



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.”**

The Covid-19 global pandemic introduced some new challenges into Whitefish Veteran's Support Team (WVST) operations. The Board met to address how they could creatively meet the needs of veterans while ensuring a safe environment. WVST identified multiple opportunities within the local veteran community where the Team could make a meaningful impact thanks to generous donations from people such as yourself. Highlights of the year include:

The WVST Board reached out to the **MONTANA VETERANS HOME** in Columbia Falls, MT to offer assistance in easing the negative effects of isolation due to the pandemic lockdown. Working with their staff, we identified technology and equipment upgrades to enhance the quality of life for elderly veterans. The WVST purchased \$5600 of iPads, television monitors, speakers and wireless headphones that enabled the residents to meet virtually with families and friends. We also purchased three large canopy awnings to provide shelter for residents to enjoy their courtyard area, the only outdoor space accessible during the lockdown. One additional canopy awning was placed outside a meeting room window allowing family members to visit safely. The positive feedback from both the residents and staff has been overwhelming, with the facility social director stating the impact on the residents' emotional well-being has been "AMAZING." To learn more about the Veterans Home go to: <https://dphhs.mt.gov/SLTC/HomeLivingOptions/montanaveteranshomes/cfmvh>

WVST made a donation in the amount of \$10,000 to the **NORTHWEST MONTANA VETERAN'S FOOD PANTRY** in Kalispell to support their activities. They are more than just a food pantry. They also have laundry, a shower facility, clothing items, household goods, medical supplies, medical equipment and much more. To find out additional information, visit their website at <https://veteransfoodpantry.org>

Board members met with **UNDERWATER SOLDIERS**, a Kalispell-based organization that provides a supportive social network and SCUBA diving opportunities/training for veterans. Founding members of the group described the relief provided to participants from physical pain and mental anxiety achieved in the underwater environment while providing a break from isolation through the camaraderie during pool sessions. WVST made a donation of approximately \$5,000 for the purchase of scuba equipment and pool time rental for the group. Visit the Underwater Soldiers Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/underwatersoldiers406/>

FIVE LOCAL COUPLES AND ONE MENTORSHIP COUPLE selected by the Kalispell Veterans Center were hosted at this year's WVST Winter ski retreat at Whitefish Mountain Resort. Couples were provided lodging, ski passes, equipment, meals and counseling sessions. These were the first couples counseling sessions the participants had attended and all planned to continue with counseling after the retreat. The Veterans Center considered this a very positive outcome. A thank you note from one couple indicated "what an incredible blessing

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UPCOMING EVENTS

GOLD STAR YOUNG ADULT RETREAT, JULY 2021

Eight young adults (ages 18-21) who have had a parent killed in combat will experience the beauty of NW Montana. The retreat has been developed so participants will find a place within the small group setting to relax and enjoy activities like white water rafting, backpacking, boating and participate in daily group sessions to explore identity, values and incorporate this experience in the context of life lessons and help them along the path of becoming the person they want to be.

GOLD STAR SPOUSE RETREAT, AUGUST 2021

Ten surviving spouses of husbands killed in battle will attend a six day retreat in cabins outside Glacier National Park. Participants will enjoy fun activities of hiking, river rafting, Red Bus tours, campfires, coupled with opportunities for group and individual counseling sessions.

SUMMER COUPLES RETREAT, SEPT 2021

Six couples will enjoy summer activities including fly fishing, water sports, hiking, and activities on Whitefish Mountain Resort. Counseling is available to discuss transitioning out of the military and into civilian life and understanding new identities in a non-military environment.

WINTER COUPLES RETREAT, JANUARY 2022

Six couples will enjoy mountain-side accommodations, skiing/boarding, private instructions, groomer tours and participate in group and individual counseling to address issues relevant to military life and transition into civilian life.

KALISPELL VET CENTER - (ONGOING)

We will continue to arrange for and sponsor opportunities for local veterans and their families to enjoy summer and winter activities and provide a welcoming setting for individual, family and group counseling. Activities to include fly fishing, lake fishing, weekly golf outings, zip lining, white water rafting and snow skiing.

TO LEARN MORE GO TO: **WVSTMT.ORG**

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the retreat was” to them.

WVST hosted **OPERATION SKI TURNER** — a full day of skiing powder at Turner Mountain in February. We wanted to find a fun activity to keep veterans from being isolated while practicing social distancing and avoiding the crowds during the pandemic. Turner Mountain is one of Montana’s skiing gems located just outside of Libby and was the perfect choice for a private rental. On Thursday, February 18th WVST rented the entire mountain and offered it to any veteran that wanted to get out and ski. We also extended that invitation to their families and caregivers. Approximately 80 veterans and family members participated with a handful of WVST volunteers and enjoyed free tickets, ski equipment, and lunch. Word spread from the VFW in Libby. What a wonderful day with endless powder turns. Even some old timers showed up to express their thanks to WVST. “This was a big deal for the vets in Libby — thank you!”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUN for local veterans were funded by WVST in partnership with the Kalispell Veterans Center: Weekly golf outings and lunch for 8-12 veterans each week at Buffalo Hills Golf Course in

Kalispell; Flathead Lake fishing — 1/2 day fishing for 4 veterans; Whitewater rafting; and Lakestream fly fishing — four boats, two vets each boat for full day guided fishing on the Flathead River.

WVST is a dedicated team that remains committed to improving the lives of veterans by providing fun and challenging outdoor activities in beautiful northwest Montana while providing opportunities to examine personal circumstances through counseling and supportive interactions with other veterans and their spouses. Feedback from participants continues to be positive and for some – life changing. None of this would be possible without the generosity of our donors. Thank you for your continued partnership with WVST and for supporting the men and women of the Armed Forces and their families who have sacrificed much and are grateful for the opportunities that we provide.



WVST RAISED \$52,281 FROM DONORS
AND THE WHITEFISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
MATCHING GRANT.

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.



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Kalispell Vet Center
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: WVSTMT.ORG