



# AFTER ACTION

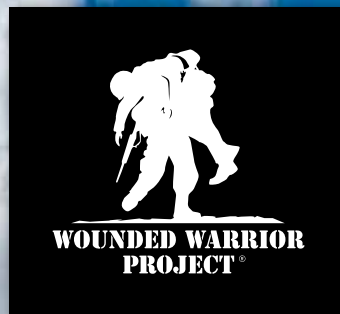
2012 ★ VOLUME 6 ★ ★ ★ ★ R E P O R T

TATTOO YOU

WATER  
FREEDOM



summertime  
fun



WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG

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**ON THE COVER:** Jason Braase celebrates every day by biking the mountains and trails around Boise, Idaho. Photo by Ricky Savi.



**CONTACT**  
 4899 Belfort Road, Suite 300  
 Jacksonville, Florida 32256  
[woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org)  
 877.832.6997

**GOT AN IDEA OR COMMENT?**  
[editor@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:editor@woundedwarriorproject.org)

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## CHALLENGE YOURSELF THIS SUMMER

Dear Alumni,

Summer is the official season of fun at Wounded Warrior Project™ (WWP).



And why shouldn't it be? Warmer weather brings with it great opportunities to get outside and enjoy some quality time together with family and friends. There is no limit to the number of activities we can enjoy, from simply grilling out in the back yard to exploring the great outdoors or spending time on the water.

WWP wants to help make sure your summer is memorable, so in this issue you will find a variety of ideas on how to spend that time while getting the most out of each day. Fire up the grill and experience some healthy, mouth-watering cuisine courtesy of The Culinary Institute of America.

Then venture out to a national or state park in your area to take advantage of the low-cost amenities. Hiking, fishing, kayaking, and biking are a small sampling of activities parks can provide.

In addition to providing great memories, these activities can also have a significant physical, emotional, and psychological impact on your life as you continue to recover and rehabilitate.

Tracy Click and Jason Braase, two of your fellow Wounded Warriors who overcame amazing odds, invisible wounds, and physical injuries, share their courageous and inspiring personal stories about how kayaking and biking have aided them in their transition and recovery.

Let this summer be the one you look back on as being the one that positively impacted your life.

I challenge you to take the stories Tracy and Jason share to heart, be inspired, and make this summer a fun one.

Sincerely,



Steve Nardizzi

executive director, Wounded Warrior Project

### NEWS AND NOTES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

#### WWP ON FACEBOOK LIVE

Facebook asked WWP to participate in a live broadcast on a panel that addressed wellness issues for service members. Check out the archived video by visiting [facebook.com/USMilitary](https://facebook.com/USMilitary)



#### WORKING FOR YOU

For the second consecutive year WWP was named the best nonprofit to work for by The Nonprofit Times.



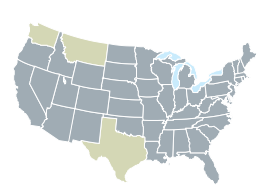


★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IN THE COMMUNITY



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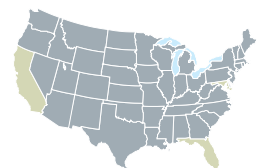
**A.** The inaugural Courage Cup golf tournament brought together wounded service members from America and the United Kingdom to compete for The Captain Pietsch Trophy. The trophy was donated by Boardman Silversmiths, Inc. and was won by the American team 12½ - 7½ in San Antonio, Texas. **B.** **William Hampton** displays one of the birds he took home as part of a pheasant hunt at Cook Canyon Hunt Club in Ellensburg, Washington. **C.** Wounded Warrior Project Alumni **David Smith, Zach Collett, Juan Arredondo, and Bryce Cole** completed a 100-kilometer bike ride in Palo Duro Canyon State Park with former President George W. Bush as part of the W100 in Texas. **D.** A group of WWP Alumni enjoyed a ski and snowboard camp in Big Sky, Montana, where they received one-on-one instruction for the outdoor sports.





E	F
G	
H	I

**E.** Wounded Warrior **Adam Harris**, **Katie Hadley**, **Samuel L. Jackson**, **Autumn Braase**, and Wounded Warrior **Jason Braase** attended the red carpet premiere of “The Avengers” at the El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles, California. **F.** **Dawn Halfaker**, WWP board president, testified before the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives. She shared WWP’s four key policy objectives for 2012. **G.** KISS bassist/singer **Gene Simmons** played host to 70 warriors at a luncheon at his new Rock & Brews restaurant in Los Angeles, California, where he donated \$25,000 to WWP. **H.** Wounded Warrior Project Alumni and former TRACK™ student **Michael Fletcher** gave a pre-game pep talk to the Sandalwood High School lacrosse team in Jacksonville, Florida. **I.** Team Wounded Warrior Project at the finish line of the Race Across America after cycling 3,000 miles from Oceanside, California to Annapolis, Maryland.





# Asked & Answered

## 1. How do I apply for TRACK™?

Eligibility requirements and the application for TRACK, the first education center in the nation designed specifically for Wounded Warriors, is available online at: [woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/track.aspx](http://woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/track.aspx). Resource Center staff can also provide TRACK eligibility information and notify the TRACK recruiter. The Resource Center can be reached via phone Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. ET at **1.888.997.2586** or via email at [resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org).

## 2. How can I attend Project Odyssey™?

Alumni can begin their Project Odyssey application process through WWP's Resource Center. Resource Center staff will then notify Project Odyssey staff for more follow-up. Project Odyssey also offers couples retreats, and spouses and warriors may also contact WWP's Resource Center to begin that application process. The Resource Center can be reached via phone Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. ET at **1.888.997.2586** or via email at [resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org).

## 3. When is the deadline to apply for "Stop Loss" payments?

The deadline to apply for Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay has been extended until October 21, 2012. To apply for the pay, or for more information on submission requirements, go to [defense.gov/stoploss](http://defense.gov/stoploss)

## 4. I need financial assistance. Can WWP provide me a grant or loan?

WWP does not have an ongoing direct financial assistance program. However, Resource Center staff can assist Alumni and caregivers with referrals to financial assistance organizations, some of which WWP provides with financial support. Additionally, WWP has an agreement with Veterans Plus, which provides financial counseling to WWP Alumni.

