

# AFTER ACTION

report





# AFTER ACTION report

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## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



In this issue of *After Action Report*, you'll read about WWP's Family Caregiver Summit and the progress we've recently made with our advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill. Helping warriors' family caregivers gain the support, training and respite they desperately need is our top legislative priority.

As support has grown for our mission, we have not rested in the development and delivery of programs to better serve you. In 2010 we will increase our focus on outreach and support for warriors suffering from traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, the so-called invisible wounds of war. Studies estimate this population of affected warriors will dramatically increase.

In addition, we plan to continue support for warrior education and employment, and increase emphasis on innovation, especially as it relates to keeping you involved with our programs and helping you stay in touch with your fellow warriors.

Last Veterans Day we proudly launched WWP Connect, an exclusive social network for warriors and family caregivers. I encourage you to log on today to join in on the conversation with your peers and to read the latest news from the warrior world. You can read more about WWP Connect on page two.

As we begin the new year, please know the entire WWP Team remains passionately committed to honoring and empowering your brave and selfless service and sacrifice.

Sincerely,

Steve Nardizzi  
Executive Director

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**ON THE COVER**  
Veronica Smith conquers the high ropes  
course at Project Odyssey in Utah

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about *After Action Report*?  
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## WWP ALUMNI PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



July's WWP Alumni photo contest winner is **Mike Erwin**, who ran the Task Force 31 Memorial Run to benefit the Wounded Warrior Project on June 20, 2009 at Camp Brown in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Thanks for the picture of you and Sgt. Chris Peterson, who took off in a full sprint towards the camera, much to Mike's amusement!

### Enter to Win

Win free WWP gear and have your photo published by entering the monthly WWP logo photo contest!

Just submit a photo of you wearing a WWP logo. Each month, the most interesting or exciting photo will be featured on the Alumni website, in the eNewsletter, and in *After Action Report*. At the end of the year, Alumni will vote on the 12 monthly winners, and one "Best Alumni Photo of the Year" will win! Good luck!

Submit your photos to [alumni@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:alumni@woundedwarriorproject.org)



August's WWP Alumni photo contest winner is **Blake Stocker**, currently of Jacksonville, FL (as he's a TRACK student). Thanks for your picture!

# INTERACT WITH FELLOW WWP ALUMNI THROUGH WWP CONNECT

WWP is proud to announce WWP Connect, our exclusive online social network for wounded warriors, is now live! WWP Connect provides a central resource to talk with other warriors, learn about events in your area, ask questions and discuss warrior issues, and more. Structured much like other popular social networking tools, WWP Connect also lets you share photos and videos with friends, post and view status updates, and join groups of warriors with similar interests.

## Getting Connected

Sign in using the same login and password you use to access the Alumni section of the WWP website at:  
<http://alumni.woundedwarriorproject.org/>

- If you don't already have a login, click "Create An Account." Once you have created your WWP account, you will be able to register as an Alumni, which will grant you access to both the Alumni website and WWP Connect.
- If you have forgotten your WWP account password, there are links to reset your password.
- Click on the WWP Connect tab at <http://alumni.woundedwarriorproject.org/> to access WWP Connect. (Create a bookmark in your browser for easy access!)

If this is your first time visiting WWP Connect, you will be asked to create a community profile.

## Feature Highlights

- Go to MEMBERS to find other wounded warriors and WWP staff members you know! Reconnect with Alumni from previous WWP events or meet new warriors in your area!



- Go to GROUPS to join groups of warriors who share similar interests, served in the same locations, or attended WWP events with you.
- Go to EVENTS for ways you can get involved in events in your area.
- If you have questions about benefits or just want to participate in a lively discussion, go to FORUMS and post a question.
- Help everyone get to know you better by creating a PHOTO ALBUM in your profile.
- Share photos from recent WWP events by adding your photos to a GROUP PHOTO ALBUM.

