



# Operation Vet NOW

*Dedicated to Honoring and Supporting Our Veterans & Their Families*

Be There For Our Veterans

Newsletter Volume 1  
Spring 2023

Meeting Veteran's Needs,  
through endless Opportunities,  
to fortify health & Wellness.

## The OVN Story #BeThereForOurVeterans

Training for active duty builds your playbook to uphold this promise; more than just standard operating procedure, it's part of a personal oath. "I'm here to help out, and you'll be safe with me." "Got your six" challenges you to function at a higher level and builds that deep feeling of camaraderie that's often missed when you leave military service.



So, what does it take to have fellow warriors' backs in the civilian world? Really, not a lot. Operation Veteran NOW is committed to sharing that hope, sometimes with grand gestures, but more often, with a simple reach that gives hope. Hope heals. Hope is about the future. And when a fellow veteran takes the time to listen, takes the time to sit with you, takes a moment to send a message, or hears your frustration, there is hope.

**This newsletter will tell that story repeatedly; athletes, musicians, woodworkers, a guy who builds campfires, brothers who unite, and someone who makes coffee and says "Welcome." You have what it takes to give hope, to Be there for each other. People like you, who have it in their blood do SOMETHING when a comrade is in need. It only takes an idea, a moment, a phone call. OVN will be a multiplier to inspire and empower you to reach out again, to have someone's six. Read these stories of hope, then work on writing your own. What can you do to inspire hope?**

Senior year of high school. Small town. Not much happening, so when the recruiter shows up, the opportunity looks pretty good. That's until the first day of training when the voice in your head screams, "What the hell did I do?"

**So many veteran stories start that way. For one of the founders of OVN, it was a nudge from an Army vet, the path was the Air Force, and 22-years later he returned to life as a civilian. But life beyond the uniform was different for both this Veteran, and his spouse who served.**

UPCOMING EVENTS:

## #BeThereforOurVeterans The OVN Story, (Cont)

Operation Veteran NOW became the platform to improve the overall mental wellness of every warrior who served. Drawing on experience, knowledge, and compassion, several discussions loomed. We did some research to see where we could best be of help, and we rallied a tribe of volunteers to recognize **Needs**, create **Opportunities** and promote **Wellness**, reaching Veterans who are suffering in silence before it's too late!



“Through outreach events and programs that connect the veteran to the care and support they’ve earned”, the volunteers of OVN are dedicated to

veteran well-being. One size does not fit all. OVN works hard to represent many resources through the Veteran Village initiative. So much more than a walk-through series of vendors and brochures, the participating organizations are coached to listen, to learn from the veteran how they might connect and be a part of the wellness journey.

Navigate through the website <https://opvetnow.org/> to learn about Veteran Village OVN Events <https://opvetnow.org/ovn-vet-village-project-1> Fallen Heroes Tribute Project, and the Ambassador Athletes <https://opvetnow.org/ambassador-athletes> program. Follow one of the veteran ambassadors and become part of the wellness community that way. You will find a real understanding of veterans who will have a warrior’s back on mental health issues and needs. Find events and ways to connect to others who understand.

Do not battle alone. Invisible wounds are linked to Veteran suicide. Not sure what is going on and just feel out of sorts? You don’t need to label it to reach out of the darkness, just reach. Volunteer to help out or look at upcoming events and stop by. Reach out to OVN and be connected.

<https://opvetnow.org/ovn-events-calendar>

### July 8<sup>th</sup>, Saturday

OVN Veterans Village @ the HCN  
Homer City, PA  
10:00 AM-3:00 PM

### July 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, Friday - Sunday

OVN Resource Table  
Pocono Raceway,  
All Day

### August 2, Wednesday

Memorial Wall arrives in Greensburg

**August 4-5** Gold Star Family, Fallen Heroes Run and Veteran Village  
Z& M Harley, Greensburg, PA

### September 9<sup>th</sup>, Saturday

OVN Veterans Village @ We The People Event  
Riverfront Park, Kittanning, PA

## OVN Veteran Village

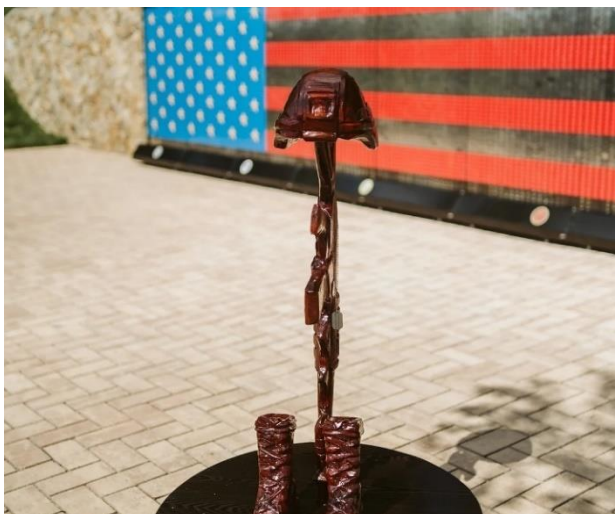
The **Veterans Village** is core to interacting with veteran communities where they are! YOUR ORGANIZATION to comes together to interact and engage with others to share what you offer to help veterans.