## 5. What is a primary family caregiver stipend?

A primary family caregiver stipend is monetary compensation paid to a primary



Andres Rosa is enrolled in TRACK in Jacksonville, Florida, as part of Cohort 7.

family caregiver for providing personal care services to an eligible veteran enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) caregiver program. WWP led the effort to create this new benefit, which is a VA enhanced service and is not considered taxable income. The stipend amount is paid monthly and is based on the number of weekly hours of personal care services a veteran requires during the month, as determined by the veteran's Patient Aligned Primary Care Team.

## 6. Can all caregivers receive the stipend?

No. Only the designated primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran is entitled to receive the stipend. Only one primary family caregiver can be designated at a time. A primary family caregiver can be a family member such as a parent, spouse, child, or extended family member, or an individual who is not a family member but lives with the veteran.

# Keeping Life on Track

Chris Gordon intentionally leaves his Purple Heart on his bedroom dresser so it's among the first things he sees when he gets out of bed.

"I keep it there so I know it is taken care of," Chris says, "and so it can be a reminder every day."

Chris doesn't need the Purple Heart to remind him of the date – March 13, 2005 – an improvised explosive device hit his Stryker vehicle and he sacrificed his right leg for the freedom of others. Instead it helps him focus on what lies ahead.

"One thing I learned from almost being killed is you have to cherish every day you have here," Chris says. "If there is something I can do, I definitely want to get out and take part in it."

Chris says he's lost track of the number of times he's had family or friends tell him, "Man, you're always on the go."

Chris regularly participates in Wounded Warrior Project™ (WWP) events. He enjoys both the camaraderie and the physical activity involved during Soldier Ride™, fishing trips, and other Alumni events.

"These outings are wonderful experiences and they provide me with a lot of positive emotions so I can keep moving in a positive direction mentally and physically," he says.

When Chris isn't at a WWP event there's a good chance he can be found on the fairways of a local golf course, pursuing his favorite pastime.

Chris has been drawn to golf, he says, because he finds key similarities to his



days in the military. Proper course management, a strong mental game, and unwavering concentration are key ingredients to scoring well during a round of golf.

"You have to be disciplined in golf, so that brings the military aspect into it," says the former Army staff sergeant. "If you are not concentrating in a disciplined manner you won't succeed."

Success is the only option for Chris. He's found a way to move ahead after losing his mother in 2009 to diabetes. As a continuing tribute to her Chris is finishing

his college degree with the plan of working in the information technology field.

Chris, who was recently married, also took on the role of raising his younger sister while being a father to his son. He knows finishing college sets a strong example for his sister and his son, as well as other injured service members who are following in his footsteps.

"One second something might be working for you, and then the next second it isn't," Chris says. "You have to make a whole bunch of adjustments to keep life on track and moving in the right direction."



WOUNDED WARRIOR  
PROJECT®



TED AND SARAH WADE:

# FACES OF COURAGE

Ted and Sarah Wade both have the willingness to stare fear in the face. They've traveled a long road of pain, frustration, and adversity. But as poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Peace has its victories, but it takes brave men and women to win them."

That's why Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) honored Ted and Sarah as recipients of the 2012 George C. Lang Award for Courage at its seventh annual Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner™ at the

Waldorf=Astoria in New York, New York.

"The George C. Lang Award for Courage is named after this amazing individual, who was a Medal of Honor recipient and who showed great courage – not only in his service in the military, but also in his service to other veterans throughout his lifetime," says Steve Nardizzi, WWP executive director. "I can't think of a couple that more epitomizes George's legacy of service to others than Ted and Sarah."





treatments, and Ted's medical team describes his condition as a "complex neuropsychiatric condition."

"When Ted was injured, I was shocked to discover people with traumatic brain injury and severe mental health disorders were not given the tools they needed to live in and participate in community life," says Sarah. "I was outraged it was still acceptable in our country to put someone with these injuries or illnesses in institutional care instead of allowing them the reasonable access and the least restrictive care possible."

Sarah left school, left her job, and she has been Ted's primary support ever since his injury. She advocated for all caregivers as part of WWP's Policy and Government Affairs program. And on May 5, 2010, she and Ted stood behind President Obama as he signed into law the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act. That law expands both healthcare services for veterans and caregiver benefits and training. The law's key provisions required the Department of Veterans Affairs to mount a comprehensive program to assist caregivers of those wounded on or after September 11, 2001.

Steve considers it WWP's biggest victory because it recognizes the plight of these families and addresses it. And it would have never happened without the human face the Wades were willing to put on the issues.

"Ted has been willing to wear his heart on his sleeve," says Sarah. "You give up your privacy in a lot of ways. He's been an open book and let everyone know about very personal struggles he's been through, and I know sometimes it's been really hard for him to do that."

Ted continues to make progress toward living an independent lifestyle. He enjoys snow skiing, cycling, and working out in the gym. He's also beginning yoga classes. Volunteer work is also important to Ted, who helps out at a locally owned food cooperative and organic market, and he volunteers as a gardener at a botanical garden.

For Ted and Sarah, it was an honor hard earned.

On Valentine's Day 2004, Ted was severely injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated under his convoy. The blast severed Ted's right arm above the elbow, broke multiple bones, damaged soft tissue in his right leg, impaired his vision, and left him with a lifetime struggle to battle severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). The TBI has greatly complicated a cluster of symptoms and

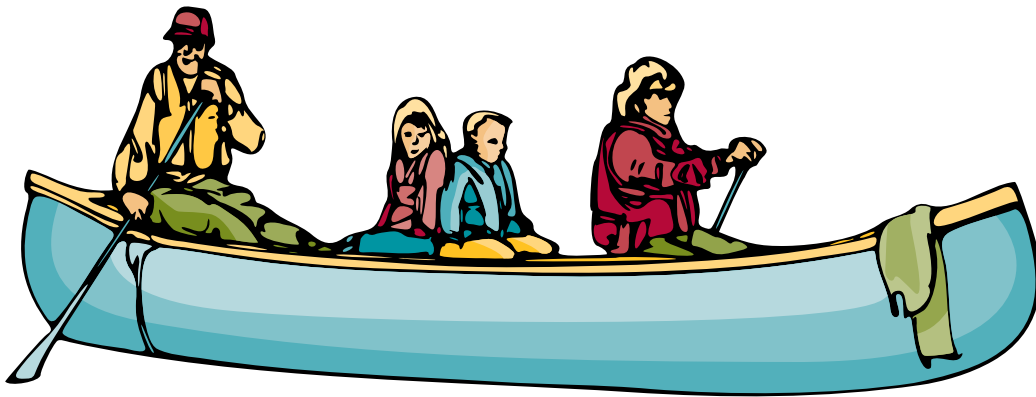
**ONLINE:** See exclusive photos from the 2012 Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner by visiting [woundedwarriorproject.org/aar-exclusive.aspx](http://woundedwarriorproject.org/aar-exclusive.aspx).

