



Stepping Up for Wounded Soldiers

Ron Raboud and Wounded Warrior Outdoors are looking for your help.

By John Dunlap, Editor – SSA Globe

A few years ago Ron Raboud was riding on a plane from Houston to Orlando when, after takeoff, he noticed that virtually the entire plane was loaded with wounded military veterans. Momentarily taken aback, he then began to have conversations with the soldiers sitting around him and found out that they were headed from Brooke Army Medical Center to Disney World. But he found out much more than that; Raboud discovered that there was a major need to help these recently-returned combat soldiers on the road to recovery and he developed just the plan to make it happen—take them hunting and fishing.

Thus was born Wounded Warriors Outdoors, Inc. (WWO), a non-profit organization that takes a group of seriously wounded American or Canadian vets to places like British Columbia, Alaska, Texas or Florida to go hunting and fishing. The organization has existed for three years (and has officially been a non-profit for one) and in that time Raboud has seen the amazing power that the outdoors can have on a soldier who

has been stuck in a hospital room for a long time.

So how does WWO have a connection to self storage? Raboud, from Florida, has worked in the self storage industry for 30 years as CEO of the RabCo Corporation that owns four facilities and has a subsidiary organization, American Roofing, which deals exclusively with self storage roofing needs. Over the years he used hunting and fishing trips to help entertain clients. Ten years ago, he began to also bring along a child suffering from either a life-threatening or terminal disease, typically cancer. Then followed that fateful airplane ride from Houston to Orlando and the creation of the WWO program.

Raboud, 50, now is enlisting the help of self storage facilities around the country and the world to step up and help. He has created a program called “One for the Troops” and his goal is to have self storage facilities donate each month’s proceeds from just one unit to WWO to help with funding the trips for the wounded soldiers. And the donations are tax deductible.

“I know that it we are dealing with a difficult economy right now, but we feel that asking for just one unit’s proceeds is reasonable,” Raboud says. “It is a way to make a huge impact for our program and the lives of some soldiers with a minimal impact to the people in self storage. We’re trying to send the message out to everyone in self storage with the hope that they will step up for a very good cause.”

Dealing with Trauma

Most of the soldiers that WWO takes outdoors are ones suffering from head trauma and/or injuries that have resulted in amputations. Raboud made it a point to visit the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Maryland to learn how best to work with the vets in ways that are beneficial and also sensitive to their needs.

“Some organizations dedicated to helping vets who have been injured take them to sporting events, concerts, things like that,” Raboud says. “And that is OK, but it creates in a lot of the kids a sort of prima donna

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effect and sense of entitlement. Our goal is to really help the kids start to heal and work their way back into society. We want to re-establish them physically, mentally and socially.”

“In a meeting with the medical staff at Walter Reed (including the commanding general, BG Gary Cheek, the Asst. Surgeon General of the U.S. Army in charge of Warrior Care and Transition), they recognized the therapeutic opportunity that our trips provide to our vets. As a result of that, we select our trips and the guests on each trip around their therapeutic goals as well as their injuries.”

“Our vets suffer a variety of injuries, most caused as a result of improvised explosive devices. The most common injuries are severe burns, traumatic amputations and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Over 90% of our injured vets suffer some degree of TBI injuries due to the explosions.”

Raboud and his WWO staff soon found that providing soldiers the opportunity to get outdoors worked directly with areas most in need of therapy and healing and for a longer

period of sustained impact than rehabilitation efforts in the hospital.

“With respect to a TBI injury, the connection between what the eyes observe and what the brain processes is interrupted,” Raboud says. “In a hospital environment the rehab involves a series of cognitive and eye exercises to reestablish the connection. The average attention span a patient has is no more than 1½ hours a day, 5 days a week. We provide the same benefit on our trips by altering our approach to either hunting or fishing. An average day on one of our trips provides a minimum of 10 hours of therapy in an environment much more conducive to progress and enjoyment.”

“With respect to hunting, we find vantage points from which we try to locate animals by using binoculars. Remember the goal is to establish that connection between the eyes and the brain. They must first find the animal then process what they observe. Our guests will sit there all day, if needed, looking for game. On a fishing trip we select trips that require visual techniques to catch fish, like presenting a fly to a rising trout. First you need to see the trout

then process how best to present your lure.”

Setting Up the WWO

Raboud’s involvement with helping those in the military actually stemmed from his own father having been wounded in World War II in France and spending a year in the hospital recovering from his wounds. His dad also was the first person to introduce him to the joys of being outdoors and hunting and fishing.

Now his goal is to run a quality organization that effectively takes care of wounded soldiers while spending virtually all of its proceeds on the program itself.

“Unfortunately, with a lot of charities only a small amount of the money they raise actually goes to the cause,” Raboud adds. “And we don’t try to overdo things. We generally only take six soldiers on each trip. It is more about quality than quantity. And we have a comfort level with the places we take the soldiers to hunt or fish since they are the same places I’ve been taking clients in self storage for years.”

“My goal was a completely volunteer organization with no salaries or needless overhead. I contacted several other companies associated with RabCo and asked for help. Everyone participated with 100% donation of their time and services. The first other company in the self storage industry to jump on board with us was Dave Curtis and Janus International. They have been involved strongly since the beginning and continue to help in any way they can.”

“With all of this in place we feel that we can provide up to 55 trips per year without losing focus,” Raboud concludes.

For more information about WWO or to set up a contribution to One for the Troops from your facility, e-mail ron@woundedwarrioroutdoors.com or visit WWW.WOUNDED-WARRIOROUTDOORS.COM. ❖



Fishing at special locations throughout Canada and the United States is one way that Wounded Warriors Outdoors is able to help vets start to heal.