

Rob



Walt Farmer

Erik



Walt Farmer

Victor



Walt Farmer

Manny

Day One, 06/13/09

Our four disabled veterans arrived at the Jackson Hole Airport: Eddie from Massachusetts, Erik from Tucson, and Manny and Victor from North Carolina. All four were tired, as some of them were up since the wee hours of morning in order to catch their flights. Jackson Police Chief Dan Zivkovich and Teton County Sheriff Deputy Chad Sachse were on hand to greet each flight. Our veterans were surprised and delighted to receive such a special welcome. We picked up our rental vehicles, generously provided by Dakotah Dayton at National/Alamo Rental Car, and headed off to Teton Village to get settled into our beautiful home for the week, an incredible town home courtesy of Julie Calder at Jackson Hole Resort Lodging.

Day Two, 06/14/09

Sunday was a day to acclimate. Even though fishing was not on the schedule of activities, some of our guys pleaded for and made a very convincing case for just “wetting a line” in Jackson Hole. Since the purpose of the day was to get accustomed to the altitude and to get each veteran his Access Pass from Grand Teton National Park, there was enough flexibility in our schedule to allow fishing.

First we saw Howard Cole at High Country Flies. Eddie’s enthusiasm over being in the Fly Shop reminded me of the “kid in a candy store” type of scenario. Howard provided excellent advice on where to fish this time of year, and we secured one-day fishing licenses for our veterans who wanted to fish.

The next stop was the beautiful Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center in Moose, the headquarters for Grand Teton National Park. Each of our veterans received his Access Pass, allowing free lifelong access to all our National Parks and other public lands. Many of our wounded soldiers did not know this pass existed,

so they were thrilled to learn about it and to receive one.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch at Dornan’s. All of our guys were very impressed with how beautiful the park is, and it is hard to beat the views at Dornan’s. Our group split up at that point: Eddie, Rob, Manny and Erik continued on to Jackson Lake Dam for some fishing, and Victor and I headed back to the condo.

Victor’s injuries are fairly recent, from November 21, 2008. His road to recovery is nothing short of amazing and inspirational. The same is true for all of these wounded warriors. They have spent significant chunks of time in long term hospitals, undergone multiple surgeries, fourteen for Erik, and through their incredible strength, determination, and attitude, have been able to come out on the other side. Some have had to retrain themselves how to walk and talk, things we all take for granted. Since they all have been through so much it was of utmost importance to have flexibility built into the program. Victor becomes fatigued easily, so he and I headed back to the town home so he could rest.

In the evening we enjoyed a wonderful Meet and Greet at the picturesque National Museum of Wildlife Art. We enjoyed the galleries and as the guests started trickling in conversation was pleasant and easy. I was really impressed by how social all of our veterans were. Part of our program is to encourage social interactions, as many disabled veterans from OEF/OIF have a tendency to isolate themselves and disconnect from society. The evening was a gentle introduction and the perfect launching point for an incredible week.

Day Three, 06/15/09

Monday was a paddling instruction day on Jenny Lake in Grand Teton National Park.

We arrived at the lake around 10:30 a.m. and were greeted by Aaron Pruzan, owner of Rendezvous River Sports/Jackson Hole Kayak School, Kurt Henry and Gill from Teton Adaptive Sports, and Culley Traweek, a Hobie Kayak representative who graciously extended his visit to Jackson Hole by one day to help with our group of disabled veterans. This wonderful team of experts and guides already had everything set up by the water to ensure the greatest comfort and safety. Aaron had brought wetsuits for each veteran and our team helped get everyone outfitted, comfortable in their boats, and launched out onto the water. Aaron had so many different boat options, we couldn't have asked for a more knowledgeable and experienced guide. With Kurt and Gill's expertise working with individuals with disabilities, and the help of Culley with his incredible Hobie pedal boats, we had the dream team assembled.

Once out on the lake, Culley stayed by Erik's side the entire time with a very calm and kind manner, helping Erik learn how to work the boat and making sure he was okay. The pedal boats are fantastic and enable someone like Erik, who is paralyzed on one side, to go out onto the lake under his own power. Manny could go very fast in his pedal boat and was amazed that his back did not hurt at all. Of course Eddie and Rob had to "wet a line." Eddie does great in every situation he finds himself in. Victor is a naturally gifted and driven paddler, and it was hard to keep up with him. I think he was amazed that he could enjoy paddling, as he too is paralyzed on one side and never imagined that the world of paddling sports would be available to him. There was at least one guide per veteran and this ensured that everyone had the best experience. We enjoyed tasty sandwiches, prepared by Burns at Jackson Whole Grocers,

chocolate chip cookies by Helga, and enjoyed some incredible paddling therapy, great companionship, and the beauty of Grand Teton National Park.



