



# 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, ACTIVE DUTY PERSONNEL, SPOUSES, CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN.”**

## MENTORING VETERAN COUPLES



Becca and Doug Legan

Doug and Rebecca (Becca) Legan participated in the 2017 Whitefish Veterans Support Team (WVST) event and were selected as the 2019 Winter Retreat alumni couple to help mentor and share their military transition experience with five other veteran couples.

All participants in the Winter Retreat are dealing with issues related to transition to

civilian life as they near the end of their military careers. Although each couple had their own sponsor (buddies) to tend to their daily activities, Doug and Becca helped create an added level of support due to their shared military background and previous experience with military transition.

Doug is a 1997 West Point graduate and former Army Special Operations officer who served twenty years and retired for family reasons. He deployed nine summers in a row, missing precious time with Becca and their three kids.

**“IT WAS EYE OPENING TO SEE A WHOLE DIFFERENT SIDE OF LIFE AND REALIZE THAT I COULD STILL LEARN SOMETHING NEW AND LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST.”**

Prior to his transition, he completed an M.B.A. at the University of North Carolina, knowing that business was something he wanted to pursue after the military. Becca had more trouble than Doug with the transition. She was frustrated leaving a job she enjoyed and didn't know what she was going to do next while Doug appeared focused and confident.

Becca's background includes a teaching degree from Charleston Southern University and a Master's in School Counseling from the Citadel.

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## THE TRANSITIONING VETERAN'S DILEMMA

by John Henry Parker, Co-Author *Transitioning Veterans, How We Get In Our Own Way... And What To Do About It!*  
[transitioningveteransbook.com](http://transitioningveteransbook.com)

Since before Homer wrote the epic works of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* more than 2,600 years ago; warriors have been going to war and families have awaited their eventual return. Since the beginning of war itself, the transition home for warriors has been challenging for most and catastrophic for far too many.

**IF YOU ARE GOING DUCK HUNTING, WHEN DO YOU LOAD YOUR GUNS? WHEN YOU SEE THE DUCKS? PROBABLY NOT.**

It is astonishing that for as long as our country has been fighting wars and managing conflicts around the world, one would think we would have mastered how to better prepare warriors and their families for the trials of transition after separating from service.

Consider this; while serving, military personnel have a clear identity of who they are, they have an assigned daily mission that focuses their attention, and being part of something bigger than themselves, serving with others and protecting our country provides significant meaning

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## MENTORING CONTINUED...

She was no stranger to military life when she met Doug. Her father flew Navy fighters for 31 years and spent much of that time deployed, or living abroad on unaccompanied tours away from the family. She did not envision marrying a military man, because she did not think she was prepared to deal with the same long absences with a spouse. Obviously, Doug was the special man that changed her mind.

The WVST retreat helped them relax, sit back and reflect on things. “Just being here is good,” Doug said. “It was eye opening to see a whole different side of life and realize that I could still learn something new and live life to the fullest. It’s ok to focus on yourself sometimes. In Special Operations we give, give, give. In the military, I had no hobbies, no friends, and could only focus on work.” Becca reflected that “after participating in the retreat, it was the first time I had seen him happy in years.”

It is no exaggeration that a retreat such as this one – combining outdoor activity in a beautiful locale, fraternal discussions with peers, and

value-added information - greatly enhanced their ability to take a positive and focused look at their future. “Listening to other couples helps you feel normal,” Becca said.

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**“LISTENING TO OTHER COUPLES HELPS YOU FEEL NORMAL.”**

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The couple credits the WVST retreat as a spark that laid the foundation for important future conversations and admitted that they went through challenging times as they embarked on the next chapter of their lives. The retreat helped identify issues that needed to be resolved, things they wanted for their family, and helped Becca eventually validate her own self worth as a stay-at-home mom and substitute teacher highly involved in their kids’ lives. She realized that both she and Doug had important family roles. “Coming to the retreat helped us think through some of these things,” Becca finalized and added that she and Doug were happy to share lessons learned with retreat participants hoping that it would help ease their own future military transitions. ■

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## THE TRANSITIONING VETERAN’S DILEMMA CONTINUED...

and purpose. Upon separation, all four of these key areas of life that were so well defined, no longer exist. Consequently, Veterans who become disoriented from this identity crisis, with no clear direction, often find themselves in a desperate struggle to understand who they are and who they are becoming. All too often, this leads to self-medicating with alcohol, drugs, sex, adrenaline seeking and workaholicism that can make life even more difficult.

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**ON THE PATH OF TRANSITION AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION,  
PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION, IS THE MANTRA.**

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Transition Assistance Programs (TAPS) offered by each branch of the military are getting better but are not effectively addressing and preparing servicemembers and their families for the identity crisis they are about to experience. This is an area of opportunity we can help the DOD and the VA improve.