New features are released regularly, and we're always taking suggestions. Go online and get connected today!

# FAMILY MEMBERS GATHER ON CAPITOL HILL FOR CAREGIVER SUMMIT

By Monique Rizer

## Meetings with Congress bring attention to caregiver legislation

This July, caregivers of severely wounded service members found solace and strength during Wounded Warrior Project's 2009 Family Caregiver Summit in Washington, D.C. Attendees included 18 spouses and parents of wounded warriors from more than ten states across the country.

The three-day event took place just as Senate Bill 801, the Caregivers and Veterans Health Services Act of 2009, and H.R. 2342, the Wounded Warrior Project Family Caregiver Act of 2009, moved forward in Congress. If implemented, these bills could provide unprecedented support for caregivers of wounded veterans from the global war on terror. The Summit gave families an opportunity to highlight the challenges veterans face after a serious injury, and encourage policy makers to support the pending legislation.

"It was a great event," said Jeremy Chwat, WWP's Chief Program Officer. "Several caregivers said they felt very empowered. It was the first time they were able to speak with people who could change the system."

Changing the system was the topic of many discussions that weekend. During the summit, caregivers had more than 70 meetings with 30 legislators and congressional staffers. They urged these men and women to support the caregiver bills before the House and Senate, and by doing so, gained ten additional co-sponsors for those bills. Senator Richard Burr, who introduced S.801 with Senator Daniel Akaka, hosted a luncheon at the Senate Visitors Center on the second day of the Summit. Senator Akaka and Virginia Congressman Tom Perriello also attended that event. The president and Mrs. Obama's offices also sent staff members to hear

the families' personal stories, as well as the caregivers' requests for White House support.

The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs also hosted a lengthy meeting. For three hours, the caregivers highlighted problems that many staff members said they were previously unaware of. The issues included disparity in benefits, the caregivers' need for direct financial support so they could continue to earn social security and Medicare benefits, and the need for a personal case manager from the Federal Recovery Coordination Program. At one point, a VA representative said the way the VA examines a wounded warrior's family finances would change "immediately." The representative was displeased to learn that caregivers with financial responsibility for the veteran's monetary benefits were being treated suspiciously, with their personal finances vetted each month.

Since the summit, both Houses of Congress have passed differing versions of Caregiver Support legislation. The House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees are currently working to conference the bills into a final package for enactment into law.



Jennifer Briest shares her thoughts during the summit.



# WARRIOR SPOTLIGHT: GREG GADSON

By Renee Galloway



Greg Gadson with fellow warrior Dan Nevins and WWP's Woody Groton.

Lt. Colonel Greg Gadson began his career at the United States Military Academy at West Point as a talented linebacker on the football team. He was commissioned as a field artillery 2nd Lieutenant in 1989. Since that commission, Greg has served in every major conflict of the past two decades, including Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Operation Joint Forge, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. His awards include the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal.

On May 7, 2007, Greg was the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery in Iraq. While returning from a memorial service for two soldiers from his brigade, he was severely wounded by an IED (improvised explosive device), losing both his legs above the knee and severely injuring his right arm.

While Greg was still in the hospital, his old West Point friend and teammate Mike Sullivan went to visit him. Sullivan, who is now the New York Giants' wide receiver coach, brought a number 98 signed jersey—Greg's old number. After that visit, Greg became a regular on the field with the Giants and gave many inspirational pep talks to the team during the playoffs. The Giants attribute their Super Bowl win to Greg's messages of motivation and leadership, and they made him their honorary co-captain and presented him with a Super Bowl ring.

More than two years after the day he was injured, I drove to Tampa to speak with Greg, who had been invited as the guest speaker at the 234th U.S. Army Ball that evening. I learned through research

*"I have been an athlete all my life, and without warning, my life was turned upside down."*



Greg Gadson

that Greg was the first person to receive bilateral battery-operated prosthetic legs. Greg helped design his legs, and even traveled to Iceland where his bionic legs, complete with Bluetooth technology, were being created. It would take months of combined rehabilitation, determination, and strength for Greg to walk with his new legs.

