

After Action

SPRING 2014

REPORT



FLYING HIGH:

FOUR WARRIORS SHARE THEIR CHALLENGES AND VICTORIES IN FINDING A CAREER AFTER SERVICE.

PLUS:

SURF'S UP:

FELIX SANTIAGO STARTED A NEW CHAPTER IN HIS LIFE WHEN HE ZIPPED UP A WETSUIT FOR THE FIRST TIME.

WARRIORS TO WORK:

TIPS TO BOOST YOUR JOB SEARCH TODAY.

A DECADE OF SERVICE.

10
YEARS



A LIFETIME OF COMMITMENT.

WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG

WARRIORS TO WORK™

WHERE TO START IN YOUR JOB SEARCH.

I JOINED THE SERVICE RIGHT OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AND HAVE NO CIVILIAN WORK EXPERIENCE. WHERE DO I START?

View this as an opportunity to start fresh, not a liability. What are your interests and hobbies? What would be your dream job? Our Warriors to Work specialists can help draft a plan to reach a position within your desired career field. They can also provide a realistic picture of the education necessary for the job and the best place within the country to get started within your field. Keep in mind the process often starts with a company or field in an entry position, not a title, until you can build up your résumé.

I WAS INFANTRY IN THE SERVICE. WHAT KIND OF JOB COULD I POSSIBLY GET IN THE CIVILIAN WORLD?

Your military occupational specialty might not have a direct civilian counterpart, but the qualities you've developed in the infantry are invaluable. Even the most junior ranks display excellent flexibility, contingency planning skills, and the ability to focus on organizational priorities, goals, and tasks. Veterans are also prized for the work ethic and focus on teamwork they learned in the military. Some of the career fields you should consider include operations, transportation, logistics, emergency services, and manufacturing. Also, bear in mind that ranks of E5 and higher could qualify you for management and director roles in multiple industries.

MY RÉSUMÉ IS A WRECK. CAN YOU HELP ME WITH THAT?

Absolutely. Many of our Warriors to Work specialists have backgrounds in human resources and know how to summarize your experience in a format that will catch the eye of employers. We also have a network of professionals who have volunteered their time to review résumés and make suggestions so the résumés will stand out on a recruiter's desk.

HOW DO I MAKE MYSELF STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD?

Marketing yourself through your own personal brand is a great place to start.

Your brand begins with an honest self assessment. Ask yourself, "What do I want people to think about me?" Determine several core values (integrity, loyalty, commitment) that define who you are and promote those through your cover letter and résumé. Your brand should also reflect your capabilities and achievements in the service. Don't just tell what you did in the service, but show the value. So, for instance, if you were a mechanic write: "Repaired more than 100 small and large diesel engines in a four-week period, increasing business productivity by 25 percent."

I'M INTERESTED IN GOING BACK TO SCHOOL. CAN YOU HELP ME WITH MY EDUCATION BENEFITS?

Wounded Warrior Project has a team of benefits specialists across the country who can help you with that. To get in touch with a Warriors to Work, Education Services, or Benefits teammate, contact the Resource Center at 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.



MOVING FORWARD



FOUR STORIES OF OVERCOMING ADVERSITY
AND REGAINING PURPOSE AFTER INJURY.

TAD STUART | NICKY NORWOOD | DAVID SERANA | BJ GANEM

EQUIVALENT

Tad Stuart fulfilled a lifelong dream when he flew helicopters for the Army, but a crash in Baghdad seemingly put an end to that career.



Tad Stuart always dropped what he was doing to answer the phone in 2010. This one, he was certain, would be the call that would change everything.

But the calls always ended in rejection: “You don’t have enough current flying time; The medications you’re taking aren’t FAA approved for helicopter pilots; We need more documentation that you’re completely healed.”

Doubt darkened Tad’s mind after every call ended. It wasn’t supposed to be like this.

“I was in the Army for 13 years,” says Tad. “That’s where I wanted to stay for life. It was a great career, but the crash changed all that.”

The crash happened in Iraq in December 2007 as Tad piloted his OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter over Baghdad International Airport. Mechanical failure forced Tad to make a hard landing that destroyed the aircraft.

“I never lost consciousness, but I couldn’t move. At that point, I knew my back was messed up, but I didn’t know to what extent,” Tad says.

The final prognosis: complete spinal canal obliteration. Over 12 hours of surgery, doctors repaired Tad’s spine with titanium rods, but they couldn’t make any guarantees about his future. Tad rejected any notion he would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. But he was certain his flying days were finished.