The WVST is stepping up to address this dilemma by gathering transition resources to create a consistent and effective pre-separation preparedness program for individuals and couples to help them re-define identity – mission – meaning – purpose. When Veterans and families go through this self-discovery process, they begin to move toward transition with more certainty and clarity. On the path of transition and personal transformation, progress, not perfection, is the mantra. ■

## GOLD STAR SUMMER RETREAT

JULY 25-30 | SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- DAY 1** Welcome Dinner  
Counseling Session I  
Campfire/Free Time
- DAY 2** Morning Yoga/Intentions  
Red Bus Tour in Glacier Park  
Counseling Session II  
Campfire/Free Time
- DAY 3** Morning Yoga/Intentions  
Rafting the Middle Fork  
Counseling Session III  
Campfire/Free Time
- DAY 4** Morning Yoga/Intentions  
Counseling Session IV  
Paddle Board Bowman Lake  
Dinner Northern Lights Saloon  
Counseling Session V
- DAY 5** Morning Yoga/Intentions  
Counseling Session VI  
Lake Activities/Williams’ Dinner  
Counseling Session VII
- DAY 6** Morning Yoga/Intentions  
Breakfast and Depart

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## WINTER RETREAT

JANUARY 13-18 | SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- DAY 1** Meet/Greet Dinner at Kearney’s  
Intros/Expectations/Goals
- DAY 2** Group Breakfast/Lunch  
AM/PM Ski Sessions  
Counseling Session I  
Dinner at Kandahar
- DAY 3** Group Breakfast/Lunch  
Counseling Session II  
Afternoon Ski Session  
Groomer Tours  
Dinner at Hellroaring
- DAY 4** Group Breakfast/Lunch  
Counseling Session III  
Cross Country Skiing  
Groomer Tour  
Dinner at Bierstube
- DAY 5** Group Breakfast/Lunch  
Counseling Session IV  
AM/PM Ski Sessions  
Explore Whitefish/Dinner
- DAY 6** Group Breakfast  
Group Feedback Session



# GOLD STAR SUMMER RETREAT HOSTS YOUNG ADULTS OF PARENTS LOST WHILE SERVING OUR COUNTRY

WVST and Folded Flag Foundation (FFF) invited seven Gold Star young adults and two West Point cadets (who served as counselors) to visit the Flathead Valley for five days in July 2018. Each day was chock full of team building activities, environmental explorations and introductions to outdoor activities.



A perfect day for water play in Bowman Lake!

A remote log cabin near Polebridge, Montana provided the land to erect two tents, a communal outdoor cooking and eating area and a big firepit for evening chats, singing and attendee bonding. The rustic outdoor

facilities provided “first-time” experiences for some guests. Every morning the participants worked together to prepare breakfast in the outdoor kitchen—another “first-time” activity for many. Spending nights inside a tent in sleeping bags offered an added “first-time” experience for some.

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**“THE ACCOMMODATIONS WERE SUPER COZY IN WARM SLEEPING BAGS. IT WAS SO NICE TO CAMP, HAVE A FIRE WITH COFFEE—I LOVE IT!”**

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Daily activities included a Red Bus Tour of Glacier Park, hiking to Avalanche Lake, river rafting on the Middle Fork, paddle boarding and kayaking on Bowman Lake and swimming, boating and water skiing on Whitefish Lake.

Vertikal Counseling Service (Whitefish, Montana) provided on-site leadership for all activities including twice daily group and individual counseling sessions focused on issues important to these Gold Star attendees. Participants reports on the counseling portions of this experience are superb: “It was



First time excitement visiting Glacier National Park!

awesome to be heard!” “Every staff member allowed everyone to be themselves without fear of judgement.”

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**“THIS PROGRAM GETS FIVE STARS! YOU GUYS AND THIS PROGRAM ARE LIFE CHANGERS!”**

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The campers spent their final night at Grouse Mountain Lodge, boarding planes the next morning and flying back to their lives in far-away states. All attendees raved about this exposure to new adventures and new friends, plus their newly acquired coping skills. “Thank you so much for this (experience). Y’all have changed my life!” ■

# TRANSITIONING VETERANS PARTICIPATE IN WINTER RETREAT



Six Veterans and their spouses participated in five days of winter sports activities and group counseling sessions addressing transition from military to civilian life. Group photo includes many of the volunteers.

The Whitefish Veterans Support Team hosted its winter retreat from January 13-18, 2019 when six Veterans and their spouses participated in five days of invigorating winter activities and daily group counseling sessions addressing issues related to transitioning from military to civilian life. Right from the start of the Winter Retreat, it was clear that it was going to be a great week. The Veterans were treated to two of Whitefish’s best inversion ski days with beautiful blue skies and sunshine on the mountain and a layer of fog below.

Additionally, Veterans were blessed with a day of snowfall where they could test their new skills after receiving their first two days of private ski/snowboarding lessons from the Whitefish Mountain Resort Ski School. One of the retreat days was spent cross-country skiing at the Whitefish Golf Course.

TRANSITIONING VETERANS PARTICIPATE IN WINTER RETREAT CONTINUED...



Veterans participated in five days of winter sports activities where they enjoyed the best of both worlds – inversions and snowfall.

This atmosphere was a positive sign that set the stage for new possibilities and ideas as these inspiring Veterans and their spouses met to discuss the challenges of transitioning

out of the military during group and private counseling sessions.

The Vets had several opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about personal obstacles and real life challenges with most participants having served our country in combat for up to 30 years and are now transitioning into a civilian life. ■



**VVST RAISED \$35,361.70 THROUGH GREAT FISH CHALLENGE**



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**PARTNERS:**

- John Henry Parker, co-author — [transitioningveteransbook.com](http://transitioningveteransbook.com)
- Vertikal Counseling Service

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

Empower injured veterans, active duty personnel, caregivers and their families by providing opportunities to build meaningful relationships and engage them in physically and emotionally challenging activities to advance their healing, growth and resiliency.

*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:**  
**[VVSTMT.ORG](http://VVSTMT.ORG)**

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE**

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• The veterans couples, who benefited greatly from this program, wish to extend their thanks to all the donors, listed or not, for the generosity extended to them during the retreat.

**PLEASE HELP SUPPORT OUR VETERANS**

**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
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