



Support the Men and Women Who Secure Our Freedom

A NEWSLETTER ADVOCATING FOR OUR AMERICAN TROOPS

“WE ARE DEDICATED TO PROVIDING SUPPORT AND NEW BEGINNINGS FOR INJURED VETERANS AND THEIR SPOUSE, CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN.”

VETERAN PREVAILS WITH DETERMINATION AND GRACE

Major William E. Lyles doesn't like to be called a “hero.” He thinks he was just doing his job. However, those who know Will may challenge his stated preference.

A gifted athlete, Will pitched for the Virginia Military Institute baseball team all four years before graduating in 2002. One year later he made a decision that would change his life forever — he accepted a commission in the United States Army. After completing two tours in Iraq, Will stepped on an IED on August 28th, 2010, just four days after his thirtieth birthday. He now wears two prosthetic legs.

Years past that fateful day, Will continues to experience gratitude for what he feels is a second chance at life.

“I know how lucky I am to be alive,” he said. “It's almost like I'm living on borrowed time.”

Transitioning to life as a bilateral amputee is by no means simple, but Will's perseverance and positivity helped him regain the confidence to live his life fully. He completed three years of intensive rehabilitation at Brooke Army Medical Center in Houston, TX, during which time he met his beautiful future

wife and Army nurse Sophia. They were married in the spring of 2015.

Borrowed time or not, Will has certainly and continues to make his mark on this world. Today he is both husband to Sophia and father to Alexis, 15, Kaitlyn, 13, William 9, and Gabby 6. He is currently working on an MBA at Rice University, where he earned a full scholarship.

“THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN'T ACCOMPLISH IF YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO IT,” WILL STATED. NEVER SAY ‘I CAN'T.’ “

Will demonstrates the strength of the human spirit and to many he is perseverance incarnate. He reports he would not trade his experience in the Army for anything in this world, even after it took both of his legs.

“There is nothing you can't accomplish if you put your mind to it,” Will stated. Never say ‘I can't.’ “

Thank you, Will, for your service and the lesson you teach us all about having determination and grace through life's most difficult obstacles. While we respect your humble nature, you are still a hero in our eyes! •

INSIDER INSIGHTS

Steve Shea, a West Point graduate of the Class of 1987, was enjoying a chilled PBR at the Bierstube after an invigorating day of backcountry skiing in Whitefish, MT, when the decision was made to support injured veterans.

Steve had the vision of how a winter ski program could provide veterans a respite from recovery. Not only would there be fun in the great outdoors, returning veterans would see firsthand that there is a community of folks who care about and who want to help with their healing. Nine years later, the Whitefish Veterans Support Team (WVST) is going strong with greatly expanded local community and volunteer support.

Through Steve's leadership and community support, WVST has offered eight additional winter retreats, two caregiver retreats, two family retreats and two summer retreats.

In addition to the great team of volunteers that supports Steve in organizing the WVST retreats, his strongest supporters are in the Shea family. Christine and their three children, Thomas, Kelly and Erin have all been an integral part of WVST's ability to support veterans and their families. Thank you Steve and the Shea family! •

WELL-DESERVED RESPITE FOR INJURED VETERANS

Five injured veterans and their wives arrived on January 13, 2016 to begin their well-deserved five day winter retreat. The veterans who arrived during the daylight hours were immediately treated to a groomer ride up the mountain.



"WHEN I SAW THE GROOMER I WONDERED WHAT THE HECK IS THAT? I NEVER KNEW THEY EXISTED. NOW I SEE HOW THE HILL'S PREPARED FOR SKIERS. IT'S A LOT SCARIER RIDING DOWN."
— TONY

Three groomers appeared slope side of Ed and Mullys; their growling engine noise announced their arrival before they came into view. They lined up outside the building, picked up their passengers and — without delay — chugged straight up Big Mountain. The veterans were introduced to this mountain via a one-hour groomer ride!



"I FOLLOWED THOSE GUYS (THE SKI BUDDIES) EVERYWHERE. I SKIED OFF-GROOMED, THROUGH TREES, IN SNOW THIGH-HIGH! WE DID ABOUT TWELVE RUNS—DON'T KNOW THE NAMES—I JUST FOLLOWED. IT WAS A GREAT DAY! THANKS FOR HAVING ME." — JIM

Each skier and snowboarder received lessons from a professional instructor, compliments of Whitefish Mountain Resort. Additionally, each veteran couple was assigned a personal buddy from WVST to ensure that all went smoothly for the next five days.

On Sunday J & L Snowmobile Rentals entertained the veterans and spouses. Appropriate clothing was issued to each person, then, following their guide, they drove five machines up the Canyon Creek backcountry route to the Summit House where they enjoyed lunch. The trip back down the mountain extended the thrill of riding snowmobiles.