# UP AND ACTIVE: Make Summer Memorable!

Trees are green, flowers are blooming, and summer has arrived. Gone is the snow-shovel workout winter provided many of us, happily exchanged for warmer days and outdoor activities. Summer is indeed a time for family fun, and this article will help you with a few ideas on how to spend time together while maximizing the benefit of your activities.

## NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS

National and state parks offer a variety of outdoor events in a natural atmosphere. Hiking, camping, jogging, fishing, kayaking, and canoeing are a sampling of the options many parks provide. There are more than 200 national parks ([nps.gov](http://nps.gov)) that never charge entry fees and an additional 147 that require an entry fee. Military service members and their families, however, are eligible for free entry to these parks on September 29 (National Public Lands Day) and November 10-12 (Veterans Day weekend). Another great resource for you and your family is your local parks and recreation department, which plans programs and events at a low cost for residents.



## KAYAKING AND CANOEING

Almost anywhere you can find flat water – a pond, lake, or river – you can kayak or canoe with ease. If you lack the equipment or knowledge to safely kayak or canoe with your family, providers can be located through the Internet, your local parks and recreation department, or through your regional Wounded Warrior Project Physical Health and Wellness coordinators.

## FAMILY FUN RUNS

Numerous themed runs allow you and your family to be creative and use your imaginations while still being physically active. Check out [active.com](http://active.com) to find runs in your area.

## BIKE RIDING, HIKING, AND WALKING

Taking a trip through your neighborhood is a great way to be active if you have a limited time frame. If you are looking for a more intensive or scenic route, many towns and state parks offer paved or dirt trails to explore.

## HEALTHY EATING

Farmers markets are in full force during the summer, and they provide healthy alternatives to hamburgers and hot dogs. Farmers markets offer homegrown fruits and veggies, whole wheat bread, various spices, and other goods. Another option is planting your own garden. It is cost effective, promotes healthy eating, and is a great learning opportunity for all.



# SPICY ASIAN GRILLED SHRIMP

## with Broccoli and Orange-Sesame Sauce

The bold flavors that come together in this marinade take very little time to enhance the flavor of these grilled shrimp. This dish is best suited with a relatively plain rice dish that allows for the showcasing of the Asian flavor profile.

### MAKES 8 SERVINGS

3 pounds large shrimp, peeled and deveined (21/25 count)

#### Marinade

2 cloves garlic, minced

1½ tablespoons rice wine vinegar

½ teaspoon Chinese five spice powder

1 teaspoon fresh ginger, minced

4 teaspoons Tabasco sauce

4 teaspoons oyster sauce

4 teaspoons sesame oil

Broccoli with Orange-Sesame Sauce (recipe follows)

1. Combine the shrimp with the marinade ingredients and refrigerate for 15 minutes.
2. While shrimp is marinating, preheat a gas grill to high. If you are using a charcoal grill, build a fire and let it burn down until the coals are glowing red with a light coating of white ash. Spread the coals in an even bed. Clean the cooking grate.
3. Shake any excess marinade from the shrimp and place them onto metal skewers, or bamboo skewers that have been pre-soaked in cold water for 30 minutes (to avoid burning).
4. Grill for 1-2 minutes on each side until the shrimp are opaque and cooked through. Serve hot with the broccoli dish.

### Broccoli with Orange-Sesame Sauce

2 pounds broccoli florets

1 cup orange juice

2 tablespoons honey

1 tablespoon fresh ginger, minced

1 tablespoon lemon juice

2 teaspoons sesame oil

2 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted

1. Place the broccoli in a steamer basket and set in a saucepan over 1 inch of boiling water. Cover tightly and steam until just tender, 3-5 minutes.
2. To make the sauce, combine the orange juice, honey, and ginger in a small nonstick saucepan and bring to a boil. Cook until the sauce thickens, about 3 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat; stir in the lemon juice and sesame oil, and cook an additional 2 minutes.
3. Place the broccoli in a mixing bowl; top with the sauce, sprinkle with the sesame seeds, and toss to coat evenly.

Source: *Gourmet Meals in Minutes* from The Culinary Institute of America  
Information printed with permission from The Culinary Institute of America.



The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) is a program provider for WWP. For more information on the CIA, visit [ciachef.edu](http://ciachef.edu).

# SUMMM

## Warriors Find Healing Through Sports

Just as the bare crescent of dawn makes its debut over North Carolina, a red, white, and blue kayak slaloms down the Nantahala River. Its pilot, feeling very much at home again, clutches a 94-inch, double-bladed paddle, sculling through the swells as if they were silky smooth.

As she feels the wind blowing leeward across her face, Tracy Click only half concentrates. The left-side, logic-dominated portion of her brain navigates the rapids, weirs, and waterfalls. The right, creative side of Tracy's mind engages a challenge far more daunting.

They are visions of a poem Tracy remains hell-bent on capturing. Yet, in the damp confines of her kayak, there is no pen and paper to tackle them.

Tracy struggles to capture the romance of her mood. So she deliberates on her watery inspiration – trying to imprint it on her memory – calling it “Good Lady Charlotte.”

*Peering down a dark corridor, I got my first glimpse of Charlotte  
Wretched tramp was she, a horrible wench  
Each meek approach to greet her ended with a painful slap across my jaw*

This challenge won't let Tracy rest.

“There is a romantic ambiance that surrounds a soldier returning home after fighting a great battle,” says Tracy. “The reality is the tasks a soldier must perform during service often burden one's heart and mind upon the arrival home. You are taught to ignore your conscience and deny humanity to do your task. You have to do that to be successful as a soldier. The life of the guy next to you depends on it.”

The post-Army Tracy had changed as a result of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). What didn't change about her was her teenage dream of becoming a whitewater athlete and earning a spot on the United States slalom kayak Olympic team.

That dream is pursuable only because Tracy was able to fight through years of lows, doubts, and desperation. Tasks like communicating with

civilians in an appropriate language and tone, learning to read body language again, and managing personal finances all required significant effort.

“Living with TBI gives a person a sense of such humility,” says Tracy. “It is confusing to be back in civilian society after you've been in the military. And then having to make that transition with an injury you didn't have before.”

Her attempts to train her body and tame her muse were, at times, frustrating.

Meanwhile, in Idaho, another warrior is less interested in capturing his thoughts and more interested in leaving them behind all together.

