

# Honoring Our Vets transmits an urgent SOS

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**Honoring Our Vets transmits an urgent SOS** By Paul Bruun, Jackson Hole, Wyo. |



Fishing guides Rob Parkins (right) and Jamie Weeks (second from right) with wounded American soldiers who participated in the second season of Sandra Bockman's Honoring Our Veterans program. A fall fly-fishing visit to Jackson Hole proves exceptional therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder. PAUL BRUUN

Over the past six years, 79 wounded U.S. Army and Marine veterans have benefitted from therapy sessions amid the breathtaking beauty of Jackson Hole.

The most generous woman you'll ever meet, Sandra Bockman, is the ringleader of this magical military rehab version of Make-A-Wish.

Her enthusiasm and caring continue to expose severely war-torn men and women to positive recuperative outdoor experiences.

This week Sandra needs a really big favor.

In 2008 this column first publicized Sandra's fledgling Honoring Our Veterans. The project began with Snake River fishing excursions for Bay Area vets who evidenced interest in fly tying and fly-fishing through a connection with the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club.

Our Jackson community's generous reception to this first wounded-soldier squad was heartwarming. Mental benefits from glorious September days learning fly casting, fly tying, float fishing and other outdoor activities elevated severely battered fighting men to levels never before seen by therapists, doctors and family members.

In a military and medical world enriched with acronyms and abbreviations, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) often sentences a soldier to a lifetime devoid of normalcy and joy. Friends, family and professionals who battle this horrible byproduct of warfare have occasional success. But generously enriched doses (weapons-grade?) of Jackson Hole scenery, activities and interaction dispense special medicinal characteristics that supersede drugs.

Blessed with her big grin and “nothing is impossible” attitude, Sandra’s tireless efforts have redoubled. She continues to advance with a thoughtfully created 501(c)(3) Honoring Our Veterans board of directors. The Community Foundation of Jackson Hole lists HOV, making it eligible for your Old Bill’s Fun Run donations.

### **Unselfish sportsman needed**

Rarely does the perpetually pleasant Sandra make any request other than a logistical question about upcoming events. She somehow efficiently manages the expanding HOV program and her full-time job at the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce. But this week the woman who helps troopers dispatched an SOS: Some unselfish sportsman is needed to sponsor a wounded veteran.

This fall HOV is hosting eight wounded veterans to hunt elk and antelope. Right now the organization is one Wyoming Game and Fish Elk Area 78 Type 1 permit short of its goal. So before Sandra has to call an excited veteran with some bad news, she is publicly appealing for this precious donation.

To those interested in helping, Sandra offers the following: “Wyoming Statue 32-1-705(k) authorizes the holder of any valid big game license to surrender said license to the department for re-issuance to a veteran with disabilities, as established by the commission rule and regulation, selected and sponsored by a nonprofit charitable organization providing hunting opportunities for disabled veterans.”

Sandra explains that her board, its hunt organizers and their many friends who applied for antelope and elk special areas figured they would draw four elk licenses. But they are still one license short and have until mid-September to postmark a surrendered license to Game and Fish for proper reissuing to take place.

Raising donations for worthy causes is something at which Jackson residents excel. However the request of a long-anticipated special elk area permit moves into a rarefied area of generosity requiring a truly unique sacrifice.

Not unlike what wounded veterans sacrificed for us.

### **Victims of success**

Let's hope that this fall Sandra won't have to make the call that disappoints a wounded soldier hoping to be part of a Wyoming elk hunt.

Sandra and HOV are victims of their own success. When news of the superb Jackson Hole vet program spread, an avalanche of veteran requests began arriving. Unfortunately, though HOV is the recipient of generous local donations, the previously obtainable grants such projects rely on began evaporating this year.

Sandra shared with me the travel, lodging and food costs of hosting a single veteran's week-long roundtrip visit. The cost for a new Water Sports Therapy Session (offered earlier in the year) is \$1,435. The Fly Fishing Therapy Session (Sept. 18-25) costs \$1,670. The Hunt Therapy Session is \$1,975. In addition, a new wood carving/artistic therapy project is being developed around the Fall Arts Festival. More information on that will be forthcoming.

I don't know how many have had conversations with true patriots who have been shot, blown up or otherwise injured (mentally and physically) during the horrors of warfare. Attempting to grasp the impacts these soldiers faced and will continue to endure for their lifetimes is beyond my meager imagination. I still have nightmares from overhearing a chat between an Army Ranger describing what it was like to be shot in his right arm in Baghdad and another soldier who survived an IED that removed his leg. This came as I was showing them how to fly cast.

Contact Sandra Bockman at 307-543-2135 (home), 307-713-5678 (cell) or [sandrabockman@hughes.net](mailto:sandrabockman@hughes.net). And please consider Honoring Our Veterans (HonorVets.org) for Old Bill's.

-----*Paul Bruun writes weekly on his adventures and misadventures in the great outdoors.*