GET INVOLVED BY GETTING ACTIVE FOR OUR HEROES

2013 ANNUAL REPORT
Active Heroes’ mission is to strengthen active duty military, veterans and their families in order to provide the coping skills to manage the stress and the triggering points that lead to suicide. Active Heroes is dedicated to connecting and helping America’s military families through community outreach, financial assistance, home repairs, physical and mental therapy, and community reintegration.

These staggering figures are a direct result of veterans believing that they cannot take care of their families. Unemployment among veterans is at an all-time high. That stress, coupled with the stigma of post-traumatic stress disorder and a loss of the military camaraderie, leave many veterans feeling purposeless upon returning home from active duty.

Active Heroes was borne out of a desire to help military families with financial support, home repairs and programs to combat post-traumatic stress disorder and veteran suicide. Since its inception in December of 2011, Active Heroes, a non-profit charity, has helped thousands of active duty military, veterans and their families.

2013 was a momentous year for Active Heroes. In addition to several successful events designed to help military families, a $250,000 grant from the Home Depot’s Aprons in Action program brought us one giant step toward realizing our dream of building a military family retreat, a one-of-a-kind place of healing from the visible and invisible wounds of war that combines integration, nature, outdoor activities, physical activities and family building challenges.

The Active Heroes Retreat and Nature Park is designed to offer peace, community and help with coping skills to veterans and their families. The 144-acre property in Bullitt County, Kentucky, has six streams, hills, open fields and a 10-acre lake and will help with post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide prevention by serving the physical, emotional and mental needs of active duty military, veterans and their families.

The retreat will give individuals and families a place where they can leave their personal problems behind and step into the warm embrace of nature, whether it be a green, mossy grove, the military family garden or the rocky hills. Sullivan University faculty have volunteered to teach seminars at the center, including techniques for conflict resolution, budgeting and other short-term, non-credit education. Active Heroes will coordinate activities and opportunities to promote physical, emotional and mental health.

While we have accomplished so much in just two years, we only have just begun. Active Heroes utilized the $250,000 Home Depot grant toward the purchase of land for the retreat. We now need $4 million to complete the retreat center. Active duty military, veterans and their families will use the grounds and activities for free. Once the retreat is open, Active Heroes will keep it running with civilian membership fees and cabin rentals. We hope to open the Active Heroes Retreat Center and Nature Park by 2015. With your help, we can make that happen.

Sincerely,

Troy Yocum
Founder & President, Active Heroes
Respect on the field

Northern Illinois University Huskies wore special Heroes jerseys during their Mid-American Conference match-up against Ball State as part of Military Appreciation Week in November.

During NIU’s Heroes game, the Huskies wore one-of-a-kind black jerseys produced by Adidas to honor past and present members of the military, as well as police and other first responders. Those 99 special game jerseys were then auctioned to benefit Active Heroes, and $60,000 was raised.

NIU Head Coach Rod Carey said he and the entire Huskie team were behind the effort.

“We’re excited about the partnership with Active Heroes,” Carey said. “That’s what it’s all about is a chance for us to assist and be involved with this great cause.”

Donor spotlight

If doctors said you had a finite amount of time left, how would you spend your remaining days?

It’s a question Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran Capt. Justin Fitch has already answered. He will fight a disease waging a war within him, while devoting what energy he has to saving the lives of fellow veterans.

Fitch, the commander of the Headquarters Research Development Detachment at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, has terminal colon cancer. At the young age of 32, he faces medical retirement from the Army, and physicians have told him he has just months to live.

To date, Fitch has endured more than 40 chemotherapy treatments, six major surgeries and several smaller procedures. Daily painkillers help him cope with the tumors that have invaded his intestines.

Despite his own fight for his life, Fitch thinks mostly about reducing the pain of others. He has spent the past year trying to increase awareness of and raise money for veterans with post-traumatic stress who are contemplating suicide.

This year, he began doing 12-hour team ruck marches with the “Carry the Fallen” campaign. He and his “Team Minuteman” have raised $114,000 for Active Heroes. Justin has donated his own money, as well.

Fitch’s mission is to help keep other veterans alive. He understands their struggles because there was a time in his own life when thoughts of suicide nearly consumed him.