The magnificent Boise River cuts through the entire city – and the rolling hills meandering along the mountain bike trail offer spectacular views of nature and its massive expanse of trees.

“The first thing I ever saved up for was a BMX bike



# entertainment



when I was in fifth grade,” says Jason Braase. “Mountain biking has been a passion of mine ever since.”

Today, there is a sweet hum emanating from the tires that reminds Jason of his childhood. He can ride up a mountain for five hours and then come barreling down it in less than 60 minutes.

“It’s nice going really fast with so little effort. When you’re up there alone on the mountain, what’s important is what you’re not thinking about. Daily life is so crazy and hectic. I get up there, and I start pushing, and all I think about is the dirt underneath my tires.”

It’s a stress reliever unlike any other. Whole stretches can go by where Jason is mentally and emotionally lost.

It’s a miracle he can even ride at all.

“In June 2005, I was escorting explosive ordnance disposal early one morning,” recalls Jason, a specialist with the National Guard who was serving in Kirkuk, Iraq. “I stepped out of the vehicle and started walking away when an IED (improvised explosive device) detonated. My Hummer took the majority of the blast, but one piece of shrapnel blew through my right leg

just below the knee.”

Jason lost a full body supply of blood within the first 12 hours. The shrapnel shattered the top of his tibia, severed his MCL and ACL, and caused major nerve damage.

It is estimated it took blood donations from more than 50 Americans to replace the blood Jason lost.

Through seven years of recovery and 13 surgeries, Jason’s doctors repeated the same song and dance. “You’ll never walk again.”... “You may lose your leg.”... “You may never be able to bend your leg again.”

They were always wrong.

“I remember once just pumping away while riding up a mountain,” Jason says. “Dirt is flying and the back tire is spinning as I get up that last little section before the top.”

And then – SNAP!

Jason flails forward and falls to the dirt. He feels pain and knows something bad just happened. But he doesn’t yet know what.

“I looked down, and there was the bike chain... snapped in half. I couldn’t believe it. To break a chain felt so good! I almost started crying. I’m the guy



# Summer fun



doctors said ‘Never’ to umpteen times. And here I am strong enough to break the chain.”

Back at the Nantahala, Tracy Click heard a familiar voice calling out her nickname, Alabama, but she couldn’t quite place who it was. She paddled her patriotic kayak over to introduce herself and soon recognized an old friend. She had last seen Dane Jackson as a small boy playing by the riverbanks when she was leaving for the Army. Now he is an accomplished whitewater athlete who has won several world freestyle kayaking championships.

As she watched her friend display his skill on the river, Tracy said a prayer with a uniquely warrior perspective: “God, please let this young man always be able to use his gifts as an athlete and sport ambassador. This boy has the spirit of a warrior. Please spare him the experience of being a soldier. I put on a uniform once in my life so hopefully my young friend won’t have to.”

Perhaps this meaningful moment inspired Tracy. Or perhaps it was simply a much-needed creative diversion. Regardless, her muse was back. And her mind raged with a flood of ideas for her poem:

“The biggest thing I had to do was learn to take my time and ask for help with things I was no longer good at. There were days I was so frustrated I wanted to lay down and die. Fortunately, the last words I heard as a soldier in uniform stuck with me – keep moving.”

The river keeps moving for Tracy. And the dirt mountain roads of Idaho keep moving for Jason Braase.

“After snapping the chain on my bike,” says Jason, “I was in sheer disbelief. I threw the chain over my shoulder, hopped back on the bike, felt so good, and coasted all the way back down the hill without a chain – never having to pedal even one time.”

It’s these outdoor activities both Jason and Tracy say go a long way to promote a warrior’s mental and physical healing.

“I’m looking forward to participating in an upcoming Soldier Ride™,” says Jason. “I’ve enjoyed biking my entire life, and it has served as a form of physical therapy for me throughout my recovery.”

Tracy echoes the sentiment.

“Kayaking with other warriors who sustained far worse injuries than mine is what got me back on track,” says Tracy, who is moved to

Over and over I would ask Charlotte to dance like a lady  
Each time I would leave with pain in my heart as Charlotte would have her way  
I sought refuge from Charlotte in the toils of battle  
Quietly I sat at my post relishing my freedom from the wretched dame  
In the night air I could hear her beckoning me like a siren  
I would plead with her as she yearned  
Let me be, good lady, let me be



# me



tears recalling how she remembers watching a warrior who had sacrificed a leg hop down to the river carrying his kayak. “Watching them carry on despite the most devastating injuries inspires me – as it should inspire everyone.”

As the late afternoon sun shifts through whitewater foam of the great Nantahala, she’s still in need of more inspiration.

“One of the things affected by my brain injury is my ability to follow complicated driving directions. In order to accomplish my mission of getting to the river each day, I had to enlist the assistance of one of the athletes. He would sit in the seat behind me and direct me to the river.”

It was that assistance – that re-learning how to cope and live – which Tracy consciously weaved into the subtext of her poetic tapestry:

*The days grew long and Charlotte’s callings became ever louder  
Leave me be Charlotte  
“Come dance with me,” she would respond  
Her beckoning screams became so loud I had to answer  
Finally I returned from my post to visit Charlotte once again  
Much to my surprise Charlotte had become quite the lady while I was away  
Charlotte had learned to dance; she was the perfect partner  
Gracious kind, the quintessential example of a Southern Belle  
No longer the dreadful wench was she  
Charlotte had finally learned to dance  
In the early eve of my final day with the good lady I realized it was not  
Charlotte that had become a lady, it was me who had finally learned to dance*

“WWP has helped me realize I’m not alone,” says Tracy. “There are other people out there who are injured. And I want to teach kayaking to more warriors. I do have a red, white, and blue boat, and I want veterans to know kayaking is fun, great exercise, and a catharsis of healing for spirit and soul.”

