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Program in Rural Mont. Gives Veterans Solace and Fishing Lessons



The Bridger Mountains provide a majestic backdrop as a program participant tries his luck with rod and reel outside Bozeman.

By Nicole Lewis

They come to learn fly-fishing amid postcard-perfect scenery. They come for home-cooked meals served in beautiful vacation houses. But most of all, the military service members come for a chance to forget their injuries, their troubles, their painful memories of war while they learn a new skill and, in the process, connect with one another.

"We build hope, restore confidence, and put them back on track to reintegration," says Seth Jordan, executive director of Warriors and Quiet Waters Foundation, the group based in Bozeman, Mont., that runs the weeklong programs. "Many folks care about them getting back on that saddle and enjoying life again."

Since 2007, 350 military personnel have participated in the group's outdoor recreation programs, which are served up with understated support and kinship. Started by a Marine colonel who found solace in the simple pleasure of catch-and-release fly-fishing after he returned home from the Vietnam War, the group seeks to

offer similar peace to small groups of traumatically injured combat veterans from recent wars, as well as active-duty service members.

Roughly seven people participate in each session. They are outfitted with fly-fishing gear (which they keep) and assigned a fishing guide and a volunteer companion who can help lift a wheelchair into a stream or assist a blind soldier. No poking or prodding by doctors, no forms or surveys to fill out, no need to do anything but fish.

Although the group is not religious, its name comes from Psalm 23: "He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul."

"We are not a 'kumbaya,' pour-out-your-guts and talk group," says Mr. Jordan, a former military pilot. "It's just good-old fashioned Americans having a good time and understanding that people care about you, life is worth living, and your outlook and perspective should be positive."

The group, which hired its first staff members last year, relies on an extensive volunteer network to provide meals, companionship, and gear. Most of its \$650,000 annual budget comes from individual donations; a few foundations and small businesses provide a small portion.

Warriors and Quiet Waters now offers weeklong skiing and horseback-riding expeditions as well as the opportunity to return to the program with a spouse. Mr. Jordan says the group has reached a crossroads: It has to decide whether to serve as many soldiers as possible or develop a program to forge deeper ties with fewer participants.