Greg told me that after the dust finally settled, he had the chance to sit and think about what had happened and how it had changed his life. "There are no shortcuts emotionally when dealing with something so traumatic. You have to come to grips with it," Greg said. "My first step was to forgive. I have no hatred toward the person who placed the IED on the road and took my legs away, and I do not

hate the Iraqi people. My faith allowed me to forgive.

"My second biggest step was accepting what had happened and taking the steps toward healing. I have been an athlete all my life, and without warning, my life was turned upside down. I live one day at a time. I live for the moment. I attribute much of my healing to my family, friends, and strong faith in God. This has been a significant life-changing event for me and my family, but we have accepted it. For the thousands of other wounded warriors who are just beginning to accept their new challenge, I would say to them that your life will be different. The sooner you accept the change, the sooner you can re-think your goals and move on."



**W**ater skiing, sailing, jet skis, and sunburns. Physical therapy took to the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Breezy Point, New York during this year's Adaptive Watersports Festival in July co-hosted by Wounded Warrior Project and Disabled Sports USA with the support of the Graybeards and the Fire Department of New York (FDNY).

Forty warriors and their family members left Walter Reed Army Medical Center and traveled to a firehouse on Staten Island to kick off the weekend. The group boarded antique fire trucks, and as they traveled to the event at Breezy Point, New Yorkers flooded to the streets to show their support. Crowds lined the roads, cheering and waving flags, and hundreds of firefighters, police officers, and rescue workers stood in formation to salute the warriors. Even when passing over bridges, fire boats in the harbor below sprayed streams of red, white, and blue, while police helicopters provided an overhead escort.

Once the procession arrived, the warriors and their guests began a whirlwind of activity. During the day, warriors sampled a wide range of adaptive watersport events, including fishing, kayaking, sailing, water skiing, and swimming. The dive industry even brought in a 35,000-gallon pool to teach adaptive scuba lessons. While the warriors took to the water, their families were ferried through rounds of pampering and spa treatments.

Evenings were just as busy. On Friday evening, warriors and their guests were treated to a sunset dinner cruise to the Statue of Liberty aboard the mega yacht Atlantis. On

Saturday evening, Rockaway hosted a giant block party for the warriors, where hundreds of local residents turned out to meet the warriors and show their support with great food, a parade, and a concert.

On the final morning of the warriors' stay, the community joined together for an outdoor mass at the 9/11 Memorial amongst the dunes of Breezy Point. Police officers, fire fighters, and EMS staff joined the warriors for an emotional, yet uplifting memorial that provided an excellent close to the week's activities.

The entire event was an overwhelming success, thanks to the incredible dedication of these communities. Hundreds of individuals contributed in countless ways, from families who hosted warriors in their homes, to the stars of HBO's "The Sopranos" who dropped in to show their support and meet the warriors, to local restaurant owners who provided meals, to the firefighters and police officers who volunteered their time to escort the warriors through town. A huge thank you to everyone involved! New York really knows how to welcome wounded warriors!



Sgt. First Class John Wayne Walding showed off his water skiing skills during the event.



Crowds lined the streets to welcome the warriors.

# NEW YORK WELCOMES WOUNDED WARRIORS



New York's police, fire, and rescue departments teamed up for the event.



# ALUMNI LEADERSHIP SUMMIT & REUNION '09



Many people say they'd do anything to help wounded warriors, but would anyone voluntarily give up an all-expense-paid trip to a luxury resort in Mexico? This summer, the employees of commercial real estate heavyweight CB Richard Ellis (CBRE) did just that. Every year, CBRE offers its top staff a luxury retreat conference as a performance bonus. This year, their employees chose to give others this amazing experience, and they donated the entire retreat to a number of charities, including WWP.