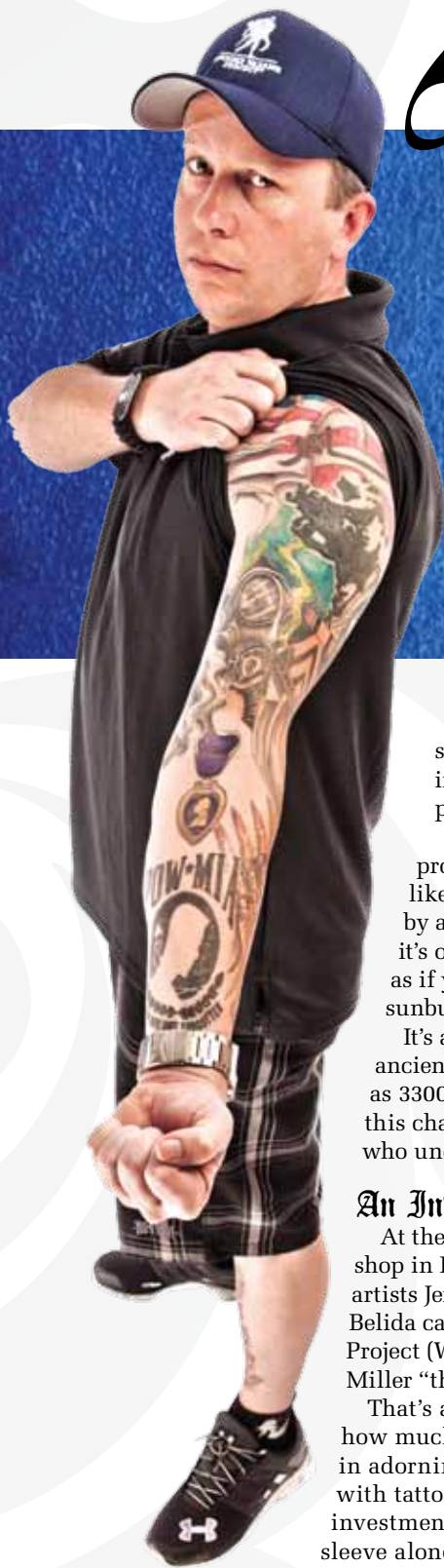
Jason knows the same is true for mountain biking.

“That’s what Wounded Warrior Project is all about – finding the warriors who are suffering and empowering them with a better lifestyle as civilians,” Jason says. “And it’s a tough transition. I’ll admit that. But when warriors find camaraderie and help dealing with their issues, they can work life out on their own terms.”

He’s got the broken chains to prove it.







# Tattoo You

“I see a tattoo as a bold outer action of a strong inner emotion.”

The equation is simple: Indelible ink into skin equals a permanent change.

During the tattoo procedure, it can seem like you're under attack by a million bees. When it's over, you might feel as if you have the worst sunburn imaginable.

It's a ritual that dates to ancient times – as far back as 3300 BC. But what does this change mean to those who undergo it?

## An Investment in Pain

At the Skin Tease tattoo shop in Bend, Oregon, tattoo artists Jeremy Tobin and Sean Belida call Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) Alumnus Brett Miller “the \$7,000 man.”

That's approximately how much Brett's invested in adorning his body with tattoos. It's also an investment of time. For one sleeve alone, Brett endured four, eight-hour sessions. And, notwithstanding, every tattoo is

an investment in pain.

For Brett, that's literal... and symbolic.

“I didn't get any of the tattoos until I got my medical retirement and I left the military,” says Brett. “I designed a sleeve on my left arm that encompassed my whole military life from start to finish. It's always a constant reminder to me about how things were – the good and the bad. As painful as it was, it represented closure pain for all the

times I spent in the hospital.”

In 2004, Brett served in Iraq as a convoy commander conducting security operations. A roadside bomb went off six feet from the door of his Humvee. The impact shook Brett with such force he suffered traumatic brain injury (TBI), brain bleed, a detached right retina, blown out right ear, and he fractured nine teeth. It rendered Brett hemiplegic – paralyzed on his left side.

Brett's tattoo is a deliberate and constant reminder about where he's been and where he is going.

“I see a tattoo as a bold outer action of a strong inner emotion. For me, my whole left sleeve is closure to the military chapter of my life.”

## In Honor of Lives Lost

Dañealea Kelly served in the Army and deployed to Iraq twice, first in 2005 and again in 2007. As a soldier, she gathered information about the enemy and helped adjust battle strategies. She also provided convoy security, which threw her into a lot of combat situations.

“It wasn't fun being shot at, blown up, and mortared,” says Dañealea. “You want to get home alive, and you definitely don't want to see any of your battle buddies killed.”

But war is reality, and there are 1,000 ways to die. Dañealea's tattoo inhabits her outer left arm, from the top of her shoulder all the way to the elbow. The higher you go up her arm – and the closer to her heart – are names of warriors she personally knew who died during her first combat tour.

“It's a way to keep their memory alive and help me cope with my grief. Experts tell you to move on, but as a soldier you feel if you move on you're doing those killed an injustice by forgetting them.”

Every day Dañealea looks at her tattoo and reminds herself these warriors paid the ultimate sacrifice, and she wants to make their sacrifice worthwhile.

“If I'm having a bad day, it reminds me to keep fighting. The pain while getting a tattoo was a release of the pain I was feeling of losing these warriors.”

The tattoo often opens conversation between Dañealea and





other veterans she meets. It establishes the common ground warriors share, and it typically provokes people to question Dañelea about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“They know if I’ve lost all these guys – and these aren’t even all of them – then I must have PTSD. We talk about the symptoms we experience and how we cope. That’s the biggest thing for warriors – finding others we can relate to.”

### **An Angel on His Shoulder**

Mark Lalli takes the biblical imagery of Saint Michael the Archangel leading God’s armies against Satan’s forces to heart. Mark was a UH-60 helicopter repairer, making sure everything was good for aircrafts to complete their missions. During his deployment to Iraq, Mark carried a medallion of the iconic image of Michael banishing the devil to hell.

“I relate that image to the experiences I had in combat,” says Mark. “Michael is doing this for the good of the world. As warriors, we’re fighting for the good of our country – trying to protect people, keep our way of life safe, and preserve liberty.”

And before each flight, Mark would say this prayer:

***Lord, please defend us in battle.  
Protect us from the wickedness of the  
devil and the snares of evil.  
And keep us safe.***

“It was a way to get us closer, get us more focused on the mission at hand, and help see us through to the end,” says Mark.

That’s why, home on leave from his tour of Baghdad, Mark had the image tattooed on his arm. He now tells

people he has a guardian angel on his side the whole time. And he believes that protection may have saved his life.

During a joint training exercise, the aircraft Mark was riding in experienced an unrecoverable malfunction. Mark was one of five who survived; six were killed. He suffered TBI and more than two dozen broken bones.

“I believe God is always going to be with me and protect me from the bad things the devil has out for us,” says Mark. “You can never see it enough times a day to remind yourself of that protection.”

### **The Eye of the Beholder**

Each of these warriors agreed their tattoos came at a price. Often that price is emotional, other times it’s social.