After medical retirement, Tad found a job as airfield manager at Michael Army Airfield at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah. Yes, it was aviation related, but Tad felt like an injured quarterback standing on the sidelines. What he really wanted was to be flying again.

When Tad got involved with Wounded Warrior Project (WWP), he met a lot of injured pilots who returned to flying after beating impossible odds. They encouraged Tad to do the same. That’s why he did what every winner must do. He quit.

“I quit feeling sorry for myself. I quit accepting that I’d never fly again. And, after talking it over with my wife, Jacqueline, I quit the cushy job that was holding me back,” Tad says.

There were many steps to reach that goal. Tad knew he needed to get himself off the medications keeping him from being medically cleared to fly. He needed new tests performed to document his spine was fully healed. He needed letters on his behalf from doctors and specialists. And he needed to get more current flying time.

“Step by step I checked those items off my list, and I kept sending out résumés,” Tad says.

After months of rejections, Tad finally got an offer. It was from Helicopters, Inc., a company specializing in leasing helicopters for news crews nationwide, and they weren’t offering a polite rejection. They were impressed with Tad’s résumé but wanted to make sure his skills in the air actually matched what was on paper.

“They brought me out for an interview and for a test flight,” says Tad. “Everything went great, and I got the job.”

The job was with NewsChannel 5, Nashville’s number-one rated news station. His first week was an adventure.

“We had everything happen in the city: fires, police chases, S.W.A.T. team standoffs, multicar auto accidents, you name it,” Tad says. “I’m up there in the sky with the reporter and cameraman, and we’re all watching it unfold live.”

More thrilling than the excitement of the chase was sitting in the cockpit, fulfilling his childhood dream.

“I’m a pilot. This is who I am. This is who I wanted to be when I grew up,” Tad says. “So my advice for my fellow warriors is simple: Figure out what you need to do to achieve your goal and then make it happen. There are success stories everywhere you look. Just know you’re going to be one of them.”

EXAMINATION

Nicky Norwood slid into depression when back pain kept him from holding a job for long, but an attitude adjustment keeps him moving forward.



Nicky Norwood stood in front of the mirror, taking his first self-assessment in a long time.

It wasn’t pretty. He was overweight, unemployed, and doing nothing with his life.

“I looked in the mirror and decided that if nothing changes, nothing changes. I just got tired of living the way I was,” he says.

It took hard work and several setbacks to get his life rolling again, but Nicky credits an email from Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) with prodding him into action. The email contained an invitation to a family bowling night at some lanes near his home in Brandon, Mississippi. It wasn’t a big event, but the warriors Nicky and his wife met that night changed everything.

“I see these guys that are having all these issues, but they’re still living their lives,” Nicky says. “They’re up and bee-bopping around and that’s encouraging.”

Nicky went home from that event and took stock of where he was and how he had gotten in this state. It started when he was just 17, with a pregnant girlfriend, a GED, and not much else in the way of prospects. The Army presented his best option.

A few years later he found himself on the front lines of the Gulf War, a forward observer in a scout platoon, fighting the enemy face to face. He turned 20 during that deployment.

“It was close contact. We were within a few feet of the Republican Guard troops we were fighting. It was rough stuff,” he says.

He separated from the service after eight years, but re-enlisted after 9/11 so he could get back in the fight. In 2004, he deployed with the Mississippi National Guard. During that deployment he was injured when a civilian vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed slammed into the Humvee he was driving. Even though the Humvee was barely dinged, Nicky immediately felt searing pain in his lower back. He had ruptured two disks.

“I was twisted at an awkward angle when I got hit,” he recalls, “and that’s what did a number on me.”

So began a long string of doctor’s appointments for

Nicky. A diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, primarily from his experiences in the first Gulf War, came next. Finally, in 2009 Nicky was given a chance to separate again. All he had to do was agree to take a 10 percent disability.

“When they dangled the 10 percent in front of me I just snatched it and ran. Big mistake,” Nicky says.

Limited by his back and armed with only a GED, Nicky got a job selling cars, but he couldn’t stay on his feet for long. He moved on to another job operating a forklift, but that only lasted two weeks because the job required heavy lifting. Other jobs followed, including working on a decontamination barge after the oil spill on Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, manning a call center, a food service worker, and transporting veterans for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Each time his back pain either limited his ability to do the job or he took too many sick days to recover from the work week.

