



The Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, co-sponsored a "Take a Warrior Fishing" event at Canyon Lake, Texas, in October. (USACE Photo)

Our Wounded Warriors: Once a Soldier, a Soldier for Life

by Brig. Gen. Thomas Kula
Commander, SWD

The U.S. Army, which I have proudly served in for more than 30 years, has a saying: "Once a Soldier, a Soldier for Life." This concept is shared across all our military services. Those who have served, whether a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine, will always be part of that great community of men and women who have put on a uniform and served this Nation.

On a broader scale, our soldiers are also part of the noble American tradition of citizen soldiers who embody the will of the people directly because they are the people. Americans who serve in our military come from our local communities and return to their families in these local communities when their service has ended. Sadly, because of

the nature of war, some return injured. We call these our Wounded Warriors, and to these all Americans owe a special debt of gratitude—though, when you meet a Wounded Warrior, you will see that gratitude is not what they seek. They seek new beginnings and opportunities to transition to a productive and fulfilling civilian life.

The Army Corps of Engineers has long been an advocate of highlighting these Wounded Warriors and helping them in their transitions. We are involved in several programs that have helped provide employment to Wounded Warriors, as well as programs to integrate them back into American life.

In the area of employment, we support the Operation Warfighter Program, as well as the Army's Wounded Warrior Program and the Federal Government's Vocational Employment and Rehabilitation Program. We have 14 Wounded Warriors working



Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Kula, SWD commander, greets recent military recruits as the Reviewing Officer for the Veterans Day Parade in Dallas on Nov. 12. (USACE photo)

in our Fort Worth District offices alone, and aiming for a higher number. But there are many Wounded Warriors who do not come through these programs; most return to their communities and seek rehabilitation, training and employment there. We ask the communities across the Southwestern Division region to welcome these great Americans who have sacrificed so much, provide them opportunity and help them transition back to into a civilian life.

Just recently, our Fort Worth District hosted a “Take a Warrior Fishing” day at Grapevine Lake. By partnering with almost three dozen local businesses and groups who provided rods, reels, tackle bags, fishing kits and boats, this day-long event honored some of our area Wounded Warriors and their families. The “Take a Warrior Fishing” program was established in 2011 to support military personnel and their families by creating an adaptive community-based outdoor recreation experience through the sport of fishing. The main goals of this program are to restore well-being by increasing family interaction, encouraging outdoor recreation, and supporting positive, social interactions that help transitioning service members rebuild connections with the civilian world.

We have hosted other events as well, always

partnering with our local communities and businesses in our region. Recently, we worked with more than 70 members of “The Mission Continues”, a national community service organization that encourages and aids volunteerism by disabled and wounded veterans. These veterans cleaned out woods and planted trees in the Dallas Floodway System—giving back to the community, because they are an integral part of the community. This story is repeated throughout the states that make up the Southwestern Division, from Texas to Arkansas to Oklahoma and beyond!

The Army is committed to lifelong success for our Soldiers, veterans, and their families. Supporting our Soldiers and Army veterans—and veterans of all branches of service—requires a team approach by the Army, other government agencies, and the local community. If you seek opportunities to assist our Wounded Warriors or if you know of opportunities to assist them, we are ready to facilitate! You can contact us anytime at www.swd.usace.army.mil, or click on the commander icon on that website to connect directly with me. Let us all work together to ensure that those who gave so much for us are given opportunities in return.

Wounded Warrior casts for lines fishing

A fishing rod with a reel and a fishing line with a hook. The rod is dark brown and the line is light green. The hook is black and curved.

by Ed Rivera and Clayton Church
Fort Worth District Public Affairs

For most people, going fishing on a weekend morning isn't that big of a deal. After a tough work week going out on a lake with friends and family provides a nice break from being at the office or in the field. But for a wounded warrior it's a break from hospitals, doctors and rigorous physical therapy.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Grapevine and Canyon Lakes recently hosted "Take A Warrior Fishing" events providing 56 warriors and 42 family members a respite from their daily routines with a day on a lake fishing and enjoying the scenic views.

"We had great turnouts at both events. Our warriors and their families were taken out by volunteer boat captains for a fun morning of fishing, then lunch provided by our sponsors," said Cheryl Jasper, event project manager and Fort Worth District natural resource specialist.

Established in 2011, the "Take a Warrior Fishing" program is designed to support military personnel and their families, specifically tar-

getting persons assigned to Warrior Transition Commands, by creating an adaptive community-based outdoor recreation experience through the sport of fishing. The main goals of this program are to restore well-being by increasing family interaction, encouraging outdoor recreation, and supporting positive, social interactions that help transitional service members rebuild connections with the civilian world.

"Take a Warrior Fishing" was formed by The 'Catch a Special Thrill' [CAST] for Kids Foundation, a public charity formed in 1991 to join volunteers who love to fish with special needs children for a day of fishing in the outdoors. The CAST for Kids Program is designed to create an environment whereby special needs children and their caretakers could benefit, leaving their problems on shore and sharing a day of fun on the water that they may not otherwise get to experience.

"We have been involved with CAST for Kids since the early 1990s and are proud to be able to introduce kids to the joy of fishing," said Charlie Burger, chief, Operations Division, Fort



Marcus Schimank, manager, Canyon Lake checks in fishermen during a Take A Warrior Fishing event. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Canyon and Grapevine Lakes recently hosted events providing 56 warriors and 42 family members a respite from their daily routines with a day on a lake fishing and enjoying the scenic views. (Photo by Fort Worth District)

Worth District. "But through this event, we are able to provide the opportunity for some of our wounded warriors and family members time to leave their stress and concerns behind, and just relax and go fishing."

Events like these not only provide opportunities for our military and their families but also are a way for local community members to show their support through sponsorship, donations and as volunteers. A combined 44 sponsors donated shirts, caps, rods, reels, tackle boxes, tackle, breakfast, sandwiches, cookies, barbecue and trimmings, drinks, boat fuel, goodie bag items, piñatas, pumpkins, candy and more to ensure the event was one to remember.

"My thanks go out to the Corps of Engineers for being the lead agency for both of the Take a Warrior Fishing event these past two weeks," said Jim Owens, executive director, CAST for Kids. Because of their support, and the caring and dedication of their employees, we were able to reach out to our wounded soldiers and give something back to these warriors who have given so much to us."

The events could not have been a success if it weren't for the many volunteers who supported the warriors and their families. The 53

boat captains were essential for getting the participants to the fishing areas and back. In addition 66 on-shore volunteers provided directions, served food and hosted activities for those not fishing.

"To all of you and your families, this is a way we can say thank you, for all you have done and continue to do for our nation," said Air Force Maj. Gen. (Dr.) Byron C. Hepburn, commander, 59th Medical Wing, Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas who spoke at the Canyon Lake event after he helped serve lunch.

Canyon Lake Manager Marcus Schimank said it's not imaginable what some of the wounded warriors and their families have to go through on a daily basis. "Giving them and their families a day of relaxation, fun and camaraderie with fellow warriors that can share their understanding is a great feeling and wonderful to be a part of."

At the end of both events, some caught catfish, some caught bass, some caught some rays of sun and some caught none. But all caught something to recall. As the son of one warrior so eloquently put it, "we may not have caught any fish today, but we will take home a lot of great memories."