“There can be a stigma attached to it,” says Brett. “I’ve had people walk to the other side of the street to avoid me – like I’m some kind of thug.”

“And I’ve had people tell me it’s not very ladylike,” adds Dañelea.

“But when you take time to get to know the real person, you learn the symbolism behind the tattoo,” says Mark. “It can connect you with others who have the same problems – and need the same answers – as you do.”

**Editor’s note:** Do you have a military-related tattoo with a great story? WWP Alumni can email a photo of their tattoo and its story to [editor@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:editor@woundedwarriorproject.org) and we may feature it in WWP social media channels as well as a future edition of After Action Report.

## Help Decide WWP's Carry Forward Awards Winners

# CARRY >> FORWARD AWARDS™

Celebrating Friends of Wounded Warrior Project

Finalists for the inaugural Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) Carry Forward Awards™ can be voted on July 1-30, 2012, by visiting [wwpcarryforwardawards.org](http://wwpcarryforwardawards.org).

The Carry Forward Awards is an innovative outreach campaign and award event that recognizes passionate individuals who support you – our nation's wounded veterans – in communities across the country.

Earlier this year, WWP searched the nation for Carry Forward Awards nominees. We asked WWP Alumni,

supporters, volunteers, and partners to nominate passionate individuals who go above and beyond to further WWP's mission to honor and empower wounded warriors.

WWP carefully reviewed all nominees and is now eager to announce the finalists. We will need your help selecting the winners by voting for your favorite nominee story during the entire month of July. Nominee stories vary from WWP Alumni, volunteers, supporters, and caregivers who selflessly support service members through our organization.

Once the winners are chosen, their inspirational stories will be highlighted at the actual Carry Forward Awards event on October 21, 2012, in Anaheim, California.

Join the campaign and vote daily for your favorite story July 1-30, 2012, by logging on to [wwpcarryforwardawards.org](http://wwpcarryforwardawards.org).

## Paralympics Gearing Up For Big Show

This summer marks an historic time in the sports world. Not only will the 2012 London Olympics be taking place, but possibly even more inspirational is what follows them; the 2012 Paralympic Games, also held in Great Britain, the birthplace of the Paralympic Movement.

Scheduled to run August 29-September 9, the London Paralympics will feature 165 nations competing, 16 of which will be doing so for the first time. That's 19 more than participated four years ago in Beijing. Plus, the number of Paralympians has risen from 3,951 to 4,200, making the London Paralympics the largest in the history of the event!

As International Paralympics Committee President, Philip Craven said, "The Paralympic Games continue to grow in size and stature each edition, and it is even more pleasing that Great Britain, the spiritual birthplace of the Paralympic Movement, will get to host the biggest ever Paralympic Games."

Featuring 21 sports including archery, cycling, football, judo, power lifting, rowing, sailing, shooting, swimming, table tennis, wheelchair basketball, fencing, rugby, and tennis, the 2012

Paralympic Games are sure to be memorable, so don't miss it! And remember the next Paralympic Games are just four years away. Are you up for the challenge?

For complete information on the 2012 London Paralympics, visit [www.london2012.com/paralympics/](http://www.london2012.com/paralympics/)



The Paralympics take place in London, England, right after the Olympics conclude. Photo courtesy London 2012.





# Tips on Traveling with a Disability

Travel is complex enough these days, but traveling with a disability requires additional research, preparation, time, and patience. Here are some basic tips for making the process easier.

## PREPARATION

**Stock up:** Bring plenty of medications, medical supplies, and other needed items with you. Carry on a three-day supply if you are checking luggage in case your checked luggage gets lost or delayed.

**Confirm by phone:** Call to check and re-check hotel accessibility, rental car hand controls, public transportation accessibility, airline special needs, etc., ahead of time. Don't rely on the online booking request to go through. Get a representative's name and ask for a confirmation number.

**Allow extra time:** While travelers with disabilities are often ushered to the front of the boarding line, give yourself no less than an hour to make it through airport security and other lines.

**Know your rights:** Download the latest version of the Air Carrier Access Act to your phone when traveling by air and know your rights for traveling with a disability. Don't rely on every employee to know these rights as travel industry turnover is high and not every representative is trained.

Use technology as a tool: View airport maps ahead of time and download smart phone apps for updates on travel delays from your airline of choice.

## DURING TRAVEL:

### By Air:

- Notify the agent of your special needs and requirements during check-in
- You are allowed one free checked bag if it is medical equipment
- Aircraft seating more than 100 passengers are required to accommodate one folding wheelchair
- Contact a "Complaint Resolution Official" if you have any problems. These are required at every airport and provided by every airline
- Airports are required to have service animal relief areas. Request assistance to and from these areas if needed during connections

### By Cruise Ship:

- Ask whether port trips are accessible and if disembarking on smaller ports is accessible before booking
- Request the accessible cabin with a roll-in shower or TTY (text telephones) if needed
- Request a map of the accessible public areas and easiest travel routes through the ship before booking

### By Amtrak:

- Request the disability discount. You will be required to show proof of disability
- Request the accessibility seating area with more space for wheelchairs and locations nearest to accessible lavatories. Ask for confirmation
- Request travel assistance if needed to and from the train
- Request your meals be delivered to the seat if dining on the trip. Café cars are usually not accessible or easily accessed

### By Rental Car:

- Request right-side or left-side hand controls. This usually also gets a size-upgrade as compact cars do not have the room for hand controls
- Request a transfer board for easy transfer into the front seats
- Request a seat swivel device if needed
- Ask if transportation to the rental car pick-up is accessible



**ONLINE:** For additional information on traveling with a disability please visit Open Doors Organization at [www.opendoorsnfp.org/consumers/consumer-resources/](http://www.opendoorsnfp.org/consumers/consumer-resources/)



# “I had a sense

When Michael Vernon was just a kid, he challenged himself to swim the length of the pool underwater. Luis Lopez had a similar love affair with the water growing up in Puerto Rico and during Marine training.

Little did they know years later water would be a saving grace. It's a place to feel physically and emotionally whole following life-threatening combat injuries. Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) teams up with Divers 4 Heroes at various WWP Alumni events to introduce military personnel and their families to recreational therapy through scuba diving and the wonders of the gravity-free, underwater world.

“I had a sense of freedom,” Michael, 34, said. “As a child, I did a lot of swimming. I would always see how far I could go in the pool. Ninety percent of the time, I could go the entire length of the pool. Now, when I scuba dive, I hit the water and breathe in the oxygen. It's another way to explore a different part of the world.”