Nicky decided to use his education benefits and improve his employment prospects. But what he saw from the other students troubled him. He saw them talking in class, whispering behind the teacher’s back. The lack of respect shown by the students, combined with the PTSD and the physical pain, led Nicky to eventually withdraw from school. With few job prospects and constant pain, Nicky was feeling desperate.

“It was overwhelming,” Nicky says. “You get to a point where you wonder whether it will ever get better.”

It was around this time Nicky received the bowling invitation. Nicky had previously attended a WWP Project Odyssey®, which gave him his first exposure to the camaraderie with other veterans offered by the nonprofit. Something had to improve, so Nicky went to this local event, and the life change stuck this time.

Today, Nicky continues to search for work and relief from his pain. But he’s got a new attitude, fitness plan, and an opportunity as a WWP Peer Mentor to keep him busy.

“I’m never going to be whole again, and there are rough days, but I’ve got my eyes looking forward and that’s what matters most,” Nicky says.

EXCELLENCE

Remaining in the medical field sometimes brings back tough memories for retired combat medic David Serana, but it's a skill set he's used to excel in his civilian career.



David Serana doesn't identify himself to the public as a combat veteran.

If you talk to his co-workers at North Shore University Hospital, they'll tell you he's a hardworking member of the elite medical surgical team. In fact, he was honored as 2012 Nurse of the Year at the New York hospital. Few, though, know his ability to problem solve under pressure was developed first in Army training and later on the battlefields of Iraq as a combat medic.

"I wouldn't have wanted my fellow nurses to treat me differently," he says. "They just know me to be a veteran."

David hesitates to disclose details of his service for several reasons. Part of it is that for years David himself would not acknowledge the traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) he brought home from Iraq. After his discharge in 2008, David refused professional help, shut out his wife, and retreated from life in general. No matter how hard he tried, though, David couldn't escape the violent images and memories from Iraq.

Says David: "I felt abandoned and alone in my own world."

Another reason was the reaction of people when he finally mentioned he served downrange. He was shocked when they demanded gory war stories and asked insensitive questions like "Did you kill anybody?" The intrusive questions brought back a flood of memories for David, whose duties included preparing bodies for transport back stateside. It hit home hardest when David escorted the casket of a close friend from Long Island.

"It was truly traumatic to answer that," David says.

The turning point for David was when two of his best Army buddies committed suicide after returning home. He didn't want to inflict that pain on his family, so he sought professional help from a neurologist and psychotherapist at his local Veterans Affairs hospital.

They helped him manage mood swings ranging from

rage to depression and suicidal ideations. It wasn't a quick fix. People would be talking right to his face, but David wasn't there. He says his mind, in a defensive mechanism to blunt the pain of his memories of Iraq, would simply go blank, like a computer in sleep mode.

Progress was made, though. Community activities brought him out of the house and his brother, a Catholic priest, helped David strengthen his faith. He contacted Wounded Warrior Project, which provided him a network of other injured soldiers who could relate to his difficult recovery and keep him accountable. David also found purpose through obtaining his nursing degree and getting back in the workforce. In spite of the painful associations with Iraq, providing medical care was David's passion. His compassion, calm demeanor, and experience in a variety of medical disciplines, led to his promotion to the medical surgical team at the 19th largest hospital in the United States. He describes his success with more than a hint of pride, suggesting his new team is the "Green Berets of North Shore LIJ."

In addition to the satisfaction of putting his combat medic skills back to work, David says it feels good to provide financially for his wife and two sons again. His work also keeps him focused on managing his PTSD. Treating car accident victims in the hospital is particularly difficult. The injuries these accidents inflict on civilians — broken bones, cuts, and burns — remind David of the aftermath of bombs in Iraq. What David remembers in those situations is he's been given a new lease on life to provide care for those in need.

It's hard to keep it together some days, but David knows he has to keep moving forward. Prayer gives him peace. Work gives him direction. Most importantly, he knows to talk about whatever is troubling him with trusted family and friends.

"Honesty is liberating," he says. "It's how you accomplish life after war."

EXCITEMENT

BJ Ganem had a job waiting for him when he returned home from Iraq, but it wasn't until he took a risk and changed careers that he discovered his passion.



It's hard to get passionate about paperwork when you've been in combat.

Sure, a district sales manager position pays the bills. But for BJ Ganem, a retired Marine who earned his Purple Heart by sacrificing his leg, his old job was no longer exciting or fulfilling.