"MY WIFE AND I RIDE MOTORCYCLES. WE'RE STOKED TO GET TO RIDE A SNOWMOBILE! IT WAS FUN." — BILLY



Each day also offered group counseling sessions with COMMIT, an organization helping the veterans navigate back into civilian life. One of the veterans said, *"I want to learn about this transition to civilian life. I want to make it work."* Several veterans expressed appreciation for the combination of fun activities and working on meaningful issues related to re-entry to civilian life.

"WE'RE STRUGGLING. I'M SO GRATEFUL FOR THIS TIME TO TAKE A BREAK FROM OUR SURROUNDINGS AND ISSUES." — REBECCA

Whitefish Mountain Resort generously worked with Whitefish Veterans Support Team to provide lodging, meeting rooms, ski tickets, instructors and outdoor equipment for the veterans.

Local families furnished dinner for the visitors and their buddies each night. Thanks to the Kearneys, Spencers, Rhemanns, Washers and Williams; who each hosted a dinner for this crowd of about 30 people. Thanks, also, to McGarry's Roadhouse for opening its doors to the Whitefish Community and WVST for dinner on Saturday night.



All too soon this five-day Montana event came to an end. New friends, new experiences, new scenery — Montana's exquisite snow-covered vistas — and new ways to maneuver the twisted maze called civilian life — all the visitors took these new memories and knowledge to their homes. WVST and the Whitefish community have again come to the aid of men and women who have bravely served their country. The veterans and their spouses expressed sincere appreciation for a fun and meaningful Whitefish retreat.

"WE WERE COMPLETELY IN AWE OF WHAT YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED FOR THE LUCKY FEW WHO ATTENDED THIS SESSION AT WHITEFISH MOUNTAIN." — JIM AND KIM

CREATING SERENDIPITY FOR VETERANS IN WHITEFISH

The COMMIT Foundation was honored to once again partner with the Whitefish Veterans Support Team (WVST) for their biannual program. COMMIT and WVST began working together last summer after WVST expressed an interest in providing more than just a getaway for its program participants.

COMMIT works to create serendipity for high performing Post 9/11 Veterans by bringing people, perspective, and opportunity into their lives. We meet veterans where they are and build solutions around them.

“Our goals for the Whitefish program were to enable the Whitefish Veterans Support Team to have an even greater impact in the lives of these warriors and to ensure that the Whitefish community is equally understanding of invisible wounds and their profound presence in our veteran population,” said Anne Meree Craig, COMMIT’s Executive Director.

COMMIT is providing its one-on-one transition assistance to the veteran attendees and their spouses before, during, and after the WVST events. Veterans will participate in this work for approximately three to six months, receiving highly individualized service and attention. Veterans will work to identify their strength and skills and to focus their career choices while COMMIT will rely on a trusted and reliable network of resources to open up doors and opportunities that otherwise might not be readily available. Services to the veteran include one-on-one transition assistance, a professional survey for the service member and their spouse, which not only identifies strengths but also helps with communication. Finally, each veteran receives a series of executive coaching sessions with a certified coach.

While in Whitefish, the veterans and their spouses spent time with highly experienced local professionals from the private sector.



MANY OF US ENTERED INTO THE MILITARY AS TEENAGERS AND NOW AS FORTY-SOMETHINGS ARE FACING A WORLD THAT WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT...

COMMIT does not believe that mentorship can be forced but knows that thirty minutes of quality dialogue can change someone’s perspective and thus their trajectory. The discussions with the mentors focused on undetermined paths, serendipitous moments and how to overcome unexpected challenges. It served as a powerful lesson that reinforced integrity, family, and the passionate pursuit of a meaningful career. *“Our mentoring sessions are where the magic happens,”* says Craig. *“By harnessing the power of candor, the human spirit, and relationships, we enable veterans to put their best foot forward.”*

Participants left Whitefish with a renewed sense of confidence and excitement to move forward through their transition period. *“The week was truly more than we could have asked for,”* said one participant. *“Many of us entered into the military as teenagers and now as forty-somethings are facing a world that we know very little about and have seldom participated in or experienced. [The program] served as a light at the end of the tunnel. It helped to show the potential opportunities that are out there if you are willing to open up to them and utilize the same determination and dedication that each of the veterans there have put into their military careers.”*

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Hundreds of local businesses and individuals stepped up to the plate monetarily and/or by volunteering time to participate in the Whitefish retreats for injured veterans.

When asked to participate in the veterans retreat, Michelle Reisch of Alpine Village Market said, *“It’s not a question of if. It’s a matter of when and how I can contribute. We all know someone who has served our country and it is an honor to give back.”*

This general theme of generosity was embraced by many establishments in the Valley including Whitefish Mountain Resort, restaurants, retailers and more. These events have become a community effort.