Manny gets some instruction from Aaron



Launch Time



Erik in the Hobie

Late afternoon found us at the top of Rendezvous Peak, thanks to the newly rebuilt, and very comfortable, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort Aerial Tram. The guys loved the breathtaking views and Eddie and Manny had to “hike” to the summit. Eddie was in short sleeves and shorts, and we all had a good laugh when he said he was cold.

In the evening we enjoyed a scrumptious meal at the Cadillac Grille. The boys were concerned about picking an expensive menu item; but I reassured them that this week is for them. Most of our guys wanted to experience wild game and were delighted with the flavors of buffalo and elk.

After dinner we attended the showing of “Taking Chance”, the story of the return of PFC Chance Phelps’ body to his hometown in Dubois Wyoming, held at the Center for the Arts. A special addition to the presentation (which was incredibly well done by HBO) was the presence of Chance’s mother and stepfather, who spoke to the packed theatre following the presentation. A Marine color guard from Salt Lake City presented the colors, and Officer Peterson of the Jackson Police Department, herself a former Marine, sang the National Anthem.

Day Four, 06/16/09

On Tuesday morning our group was in the capable hands of the Jackson Hole Therapeutic Riding Association for a horseback ride on the incredibly beautiful Snake River Ranch. The association set up a mini cattle drive for the guys and what a treat that was! The ride was followed by a delicious outdoor chuckwagon, compliments of Addie and Ted Donnan. We couldn’t have asked for a more incredible experience.

In the afternoon the veterans were offered an opportunity to fish in some private ponds. Rhett Bain of Reel Deal Anglers was on hand to teach the fellows some fly-casting.

Tuesday evening found us at the Bar T-5 Covered Wagon Cookout and Show. The wagon ride, entertainment, and food were all incredible and the Warburtons’ and their staff went out of their way to accommodate us. Thanks to the Bar T-5 our veterans got a little taste of the old West.



Erik gets some help from the JHTRA staff



Erik comfortable in the saddle



Eddie enjoys a great day of paddling



Manny shows his enthusiasm for paddling



Erik gets a final adjustment to his boat by Hobie Kayak representative Culley Traweek

Day Five, 06/17/9

On Wednesday we enjoyed Slide Lake by kayak. We had the entire lake to ourselves. The beautiful red hills of the Gros Ventres and the distant views of the Tetons made for an enjoyable trip.

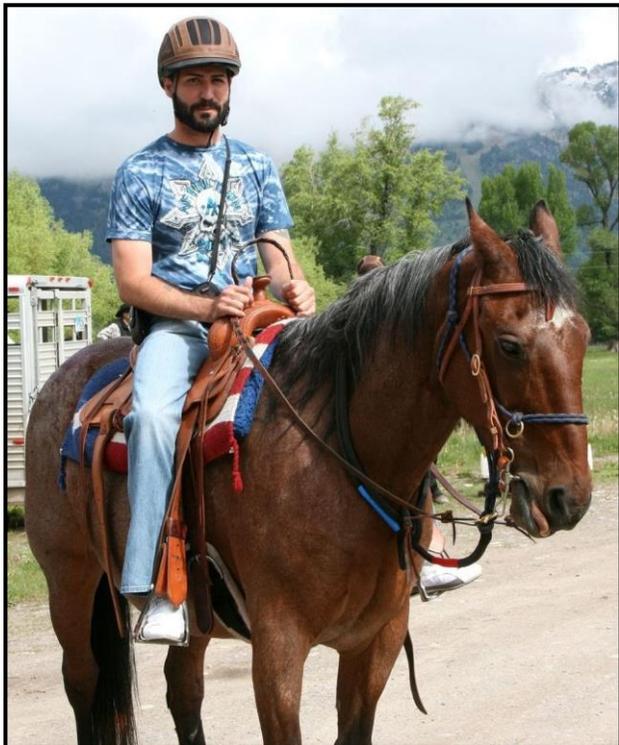
The evening found us at the Bar J Chuckwagon. Our veterans truly enjoyed the melodies and humor of the Bar J Wranglers and were touched by the Humphreys' talents and hospitality. It was an evening to remember.