"I always came home from work unhappy, unsatisfied," says BJ. "It reflected on my job performance and ultimately affected my home life."

The stale career was something BJ suspected would ultimately be waiting for him when he woke up in Walter Reed Army Medical Center. He had previously served in the Marine Corps Reserves, but volunteered for full-time duty after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Corps sent him to Iraq in 2004, where a roadside bomb took his left leg and killed another Marine. It also ended the military career BJ loved.

"The hardest part wasn't even getting injured, it was knowing I'd be taken away from my unit," BJ says. "I wasn't upset about the prosthetic. I was upset about not being able to finish the combat mission."

Twenty-two surgeries led to medical retirement and put BJ back into the civilian job he held during his time with the Reserves. As he made his way through the daily grind, BJ turned to Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) to keep him inspired. WWP sent him to Soldier Ride® and cookouts with other veterans. His watershed moment came when he signed up to become a Peer Mentor and discovered a new passion for helping other veterans in their transition to civilian life.

In 2011 he took a job as a veteran services officer with Dane County in Wisconsin. There he helped veterans understand and gain access to benefits while also helping place them in jobs or school. Looking for a more grassroots concept, he moved on to the Semper Fi Fund in 2013. Today he helps veterans write résumés and prepare for interviews. He seeks out veterans

across 28 states and helps connect them with funds to repair a home, buy a car, or move across the country for a job.

Leaving a corporate job for a nonprofit meant less money and more hours. But every veteran case he works helps BJ heal as well.

"I took a pay cut going to work for a nonprofit, but it's more therapy for me, too," he says. "I get to meet and work with guys going through the same things. We're all just trying to find our way together."

While he'll never report for drill again or defend his country in combat, BJ has found a new way to fulfill his drive to serve. Today, service is empowering a veteran to launch a business from a wheelchair. It's helping a wounded Marine sign up for benefits or go back to school to start a new career.

BJ has also found a way to help civilians through his work. After the April 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon, BJ went into the recovery rooms where runners and bystanders had limbs amputated and their bodies burned — much like what BJ saw and experienced in a war zone. BJ and other counselors gave them advice on fitting prosthetics and what to expect in recovery.

"This is the kind of stuff that happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we knew these people were going to need more support than what was available," BJ says.

Like he tells his fellow veterans to do, BJ is also thinking about upward mobility. He is working on a master's degree in social work and hopes to open his own business one day. A passion for helping veterans has become its own career path, and he's going to continue helping service members find their own callings.

"I was given a second chance," BJ says. "I want to show others there's one for them, too."

A WARRIOR'S REDEMPTION



Marty Gonzalez expected to die in Iraq.

If life was anything like Hollywood, it made sense: he was a retired Marine coming back to fill a combat-depleted pool of non-commissioned officers; his wife was pregnant with their first son; and, most damning, he had prayed to fight in Fallujah.

But Marty didn't die in Iraq, in spite of the enemy's best efforts.

Instead, Marty was sent home to Houston, Texas, with a busted arm, a broken back, a chest full of medals, and a head spinning with the traumatic memories of close-quarter combat.

It didn't make sense.

"People were calling me a hero and it was consuming me," Marty says. "I had planned to die, but I didn't have any plans for coming home. I was scared to do anything."

Marty cruised through medical retirement on autopilot, going through the motions of being a Marine and a father with a fake smile planted on his face. The only thing that pierced the haze was physical pain. Therapy for the bullet wound was helping him regain function again. But he was only receiving over-the-counter painkillers for the back injury he sustained when an explosion threw him into a wall.

Back home in the rear detachment, Marty scanned the casualty lists daily to see who under his command was wounded or killed. As squad leader, he often volunteered for the most dangerous assignments and made sure he was the first one in the door when clearing a building. Now, he had no accountability for his men and he took each new casualty personally. At the time, the only resource for

post-traumatic stress disorder Marty knew about was the chaplain's office, and no one wanted to admit they needed help. That signaled weakness. So Marty just faked it.

"My mind wasn't there. If you had looked at me from the outside, you would have thought I was all right. But nothing was in my control," Marty says.

Marty hit bottom in April 2008 when he got behind the wheel of his car after taking multiple painkillers. His son in the backseat was just two years old.

At some point on the drive home, Marty blacked out, struck a parked car, then smashed his vehicle straight into the living room of an empty house. Marty woke up surrounded by the wreckage and his son screaming, "Daddy, daddy, daddy."