The generous donation quickly transformed into the 2009 Alumni Leadership Summit & Reunion. Alumni traveled to the beautiful Cabo San Lucas Hilton in Mexico for a long weekend of leadership development classes and a chance to re-connect with old friends. During the day, warriors attended workshops, and many trained to become certified peer mentors. Warriors' caregivers also became involved, with mixers and workshops to connect with other caregivers.

Despite the busy schedule, the weekend included plenty of time to enjoy some rest and

hang out with friends. Many enjoyed the oceanfront pool, and evening activities included an opening reception and a casino night (with tickets, not cash!). On the final night, everyone met up on the beach for a banquet and "American Idol"-style warrior talent show. Competition was fierce, but at the end of the evening, Mike Green won with his Hendrix-style "Star Spangled Banner" played with a home-build prosthetic. (You can see clips from the talent show, including Mike's winning performance, on WWP's YouTube channel at [youtube.com/WoundedWarriorProject](http://youtube.com/WoundedWarriorProject) (The address doesn't have a "T" on the end.)

Chris Ludeman, CBRE's President of Americas Brokerage, said, "CBRE was honored to donate these accommodations to Americans who have made so many sacrifices for our safety and security. Our contribution pales in comparison to what they have done for us."

**Thank you  
CBRE, and thanks  
to all the Alumni  
who attended!**

## Our Top 5 Highlights

- 1 Catching up with friends we haven't seen since Walter Reed or BAMC.
- 2 Talent show. Marc Giamatteo rocking out Journey, and Chris Bain's back flip off the stage. 'Nuff said.
- 3 An incredible parachute jump from keynote speaker Dana Bowman who proved you don't need both legs to hit the target.
- 4 Peer mentor training. (We'd like to tell you about it, but what happens during training stays in training...)
- 5 Closing dinner on the beach at sunset.

## Your Top Highlights

The coolest part was being back with the guys I was at Walter Reed with. It was the first time seeing most of them since I left WRAMC almost 4 years ago. -Mike G.

For me it was the feeling of belonging and normalcy. I haven't felt that in years. Thank God for the WWP. -Todd S.

I enjoyed being in Cabo with my wife and seeing her get a break / timeout from the everyday routine of taking care of me. -Heriberto V.

The talent show showed the true strength, courage, and camaraderie of the warriors. We all laughed together, and we all cried together. It was the most incredibly inspirational night of my life! -Kerri S.



# COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Grassroots events unite individuals in support of wounded warriors



In Geneva, NY, Hobart Hockey Helpers created special WWP jerseys to help raise awareness.

During America's previous military conflicts, communities have gathered to roll bandages, provide volunteer nursing care, and plant victory gardens to support our nation's military personnel. Today, American citizens are still eager to support service members and veterans. Times have changed, though, and a bunch of homegrown broccoli doesn't quite transform lives as it used to.

Many communities are turning to fundraisers for veterans' nonprofits like Wounded Warrior Project as a way to show their support for military

men and women. These events bring neighbors together behind a common cause, and together, they accomplish incredible results. At WWP, our organization is run entirely on private donations—we receive no government funding. Community supporters are a critical part of our team, and these fundraisers provide a significant percentage of the funds we need for warrior programs and services.

Events are as varied as the hosting communities. All are organized and run entirely by the hosting group under a "Proud Supporter" umbrella, complete with registration and

the WWP Proud Supporter logo. Supporters have hosted hundreds of events including benefit walks, silent auctions, golf tournaments, car shows, concerts, dinners, wine tastings, sporting events, and more. Event coordinators have included people from all walks of life: corporate CEOs, veterans support groups, homemakers, businesses, retirees, elementary school classes, and motorcycle groups. In 2009, supporters hosted more than 900 events. Despite their many differences, all of the events are hosted to help raise money for warrior programs.

Next time you're reading your local paper or on the WWP website, keep your eyes open for events in your hometown. Even if you're in Middle of Nowhere, USA, chances are good a Proud Supporter event isn't too far away.