Day Six, 06/18/09

Thursday morning was one for excitement as we prepared for a whitewater float trip down the Snake River Canyon with Dave Hansen Whitewater. Our veterans got to experience the very best, as none other than the master himself, Bud Chatham, guided their raft. Bud made sure that other guides were in the boat as well to ensure that our veterans felt comfortable. Everyone suited up in wetsuits, listened to the safety talk, and was positioned comfortably in the raft. Bud made sure to hit every rapid just right for maximum fun and safety, and our guys had a blast. They also had a little bit of mischief with splashing the raft full of Girl Scouts, causing squeals of delight on the part of the young ladies. Bud and the Dave Hansen crew did an outstanding job and the whitewater trip ended up being one of the favorite activities for our June session.

Following the river trip we all returned to town, the guys got into their normal clothes and we went to the Granary for lunch. Everyone loved the Granary, with its beautiful views and excellent food. The service was incredible, with Stacey and staff attending to our wounded soldiers' every need.

In the afternoon our guys enjoyed another incredible horseback ride with the dedicated and phenomenal staff of the Jackson Hole Therapeutic Riding Association. The ride was gorgeous, lush and green and right at the base of the Tetons. This ride involved more varied terrain than Tuesday's ride and the guys loved it. The ride was followed by one of the most enjoyable and relaxing evenings our veterans have ever had, an evening cookout at a beautiful ranch with the Tetons as the backdrop, the incredible voice of Joel and his cowboy songs and poetry, gourmet western food with fall off the bone ribs, delicious baked beans, Dutch Oven biscuits, pasta and cucumber salads and the most incredible desserts. The evening was a magical one, shared with newfound friends. Everyone at the Riding Association and neighboring ranches did an outstanding job at making this an incredibly memorable and special experience.



Victor mounted and ready to ride



A beautiful day for a beautiful ride

Day Seven, 06/19/09

As a close to our week we wanted to give our veterans something to remember: the beauty and grandeur of Yellowstone National Park. Clarke A. Nelson made the dream of visiting Yellowstone a reality and arranged for a wildlife trip through Teton Science Schools Wildlife Expeditions. We started out by taking the RKO/River Road, where we enjoyed a lot of wildlife: elk, pronghorn and mule deer, and saw incredible morning views of the Tetons. We then continued to Lupine Meadows, where we viewed more elk and a black bear sow and cub. Conversation was easy and our guide Paul was willing to roll with our veteran's unique sense of humor. Paul also did an outstanding job working in all the important aspects of what makes Grand Teton and Yellowstone so special.

At around noon we ate at the historic Old Faithful Inn, watched Old Faithful erupt and went to Fountain Paint Pots and walked around the boardwalks to experience more of the unique features of Yellowstone National Park. The veterans loved Yellowstone and were awestruck by its size, features, and beauty. We then headed back to Jackson Hole, the perfect ending to a perfect week.

Tricia Dornan generously hosted our “Hale And Farewell” at Dornan’s. Who could ask for a more fitting location to truly represent the best of Jackson Hole? It was a wonderful evening, with shared stories from the week, and warm thanks given to all. We couldn’t have imagined a more meaningful experience and all of us involved were sad that our veterans would leave the following day. We are grateful to have had this small opportunity to thank and care for these fine young men. They have given us far more than we ever could give them, and we thank them for being the wonderful, strong, dedicated and unique individuals they are.

The true measure of success for our recreational therapy program is the likelihood that our veterans will want to continue a therapeutic activity learned here in the Tetons once they are back at home. All of our veterans expressed interest in continuing therapeutic horseback riding and paddling/kayak therapy.

We are looking forward to our September fly-fishing session. We would like to offer our deepest and most heartfelt thanks to the following individuals and businesses for making the June Session possible:

ASMBA Star Foundation

Aaron Pruzan, Rendezvous River Sports/Jackson Hole Kayak School

Addie and Ted Donnan

Brian and Scott Humphrey and the Bar J Wranglers

Bud Chatham, Dave Hansen Whitewater

Chris and Jeff Warburton and the Bar T-5 Band and staff

Clarke A. Nelson

Culley Traweek, Hobie Kayaks

Dakotah Dayton, National and Alamo Rental Car

Donna and Lance Johnson

Fran Peterson

Jack Dennis

Jackson Police Chief Dan Zivkovich

Julie Calder, Jackson Hole Resort Lodging

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Rhett Bain, Reel Deal Anglers

Richard and Leah B. Chace

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Snake River Ranch and Staff

Terry Roper, Grand Teton National Park

Teton County Sheriff Deputy Chad Sachse

Tom and Bobbie Laughlin and Staff

Tricia Dornan

Walt Farmer