"Obviously it was a bad, bad situation," Marty says.

No one was injured in the wreck, but Marty was arrested that night on a charge of felony driving while intoxicated with a child passenger. It was the wake-up call he desperately needed, but the cost was high. Such a serious charge carried up to 10 years in prison.

"I realized how stupid I had been. I couldn't believe I had given up on myself," he says.

Marty realized such a serious charge did not deserve a second chance, especially with a child involved. But a reformed Marty was eager to restore his name and prove himself worthy of a second chance.

The day finally came for Marty to stand before a judge and account for himself. Marc Carter, Harris County district judge in Houston, saw no reason to help someone who posed a threat not only to the public at large but to a child as well.

Marty had one chance to explain everything, so he handed the judge a file he had compiled detailing his service, including his three Purple Heart citations, two Bronze Stars with combat Vs for Valor, and a Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medal with a combat V.

He pleaded: "Look sir, I don't know how to explain this. I just gave up when I came home from war. I don't know how to turn my mind off. I've been staying up for nights and nights. I'm not this person, though. What can I do to prove myself to you?"

The judge, a veteran himself, was moved by Marty's sincere plea. So instead of handing down a heavy sentence, he gave Marty two years of intense probation. Some of the conditions included frequent drug tests, regular appearances in court, and complete access to his records from the local Veterans Affairs hospital to prove he was attending therapy.

"I put a lot of pressure on myself to earn my life back," Marty says. "I'm not a felon and I'm not going to let myself be that person."

Marty continues to mentor and counsel the veterans that come through the judge's docket. As Marty puts it, you never go into a firefight alone in the Marine Corps, so why start tackling heavy problems in the civilian world by yourself? Marty witnessed firsthand the improvements in his life by connecting with other veterans who understood what he went through in Iraq.

"There are different twists, but basically they are all the same story, just like mine," says Marty. "The difference is that we have each other now and veterans can connect with each other."

After his close encounter with the law, Marty volunteered to teach law enforcement and firefighters in Houston and other major cities in Texas how to approach veterans during a traffic stop and communicate with veterans in crisis.

He also serves as an advisor for a free phone service in Houston that connects veterans and their family members with much-needed resources, from job placement to mental health counseling.

"It's cool to be able to do that and know I'm helping a veteran I'll never meet," Marty says.

At home, Marty just welcomed his fourth child, a girl, Emry Pearl. The responsibilities of being a father give him a reason to face each day and keep pushing to make a difference in the world. When he looks at his oldest son he's sometimes reminded of how close he came to losing him and it's a sobering reminder of all he has to fight for.

"It's cool to be a father and know you're responsible for bringing them up," Marty says. "I try not to think about it too much, but there are men who never got a chance to meet their kids."

For all he's accomplished, Marty knows how easy it would be to slip back into his old habits. His chronic back pain is a nagging issue and obtaining effective, permanent relief and treatment has been an uphill battle. The memories of the Marines he watched killed in action haunt him at night and there are days the survivor's guilt squeezes harder than normal.

"I understand why people give up. There are so many irritating things in your life, but you've got to find the positive when you're tempted to dwell in the negative."



Marty Gonzalez and his family, from left, Alyssa, Adryan, his wife, Tawnee, and Kaylen.

ASPARAGUS WITH SHIITAKES, BOWTIE PASTA, AND SPRING PEAS

Early spring is a great time to “go green” in the kitchen. As our thoughts turn to gardening and farming, it’s time to turn over a new, green leaf.

In early spring, farmer’s markets will put out their first crops of the season – peas, asparagus, and early greens. One of the “greener” farmer’s traditions is to plant peas on St. Patrick’s Day. The sturdy peas take root in the cold ground and provide the spring kitchen with one of the sweetest green treats.

The following recipe uses three different varieties of peas – sugar snap peas, snow peas, and green peas – for a bright, spring flavor. The vegetables are cooked minimally to help retain their bright green flavor and natural sweetness.