Michael served four tours of duty in the Marines and Army. On September 2, 2010, his vehicle was struck in Iraq and rolled over. Michael suffered two broken legs, two broken arms, broken ribs, a neck injury, a severely injured left hand, and a traumatic brain injury (TBI) he lives with every day. Multiple operations followed, and it was necessary to amputate his left hand.

Michael was introduced to Divers 4 Heroes as a way to return to an active lifestyle. He immediately bonded with his injured military brethren.

“There were people just like me – amputees, burn survivors, paralyzed people – they felt like family,” said Michael, who is based at Fort Stewart, Georgia. “We were able to joke with each other and talk. It was a wonderful experience.”

Divers 4 Heroes was a breakthrough for Luis, too. The 32-year-old Kissimmee, Florida resident was a Marine gunner in Iraq in 2005 when his vehicle was hit by two improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The impact knocked Luis out, injured his shoulders, back, knees, and vocal cords, and caused a TBI. Of the 16 Marines hit by those IEDs, only four survived.

Four years later, Luis was medically discharged to the care of his wife, Karen. She had been forced to quit her job to care for Luis and their three children. Luis had to take 20 forms of medication twice daily and was severely depressed and paranoid. He would only communicate with Karen and would only allow her to transport him for nearly 3½ years. If a WWP opportunity came up, Luis would usually cancel at the last minute.

Finally, in early 2011, the Lopez family was introduced to Divers 4 Heroes at its home base in nearby Lakeland, Florida. Luis tried it – and came away smiling.

***“I wasn’t confident at all in myself,” Luis said. “After scuba diving, I am more relaxed. In water, there’s no resistance. I don’t feel the pain as much. I’m free to move around. I enjoy it. I’m not afraid anymore.”***

# of freedom”



Photo courtesy Debbie Twillman

Luis Lopez has enjoyed both physical and emotional benefits from his seven dives to date.

“I wasn’t confident at all in myself,” Luis said. “After scuba diving, I am more relaxed. In water, there’s no resistance. I don’t feel the pain as much. I’m free to move around. I enjoy it. I’m not afraid anymore.”

Karen said Luis improved in numerous ways through his seven dives so far: He became more social as he connected with other injured veterans, the headaches subsided after dives, his appetite increased, the reliance on medication was lessened, and he was able to sleep soundly.

“It was our lifesaver,” Karen said. “Luis was always in his own shell, and now he’s able to come out of it.”

Michael and Luis are among the many success stories for the Divers 4 Heroes program and founders Bo and Debbie Twillman. As a retired Army Special Operations Ranger, Bo knew about disabled veterans and he is the instructor trainee for Divers 4 Heroes. The Twillmans’ calling came in the summer of 2006 when the couple was on a diving trip to Key West, Florida, and watched closely as a group of disabled



Michael Vernon has used Divers 4 Heroes as a way to return to an active lifestyle.

veterans in their 20s struggled to exit a bus.

“We found something; it made so much sense,” said Debbie, who is also a master diver. “How could this not work? I imagined if I had a son in a wheelchair, and through scuba diving he could maneuver. I was totally motivated. We’ve never turned down a veteran.”

In 2011, Divers 4 Heroes registered 176 disabled veterans – and the cause is growing, with 34 in April 2012 alone. Approximately 400 veterans have gone through the program since it began in 2008, taking monthly and quarterly dives in pools, springs, the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and even international waters.

Additionally, a recent study conducted by The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine found paralyzed veterans who learned to dive experienced notable physical and psychological improvement.

“It’s definitely made a difference in a lot of lives,” Debbie said, “and hopefully many more to come.”



## WEST REGION

June 16, **Lowman Nature Pond Alumni Fishing Day**  
Lowman, Idaho  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

June 25-29, **Male Project Odyssey**  
Tahoe, Nevada  
C: sespinosa@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 16, **Walleye Fishing**  
Rudyard, Montana  
C: ppace@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 23-27, **Male Project Odyssey**  
Telluride, Colorado  
C: khoucek@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 26-29, **Alumni Summit Northwest**  
Seattle, Washington  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 5, **Seattle Sounders Soccer Game**  
Seattle, Washington  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 10-12, **King Salmon Fishing Day**  
Sekiu, Washington  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 13-17, **Warrior Transition Unit Project Odyssey**  
Palmer, Alaska  
C: cchapman@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 17, **Lasting Experiences for Military Women**  
Bozeman, Montana  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 18, **Seattle Sounders Soccer Game**  
Seattle, Washington  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 22-26, **Summit Challenge**  
Park City, Utah  
C: mspeicherharris@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 30-September 2, **Family Retreat**  
Park City, Utah  
C: ssmith@woundedwarriorproject.org

September 12, **One Shot Antelope Hunt**  
Lander, Wyoming  
C: jsinchak@woundedwarriorproject.org

September 17-21, **Male Project Odyssey**  
Hilo, Hawaii  
C: sespinosa@woundedwarriorproject.org

## CENTRAL REGION

June 6-10, **Alumni Summit Great Lakes**  
Lake Geneva, Wisconsin  
C: aschmit@woundedwarriorproject.org

June 25-29, **Female Project Odyssey**  
Duluth, Minnesota  
C: khoucek@woundedwarriorproject.org

June 26-29, **National Veteran Small Business Conference**  
Detroit, Michigan  
C: tdixon@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 7, **Craig Morgan Concert**  
Michigan City, Indiana  
C: aschmit@woundedwarriorproject.org

## EAST REGION

June 16, **Fishing/Bird Hunting**  
Pittsburg, New Hampshire  
C: lperry@woundedwarriorproject.org

June 22, **Muster New Jersey Knights of Columbus  
Third Annual Army Tank Pull**  
Clifton, New Jersey  
C: tntellas@woundedwarriorproject.org

June 24-27, **Society for Human Resource Management**  
Atlanta, Georgia  
C: falsina@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 5-8, **Operation Down Home Camp**  
Homewood, Alabama  
C: ssmith@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 10-14, **Couples Project Odyssey**  
Charleston, South Carolina  
C: mfishermurray@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 20, **Ohio River Bowfishing**  
Louisville, Kentucky  
C: rgullion@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 23-26, **Male Project Odyssey**  
Delta, Alabama  
C: rdean@woundedwarriorproject.org