*"...keep your eyes open for events in your hometown."*

## CASE STUDY: Florida's Ladies Auxiliary VFW

Spaghetti suppers. USO shows. "Kiss the Blarney Stone." An Army boot passed at local meetings. No one ever guessed a simple challenge would generate such enthusiasm or conclude with such amazing results.

Each year, the President of the Department of Florida Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars picks a special project for members across Florida. Last year's project began with a conversation. The president at the time, Kathy Roman, was talking to a friend who is a Vietnam veteran about the injured service members coming home from the global war on terror. "You know, we can heal their bodies," he said, "But it's harder to heal their hearts and souls." That statement provided a powerful direction: to assist an organization dedicated to making a difference in the lives of today's veterans.

At their School of Instructions in July of 2008, Department President's Special Project Chairman Gail Hadley, introduced the Wounded Warrior Project to over 400 Auxiliary members from throughout Florida's 161 local based Auxiliaries. She presented a short video with clips of wounded warriors talking about being injured, their recoveries, and the role WWP played in their lives. At the end of the presentation, Gail challenged each Auxiliary to raise just \$1 for each member of the Florida Ladies Auxiliary VFW- approximately 28,000 individuals.

A wildfire of activity ignited across Florida. Local Auxiliaries hosted countless creative fundraising events, and the total quickly began to build. Six months into the initiative, the group presented their first donation of \$12,000 to WWP representative Melody Godwin at their Mid-Winter Conference in Orlando, January 2009... but the project wasn't over.

With the support and approval of State VFW Commander David Harris and the Ladies Auxiliary invited wounded warrior (and WWP Area Outreach Coordinator) Jonathan Pruden to their annual State Convention in June to accept the final

donation on WWP's behalf. In a joint session of the VFW and Ladies Auxiliary, the VFW Color Guard ushered Jonathan to the front of the room. Jonathan was introduced for remarks. He shared with the members assembled his wartime experience, his injuries and how he became involved with the Wounded Warrior Project. Finally, the moment arrived. On behalf of the members of the Department of Florida Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Kathy presented Jonathan the final check—for \$50,000.

By all definitions, the fundraiser was a tremendous success. Even after the "final" check presentation, contributions continued to trickle in. At last tally, the ladies raised more than \$65,000—more than twice their goal and the most the Florida group had raised for a Department President's Special Project. "It was just magical," Kathy explained. "I think these women worked so hard because we all have family members who have served on foreign soil during wartime. These wounded warriors could be our own sons, daughters, brothers or sisters...we know firsthand how the injuries they endured will change their lives forever—we've lived it. It's up to us to do anything we can to help."



The year-long initiative concluded with a check presentation to WWP.



# PROJECT ODYSSEY NORTH CAROLINA

By John Roberts, WWP National Service Director

This August, WWP hosted a Project Odyssey at the Cape Lookout National Park. Project Odyssey was WWP's first program developed strictly for warriors dealing with combat stress-related issues. August's Odyssey was our first session exclusively for active-duty warriors; specifically, the special operations community. It was a great opportunity to assist a population of warriors who are often not willing to come forward and admit they may be dealing with the effects of multiple combat deployments.

This Odyssey included three full days of activities. The arrival day is normally when everyone gets to know one another. During this Odyssey, we had an unexpected team-building exercise on arrival day. Our non-four-wheel-drive U-Haul van (graciously donated by U-Haul) got stuck in the deep sand at Cape Lookout. (U-Haul has been a long-time sponsor of WWP, so maybe I should have left out the part about getting their van stuck.) We had the opportunity to break the ice early, as we worked as a team to get the van out of the sand and push it to our cabins. The good news is the van is fine.



Kayaking was just one of many activities during the warriors' stay in NC.



The quiet waterways provided a great place for relaxation.