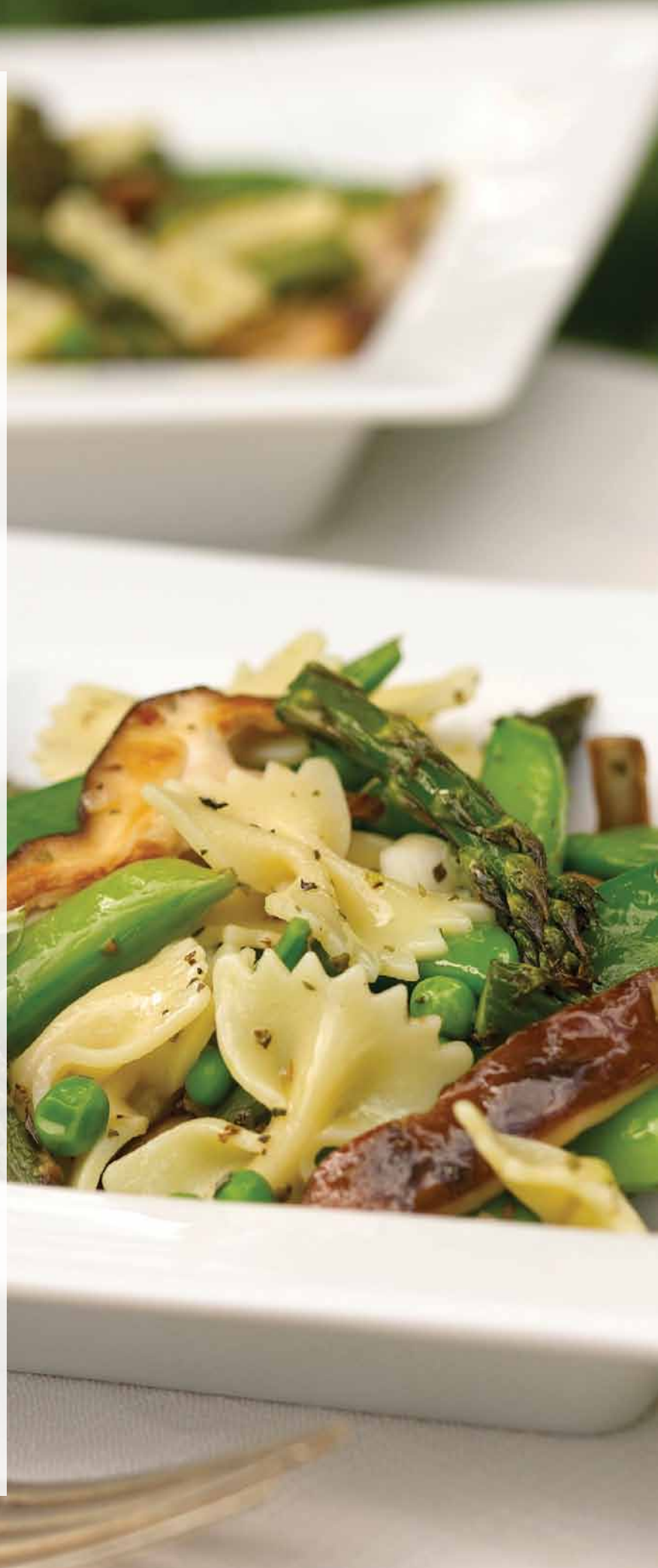
Makes 8 servings

Ingredients

- 3 pounds asparagus, peeled and trimmed
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper as needed
- 1 cup snow peas
- 1 cup sugar snap peas
- 2 cups frozen green peas
- 2 cups dried bowtie pasta
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3 cups sliced shiitake mushrooms
- 3 tablespoons minced shallots
- 3 tablespoons chopped marjoram
- 2 bunches scallions, split lengthwise, thinly sliced
- Parmesan, shaved, to taste