“It’s OK to seek help. I’m a captain, and I sought help. As an active duty military leader, I have seen first hand the effects of the military lifestyle on my subordinate, peer, superior and separated warriors,” Fitch said. “Some choose to keep quiet because of stigma. Others separate from the military and find themselves in social circles where none of their friends can understand the hardships of both peace and wartime military service. This makes their support network very small. If they are not comfortable talking to those they know, they are usually limited to ineffective and often automated suicide support hotlines or to make mental health appointments with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which often place a high-risk veteran on up to a two-month wait list, which often is too late. It is a real problem.”

It is Fitch’s hope that he will get to see the Active Heroes’ Retreat Center completed. To do that, he would have to defy doctors’ predictions.

“Other than family and friends, this is my final mission, and I’m going to do everything I can to accomplish it.”

Capt. Justin Fitch
CARRY THE FALLEN RUCK MARCH EVENT GETS BIG BOOST

In 2012, Active Heroes introduced a 12-hour ruck march fundraiser that was conducted on a Wednesday during Veterans Day Week and called the Hump Day Hump. During the ruck march, teams carry 50 plus pounds to raise money to prevent veteran suicides.

That year, the event was hosted in 20 cities with teams of military supporters who honored fallen soldiers, marines, airmen, coastguardsmen and sailors while raising funds to help military families.

In 2013, the 12-hour ruck march fundraiser event name was changed to Carry the Fallen and had huge success with 35 teams across the world. The event raised more than $100,000 for Active Heroes. This success is attributed to several outstanding veterans and military supporters.

In May, Active Heroes competed in The Home Depot Foundation’s National Facebook Voting Contest called Aprons in Action. The criterion given to voters was that the project needed to help military families. The winner was selected based on the number of votes placed by the public.

Throughout May, Active Heroes competed against nine other finalists for the $250,000 grand prize. On May 31st, Active Heroes hosted a live-streamed event at 4th Street Live in downtown Louisville called the “Active Heroes Voting Marathon” to inspire the Louisville community and viewers from across the world to cast their votes for Active Heroes.

Active Heroes and several veterans walked and ran on a treadmill, biked on exercise bikes and encouraged the crowd of 15,000 people to help finish off the voting in style. The team ended up completing 300 miles on the treadmill and exercise bikes.

“It was truly an honor to be invited and to be able to collaborate with a great organization such as Active Heroes. Seeing all the vets that came up to thank us for what we were doing was truly amazing,” said Mac Alaniz, a supporter who participated in the biking challenge. “I dug down deep and remembered who we are doing this for and why we were doing it: the sacrifice and dedication to us all that these brave warriors endure. As the countdown came to a close, tears ran down my face not because of the pain or the fatigue, but because I knew at that exact moment that we had won and that we achieved something great that would impact the lives of thousands. We had paved the way for healing for our heroes.”

Active Heroes won The Home Depot’s Aprons in Action program with more than 107,000 total votes, which was more than 60,000 votes ahead of second place. The grand prize money was used to buy land for the Active Heroes Retreat Center.

2013 FINANCIALS

During Active Heroes’ second year, we focused on how we can affect the lives of veterans and their families through our four programs. Each program expense is listed on our 2013 IRS Form 990, which is available on our Web site (activeheroes.org/financials). We set our goals for fundraising and administration expenses to be as low as possible while still being able to function efficiently to support hundreds of veteran families.
Throughout 2013, Active Heroes partnered with The Home Depot Foundation to repair 16 homes for veterans and their families in Kentucky and Southern Indiana. Team Depot volunteers were led by Scott Krueger, Active Heroes Board Member. While all the military families helped were extremely grateful when the repairs were completed, one veteran’s story stood out from the rest.

Veteran Brian Florence was injured from an IED explosion in Iraq in 2007. He woke up in the hospital back in America, never receiving a welcome home ceremony. He suffered greatly from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Home Depot volunteers lifted his spirit and let Brian realize that his service to our country was supported. Brian worked with everyone to repair his home, and experienced a complete turnaround. He began laughing and hugging the volunteers. These relationships were the answer to how we could help these veterans even more. He found friends through Active Heroes. He even said that it had saved his life to meet everyone and finally talk about his experiences.

As the year of home repairs closed, Active Heroes invited all the families helped to a University of Louisville basketball game. At half time, the families gathered on the basketball court to be honored for their sacrifices. It was then to a crowd of 30,000 people that Active Heroes announced a lifetime endowment fund to help the Florence family for the rest of their lives with financial assistance and home repairs. The crowd was invited to give Brian the welcome home he deserved. The crowd roared and gave the Florence family a standing ovation that lasted for five minutes.