*"What happens at Odyssey stays at Odyssey."*

After dinner, I started the conversation by telling the warriors about my own experiences dealing with combat stress for the last 17 years, which showed everyone they were not alone. The warriors started to open up and share a little bit about their stories and experiences. Each night, the stories got more and more intense, and a couple of the guys told us stories they had never shared with their spouses, doctors, or other warriors.

This is the power of Project Odyssey. We call it the "circle of trust." It's like Vegas. What happens at Odyssey stays at Odyssey. No one is judged, and you're free to share anything you want. Many felt a relief just by being able to tell another warrior their story without being judged, and then learning others were having similar issues.

**Day 1.** The first full day of activities started with sea kayaking with Lamar Hudgens and his partner from Barrier Island Kayaks from Swansboro, North Carolina. Everyone had a great time and was worn out from the long day of paddling against a strong wind and currents. It was relaxing to be out on the water, not on a schedule, and just be able to enjoy the scenery. That is, until one of the warriors tried to pick up a stingray with his bare hands. I think he stopped when he remembered what happened to the Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin. Crikey!

That evening a very large group (and their dogs) joined us from Indo Jax Surfing in Wilmington, North Carolina. The owner is Jack Viorel, and his crew is incredible. We shared our dinner with them, and then gathered around the campfire to share stories. They also gave us lessons with a training kite that individuals use to learn kite surfing. Because our group included special operation warriors, they determined, of course, that the kite could also be used as a weapon.

I received an email from Jack Viorel after the event. He said, "I just wanted to say that we at Indo Jax had a fantastic time with you guys. It was a real honor to surf, kite, ski, etc., with you all, but it was an even bigger honor to sit by the campfire, share food and stories, and get to know you. Your sacrifice to this country and your dedication and courage are incomprehensible and definitely immeasurable. Meeting you heroes

definitely changed my life. I tucked my kids into bed last night with an even greater appreciation of your commitment to our freedom. We enjoy so many things because of the work you've done, and I, for one, will never forget that. I am certain I speak for all the guys who came out for this fantastic weekend."

**Day 2.** The next day, we were given a brief surfing lesson on the beach, and then we were taken out to the water. Many of the warriors picked surfing up right away. However, being the oldest warrior attending the event, my body was not really up to the challenge. The photographer in the water taking pictures told me that it only takes one quick shot to make you look like a pro. Here's hoping he managed to get that quick shot in my case. We also were given the chance to jet ski and get pulled behind it on an inflatable torture device.

**Day 3.** The last day's event was off-shore fishing on the boat Continental Shelf from Morehead, North Carolina. We had a huge 100-plus passenger fishing boat all to ourselves. We went out about 25 to 30 miles, and only Lee Cook felt the full effects of the ocean and turned a nice shade of green. This would be appropriate in the jungle, but not at sea. Here's some advice: never get sick around combat veterans. I will leave it at that.

It's easy to talk about the humor that takes place during Project Odyssey. A great example was when one of the warriors made a joke about his traumatic brain injury (TBI). All of the warriors at this event were dealing with both combat-related stress and symptoms of a TBI. Each has some level of memory loss. When the conversation was coming to a close the first night, one warrior said that due to his TBI, he would probably not remember the conversation and would have to start over from the beginning the next night. I thought the group would never stop laughing.

This is what Project Odyssey does. It brings these total strangers together, and because they have similar stories, injuries or experiences, they can laugh together and joke about what often is the hardest thing they have ever faced.

Hopefully, you can tell by this story how passionate I am about Project Odyssey. I have seen the difference it has made in the warriors who have the courage to share their stories and their problems with perfect strangers. If you look at WWP's logo, you will see one warrior helping another warrior. Project Odyssey hits to the core of what the WWP logo represents. It is truly a program where warriors help each other through a difficult period in their recovery from combat stress.



# TRACK'S FIRST COHORT GRADUATES



Congratulations to the warriors in TRACK's first cohort, who graduated from the inaugural year-long program on July 31.