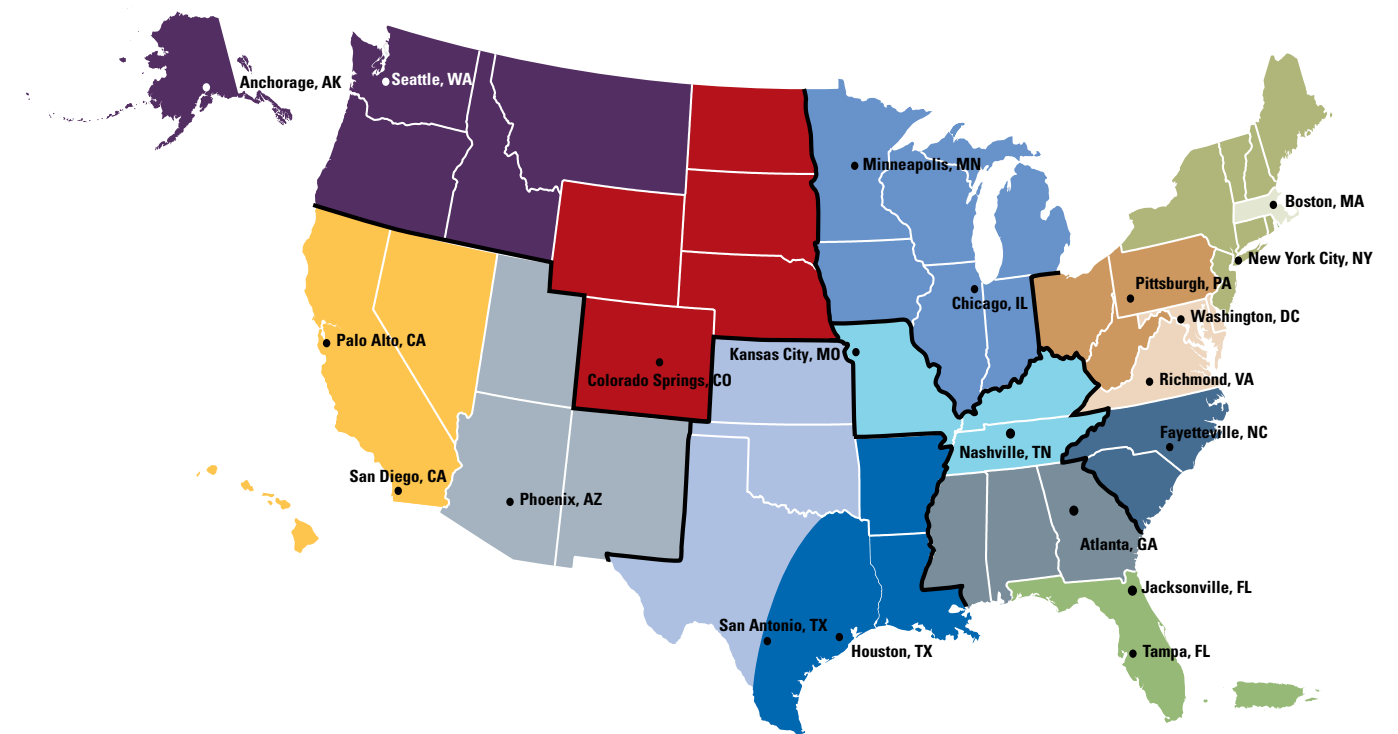
Directions

1. Bring a medium saucepan of salted water to a boil to blanch the peas and a large pot of salted water to boil to cook the pasta. Preheat the broiler.
2. Toss the asparagus with the oil and 1 teaspoon of salt. Place in a baking pan under the broiler, turning occasionally, until tender and lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Slice the asparagus on a diagonal into 1-inch pieces and reserve.
3. Cook each type of pea separately in the boiling water until almost tender, about 2 minutes each. Remove them from the water using a slotted spoon or small strainer and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking. Drain well and reserve. (The vegetables can be prepared in advance and held in covered containers in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours.)
4. Cook the pasta in boiling water until tender to the bite, about 10 to 12 minutes. Drain well, reserving some of the pasta water to adjust the consistency of the dish.
5. Heat the butter in a sauté pan until it begins to turn brown. Add the shiitakes and shallots and sauté until they are light brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the asparagus, green peas, snow peas, sugar snap peas, marjoram, 1 teaspoon salt, and a pinch of pepper. Sauté, stirring or tossing, until the vegetables are thoroughly heated, about 3 minutes. Add the hot pasta and toss the pasta with the cooked vegetables and scallions until evenly blended. Add a little of the pasta water to moisten the dish if necessary. Top with shaved Parmesan.



This and other green recipes can be found in *The Culinary Institute of America's Vegetables Cookbook*. For more information on the CIA, visit ciachef.edu.

GET CONNECTED



Looking for opportunities to engage with veterans in your area? Check your inbox for the weekly issue of *The Post*, an interactive email from Wounded Warrior Project highlighting events specifically in your region. Not only does “The Post” keep you up to date on events, but it also lists

job opportunities and direct contact information for the WWP teammates in your area.

If you’re not registered as an Alumnus or receiving “The Post,” contact the Resource Center at **888.WWP.ALUM** or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.

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PARTING SHOT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Warriors KeYana Russell, left, and Latisha Chong share a laugh over a manicure while attending a combat stress recovery retreat.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Strength in Numbers