July 27-29, **Muster Buffalo**  
Buffalo, New York  
C: tntellas@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 2-5, **Family Lake Extravaganza**  
Windham, New York  
C: ssmith@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 7-10, **Female Project Odyssey**  
Carolina Beach, North Carolina  
C: mfishermurray@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 13-17, **Couples Project Odyssey**  
Hamburg, New Jersey  
C: jcilento@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 15-19, **Alumni Summit Capital**  
National Harbor, Maryland  
C: mbunce@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 17, **Muster Albany**  
Albany, New York  
C: tntellas@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 18, **Dragon Boat Team**  
Hartford, Connecticut  
C: lperry@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 18, **Combat Stress Recovery Program  
One-Day Family Event at Terrapin Adventures**  
Savage, Maryland  
C: dhamlinglover@woundedwarriorproject.org

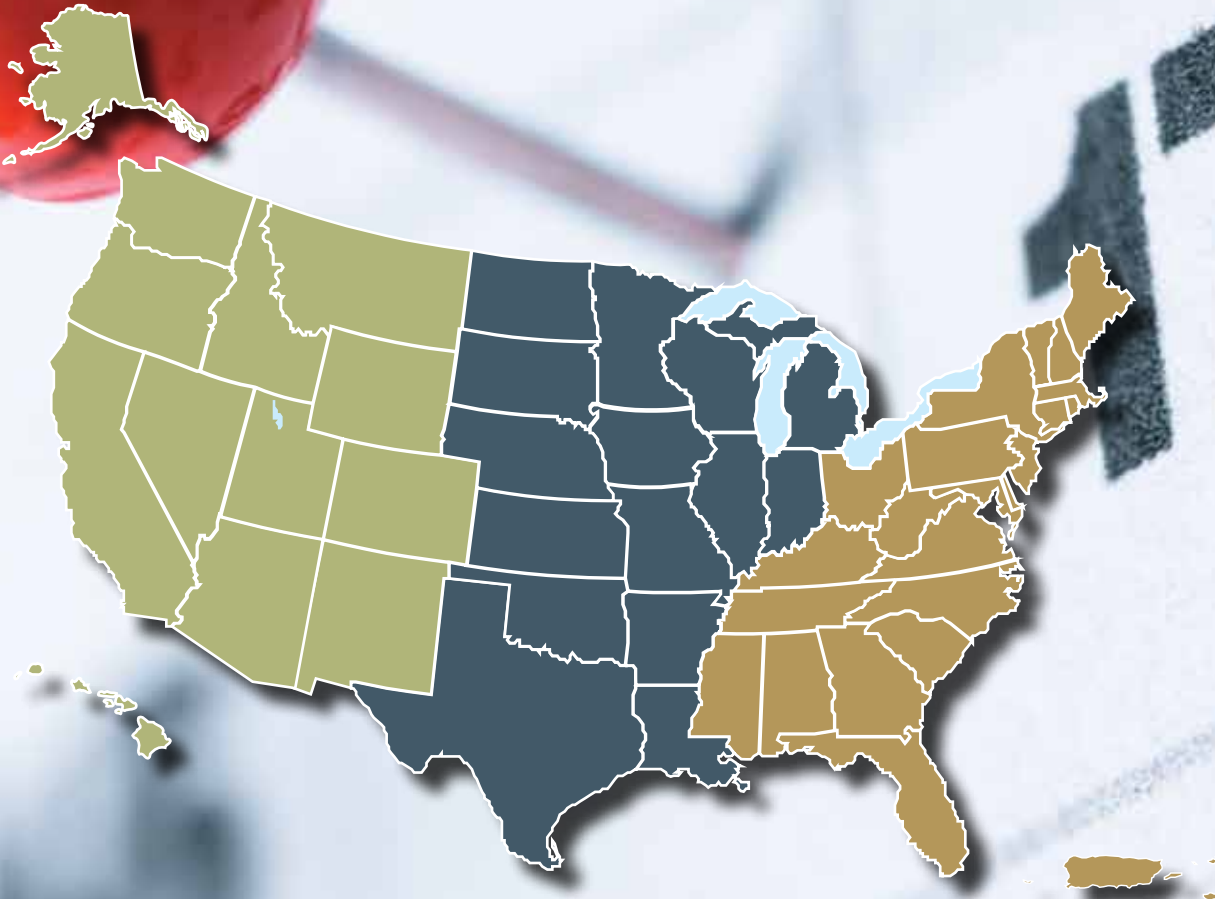
August 24-26, **Alumni Summit Northeast**  
Plymouth, Massachusetts  
C: tntellas@woundedwarriorproject.org

August 30-September 3, **Soldier Ride North Fork**  
C: mspeicherharris@woundedwarriorproject.org

September 7-9, **Muster Cow Harbor Warrior Weekend**  
Long Island, New York  
C: tntellas@woundedwarriorproject.org

September 15, **Wheeler's for the Wounded**  
Wanaque, New Jersey  
C: tntellas@woundedwarriorproject.org

September 17-21, **Female Project Odyssey**  
Windham, New York  
C: jcilento@woundedwarriorproject.org



**INTERNATIONAL**  
 July 29-August 7, Soldier Ride Germany  
 (for warriors at Europe WTU)  
**C:** mspeicherharris@woundedwarriorproject.org

**MULTIPLE REGIONS**

<p>July 9-September 28  <b>Introduction to Computer Security</b>                  Locations:                  Fort Sam Houston                  Fort Bragg                  Camp Pendleton                  Fort Carson                  Bethesda NMC                  Fort Belvoir  <b>C:</b> fpedroza@woundedwarriorproject.org</p>	<p>July 9-September 14  <b>Introduction to Computer Technology Classes</b>                  Locations:                  Balboa NMC                  Camp Pendleton                  Fort Carson                  Bethesda NMC                  Fort Belvoir                  Fort Stewart                  Fort San Houston                  Fort Bragg  <b>C:</b> fpedroza@woundedwarriorproject.org</p>	<p>July 9-September 28  <b>Introduction to Computer Security Classes</b>                  Locations:                  Fort Sam Houston                  Fort Bragg                  Camp Pendleton                  Fort Carson                  Bethesda NMC                  Fort Belvoir  <b>C:</b> fpedroza@woundedwarriorproject.org</p>
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Please note event dates and availability are subject to change. Check with the appropriate event contact for updated availability and dates.



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## PARTING SHOT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



**Stephen Fleming (left) and Brian Sellers (top) experience near weightlessness high above the Gulf of Mexico on a Zero-G flight that simulates the effects of gravity on the moon.**

Photo courtesy [steveboxall.com](http://steveboxall.com)

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:** Living Inspired