



Jill and Brian with son Kellan

In 2015, Laurel Cove residents Jill Crist and her husband Brian, a retired Navy SEAL, formed Coastal Authority Care Foundation; a non-profit organization providing grants to veterans with service-connected injuries, particularly brain injuries. The grants help veterans obtain cutting-edge medical treatment that insurance often doesn't cover, as well as cover costs associated for spouses/family members for travel and lodging associated with treatment.

During his 24 years as a SEAL, Brian was exposed to years of repeated gunfire, explosions, falls, and rigorous training. By the time he retired, he had already undergone five surgeries related to his service. At that time, mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI) were not recognized as a health issue, so service members were not screened for them. Brian thought that his anxiousness and sleeplessness were associated with the stressors of his transition to civilian life. It wasn't until his symptoms began to include ringing in his ears, depression, anger, and short-term

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS

By Katie Alpigini

memory and concentration issues that he thought something more serious was at play with his health. He averaged four hours of sleep a night. He was prescribed pain and sleeping medications but didn't like the side effects. Psychotherapy didn't address the physical symptoms. Jill became increasingly worried.

During a dinner conversation, Brian learned that he shared identical symptoms with a friend recently diagnosed with mTBI. This friend had undergone treatment at a facility in Texas that offered non-traditional medical treatment for veterans suffering with mTBI, using no pharmaceuticals. The treatment cost \$12,000 and was not covered by insurance. The Crists were willing to find the means to send him and in March of 2015, with much skepticism and grant-funding from a private foundation, Brian flew to Texas for an intensive two-week treatment that focused on the vestibular system and used electrophysiological and eye-movement techniques to stimulate areas of the brain that were not functioning properly. His bloodwork and diet were also assessed. After the fourth day, he slept seven hours and his symptoms improved daily.

"This treatment brought me back to life," says Brian. "It gave me hope that I had some control over my health." He began to exercise again, eventually training for and competing in the 2018 Molkai to Oahu World Championship Paddleboard Race as part of a three-man, all-veteran stand-up paddleboard (SUP) team.

"The combination of hyperbaric oxygen treatment (HBOT) and neurotherapy made such a difference in our lives, that we knew we wanted to help other veterans with similar service-related injuries gain access to it," says Jill. "Most people either

cannot afford it, or cannot take the extended time off from work to travel to a facility for treatment, so we have found local practitioners who are offering these cutting-edge treatments like my husband received in Texas."

The VA currently has studies underway looking at the effectiveness of HBOT and neurotherapy for mTBI and PTSD. In the meantime, the Coastal Authority Care Foundation is helping veterans now; raising funds to help both local veterans receive treatment, as well as transport veterans here from areas that might not offer these alternative treatments. "The symptoms of mTBI worsen over time," says Brian. It becomes harder to function, and life can begin to feel hopeless. Nearly 22 veterans take their own lives each day, and it's a complete tragedy when there are treatments that can help."

"If we can help one veteran from being one of the 22, it's worth it," says Jill. "Our goal is to make a difference in the lives of veterans and their families by helping them gain access to emerging therapies."

For more information about Coastal Authority Care Foundation:
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"It's been so great working with you. I realized when thinking about responses, it really is a skill to interview and get usable information from someone. You are a really good, natural interviewer. Well done and thank you!"

— Maria Galifianakis-Croke