WHO IS WHITEFISH VETERANS SUPPORT TEAM?

The Whitefish Veterans Support Team is a donor-based, charitable 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing support and new beginnings for veterans and their spouse/caregivers. We are a small group of Whitefish citizens who are committed to improving the lives of veterans with reentry into civilian life.

THE PROGRAM GOAL:

- Engage veterans and caregivers in physically challenging summer and winter retreats in Flathead Valley
- Provide veterans and caregivers with much needed down time and access to fun and appropriate community events
- Build meaningful relationships that advance the healing process and encourage veterans to overcome challenges of readjustment to civilian life
- Raise community support to foster awareness and action to aid veterans in their recovery

WVST RAISES \$85,000 TO SUPPORT VETERANS

IN JULY 2016, Flathead Valley rallied behind our troops by raising over \$85,000 to fund retreats for injured veterans in Whitefish. A generous donor and supporter made a pledge of \$25,000 for a matching campaign. Other donors matched and exceeded the pledged amount. "The response was overwhelmingly positive," said Dave Williams. "With rural and small towns making up a disproportionate share of our US military, Montana residents have a strong sense of patriotism and it showed during this fundraiser."

2015 COMMUNITY GRANTS AWARDED TO WVST



The Whitefish Veterans Support Team was awarded \$7000 at the 2015 Whitefish Community Foundation Grant Program in November. WVST received the Russ and Mary Jane Street Community Service Award in honor of their son, Douglas Street, who served honorably and died for our country in Vietnam. The Community Foundation awarded a grant to support the WVST winter retreats and donations from two Donor Advised Funds were also received.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

We extend a *SPECIAL thank you* to all community businesses and individuals that supported the 2016 Winter Retreat.

Chef Johnny Alamilla • Matt Baldwin • Big Mountain Club • Brian Carper • Walt Chauner Pat Clanton • Bill Cabbage • John Dunnigan • Jason Forest • Brant Giovannetti • Dan Graves Robb Greer • Bob Heim • Marilyn and Dick Hensley • Iron Horse • J & L Snowmobile Rentals Rory Kiser • Rhonda Knudsvig • Scotty McCintosh • McGarry's Roadhouse • McGough & Co Erik Moore • Sandy & Steve Nogel • Meghann Porter • Sherry & Rand Spencer The Bierstube • The Daily Interlake • The Whitefish Pilot • VFW & Aux. Post 276 • Whitefish Mountain Resort Ski/Ride Instructors • WVST Directors & Advisory Board • Michael Zuckerman

PLEASE HELP SUPPORT OUR VETERANS

WVST hosts summer and winter retreats for injured veterans. The net cost after in-kind gifts is \$20,000 per retreat including airfare, lodging and support sessions for 6 veterans their spouse/caregiver/children.

IT'S EASY TO MAKE A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION

- ★ Retreat Sponsorship\$5,000
- ★ Sponsor a Veteran Couple...\$3,300
- ★ Sponsor a Veteran.....\$1,650-\$3,299
- ★ Brigade Donor\$1,000-\$1,649
- ★ Battalion Donor\$500-\$999
- ★ Company Donor\$250-\$499
- ★ Platoon Donor\$100-\$249
- ★ Squad Donor.....Up to \$100

Credit Card Billing:



Credit card #: _____

Exp. date: _____ Code: _____

PayPal PayPal online donation

AMT DONATED \$ _____

Mail your tax-deductible donation to:

Whitefish Veterans Support Team
200 Parkhill Drive
Whitefish, MT 59937
TAX ID: 47-2873695

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____



**WHITEFISH
VETERANS
SUPPORT TEAM**

WVST BOARD MEMBERS:

Steve Shea, President
Kim Richards, Vice President
Dave Williams, Secretary/Treasurer

WVST ADVISORY BOARD:

Peggy Brammer
Lisa Fewer
Paul Ianniello
Betty Sue Kearney
Frank Kearney
Larry LaRocque
Nancy LaRocque
Bret Luedke
Don MacKenzie
Lee Pinski
Joe Rhemann
Maureen Rhemann
Janice Richards
Christine Shea
David Trousdale
Jeannine Trousdale
Dayna Vinje
Chris Washer
Leslee Washer
Judy Williams

PARTNERS/COMMIT FOUNDATION:

Anne Meree Craig
Les Craig

The Whitefish Veterans Support Team is a charitable 501(c)(3) organization that is solely funded by private donations. We are a small group of Whitefish residents that are dedicated to empowering the lives of injured veterans and creating community awareness to assist in this meaningful effort.

**TO LEARN MORE GO TO:
WHITEFISHVETERANSSUPPORTTEAM.COM**