

GALLERY

PAWS FOR PEACE



Al & Ziva

HEALING RETREATS



Weatherby's Camps



Bald Mountain Camps

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It all began in Harpswell, Maine. The daughter of a naval aviator, a 36 year military spouse and former social worker, Joy Johnson was concerned about the rising rate of suicide among military veterans—22 lives per day.

Maine has one of the lower per capita incomes in the country and one of the highest ratios of veterans who served in the Gulf War, Iraq and/or Afghanistan. A large number of these veterans are at risk or high risk for post-traumatic stress (PTS) and/or for traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Even for those who did not experience combat, deployment may have led to feelings of guilt about their survival, the loss of a buddy and/or the horror of injuries that some of their friends incurred. In addition, there is a large number of Viet Nam veterans who were poorly treated or whose conditions were unidentified or simply ignored. Military veterans also may endure other traumas such as sexual harassment and/or assault. These invisible wounds are more difficult to define and “legitimize” with empirical data, resulting in a disparity in services afforded those with physical disabilities versus those with symptoms of PTS /TBI disabilities.

Knowing the VA system is overwhelmed and believing that services for veterans

living with the symptoms of PTS/TBI were less accessible, Joy recognized an urgent need among this population and, with the help of friends, Joy formed an organization with By-Laws, a Board of Directors, and clinical resources. Embrace A Vet was incorporated in the State of Maine in 2012 and received 501(c)(3) status in 2013.

Together with Bonnie-Kate Allen and B.K.'s husband, Dr. Fredric Shotz, Joy and EAV developed a program to address the symptoms of PTS/TBI through the use of alternative healing modalities such as energy psychology, acupuncture, yoga, massage, Thai body work, and Reiki. Based upon accepted techniques for behavioral change, EAV offers a multi-day Residential Retreat in a healing environment that includes educational classes on managing PTS, coaching reinforcement, nutritious meals, support and celebrated successes. An outdoor experience such as fishing or cross-country skiing and art therapies also are included.

Experience indicates that this can be a baseline for healing and moving veterans toward a path of improved recovery and reintegration into civilian society.

Research supports the importance of companion dogs and service dogs in calming and/or reducing anxiety or even warning a veteran of increasing anxiety. EAV de-

termined this additional resource could help manage symptoms of PTS/TBI, and Paws for Peace was initiated in 2013.

All of the interventions used during the retreats are evidence-based or best-practice-to-date. Pilots were established for each program offered, pre and post testing with assessment tools to measure outcomes and a follow-up assessment post retreat.

Success is celebrated by remarks from attendees such as “this has changed my life;” “....together with my doctor, I have been able to get off all of my medications that were making me feel like a zombie...”; and “...now that I have this dog, I can go places that I've never been able to go before...” and “...I slept through the night last night for the first time since Viet Nam....”

Thanks to our supporters, all of the Retreat Services are provided at no charge to the Maine veteran and/or his family member.

Subsidies are available for the dog program and thus based on an individual veteran's ability to pay.

April is the National Military Caregiver month. We greatly appreciate and thank our military caregivers. Please see our next issue for details on EAV's soon-to-be-launched caregiver support program.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS

Exposure to trauma has been a part of the human condition since we evolved as a species, and the resulting effects have been written about since the Egyptians. There are extensive references in Greek mythology, particularly in the *Iliad*. Shakespeare's revelations in *Henry IV* about his returning from war speak specifically about symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress. Known as "soldier's heart" (Civil War), "shell shock" (WWI), or "battle fatigue" (WWII), we now understand that both psychological and biological components are involved.

In 1952, the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) was published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). It included a diagnosis for "Gross Stress Reaction," which was thought to be specific to combat related trauma. The description indicated that anyone exposed to trauma was vulnerable to this disorder, a temporary reaction which would be alleviated once the soldier was removed from the stressful situation.

In 1980, in the 3rd edition of DSM, the APA changed the term to what we now know

as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It was defined as having clusters of symptoms that fall into three criteria: Re-experiencing, most often reported as nightmares and intrusive memories; Avoidance, including emotional numbing and avoiding any reminders of the trauma; and Arousal, including irritability, sleep disturbance, hypervigilance and exaggerated startle response. In the most recent edition, DSM 5 (2013), a new criteria, Negative Cognitions and Mood, was included which takes into account a persistent and distorted sense of blame

of self or others, resulting in guilt, anger and fear.

In the past few years there has been debate about the term "disorder." Many think that exposure to traumatizing circumstances results in a predictable outcome and that the term "disorder" can be viewed as an abnormal condition resulting in stigmatization. This has played a major role in peoples' perception of PTS which, unfortunately, has in turn made those struggling with symptoms reluctant to seek help.



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CALENDAR

APRIL

*National Military
Caregiver Month*

MAY

Saturday, May 16
*Armed Forces Day
Healing Retreat*

**Wednesday, May 27 to
Monday, June 1**

**Bald Mountain Camps
FMI:**

www.embraceavet.org

JUNE

Saturday, June 27
4th Annual Barn Party

YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR 2015 BARN PARTY

There is nothing lovelier in Maine than a summer day at the shore. Add great food, live music and a worthy cause ... our veterans... and you have the recipe for a special time. Please **save the date** for Embrace A Vet's 4th annual benefit barn party to be held on **June 27, 2015**. The event again will take place in Harpswell at the beautiful saltwater farm of Admiral Greg and Joy Johnson. The barn party, our major fundraiser, is a casual, fun evening.

We welcomed our first corporate sponsors, Bath Savings Institution and Mid Coast Hospital, last year. The silent and live auctions benefited from the generosity of our enthusiastic guests. Funds raised from this single evening enabled us to offer three additional residential wellness retreats for 25 veteran couples affected by PTS and/or TBI, to expand our Paws for Peace companion and service dog program, and to develop a new initiative, the much-

desired caregiver support program.



2014 Barn Party

Please join us on June 27 in Cundy's Harbor. You'll have a good time and your support will help improve the lives of many deserving Maine veterans and their families.