OVN does all the logistics work and planning, Your organization extends invitations, then just shows up for Face to Face activation of your brand and service in the Veterans comfort zone.

For information on how to become involved:

Contact OVN [tony@opvetnow.org](mailto:tony@opvetnow.org)

## #BeThereforOurVeterans



## **Global War on Terror OVN Brings Traveling Memorial Wall to 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Fallen Heroes Run**

2-6 August  
Operation Vet Now Event  
Greensburg, PA

To honor our fallen heroes from the Global War on Terror as well as their gold star families, a 28-foot wide by 6-foot-tall American flag symbolizing the shape of the flag when draped on a fallen service member's casket has been created by Veterans and Athletes

United. Using over 7000 dog tags of all those who have fallen in the GWOT, the Fallen Heroes Memorial has traveled to over 60 locations nationwide to bring awareness of all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and the American flag.

<https://www.vetsau.com/memorial>

**You're not alone—the Veterans Crisis Line is here for you.**



24/7 confidential crisis support for Veterans and their loved ones

**You don't have to be enrolled**  
in VA benefits or health care to connect.  
The end of a personal relationship. The loss of a job.  
Everybody faces difficult times in life,  
and people cope with stressful situations differently.  
When emotional issues reach a crisis point,  
**contact the Veterans Crisis Line.**

## **Operation Vet NOW - Outreach**

Veterans deserve to be known and supported. Community is the best support for veterans. Veterans make communities better places to live. Using a page out of the America's Warrior Partnership, Community Integration Playbook, OVN will work toward:

- Outreach to and engagement with all veterans
- Developing a community of partners to provide opportunities and solutions.

In the Pittsburgh Metro Area, we have opportunities for veterans, but sometimes accessing what is available is a challenge.

Partner with OVN to:

- Connect
- Educate
- Advocate
- Collaborate

Start by subscribing to the newsletter, give feedback or suggest future articles, topics, activities or events. Begin the conversation. Reach out to Sue at [susan@opvetNOW.org](mailto:susan@opvetNOW.org)



# OVN Ambassador Athlete

## Major Chris Walsh

Professional Race Car Driver,  
Active Military USAF Special Tactics Officer

**“The smallest gesture can be a big deal.”**

**Chris Walsh** is an all-around athlete – a professional racing driver, former United States bobsledder, and a fan of all things fast. In addition to professional racing, Chris is extremely active in competitive eSports, beginning on the Air Force competitive gaming team – all alongside being an active-duty service member in the United States Air Force.

Maj. Walsh also represents various non-profits that support veterans, Gold Star youth and disabled and wounded military veterans. These organizations include Wear Blue Operation Motorsport and Operation Vet Now.

Chris has teamed up with Operation Vet NOW Athlete Ambassador Program to Help carry OVN's message of hope for our veterans. Our focus is the mental health and wellness of our warriors, Our Ambassador Athletes help to make the connection. In Chris's words, *“I am excited about the opportunity to find a way to connect our veterans with the different services and resources that are out there, to help them with some of the tough things that they are dealing with after their military service, or even during their military service. That's something that has hit home for me in multiple places with different people. I have had multiple team mates who have been successful in their rehabilitation and some who have not been successful. The pain that comes with that for them and their families is real. This is just one small piece of engagement that gets the message across, that there are always options out there. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture. Just keep engaging, keep the dialogue going. It's the best thing that any of us can do,”*

Watch Chris talk about being part of the OVN Athlete mission - <https://youtu.be/IP7dslkJqe0>

Thank you, Chris Walsh for representing the mission. Follow Chris on social media at



[facebook.com/cwalsh86](https://www.facebook.com/cwalsh86)



[instagram.com/walsh.usa](https://www.instagram.com/walsh.usa)

# We must never stop Being There for Our Veterans

# Veteran Resources You Should Know About

If you need more info or an assist in navigating, give Sue a shout at [susan@opvetnow.org](mailto:susan@opvetnow.org)



**Pittsburgh/Western PA**  
**412-920-1765**

Pittsburgh Vet Center:  
<https://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-h-vet-center/>

**100% Confidential help** for Combat Veterans, service members, and their families

- Connection, camaraderie, community
- Counseling for depression, (PTSD), and the psychological effects of (MST).
- Connections to more support in VA and community.
- Readjustment Counseling
- Group Sessions - virtual and in-person
- Monthly writing group
- No cost
- Non-medical setting
- Do NOT need to be connected to VA Health Care or have a service disability
- Involvement with the Vet Center remains confidential
- Highlight about the Vet Centers <https://youtu.be/VMzkZNbKk1I>

The Vet Center also offers an around-the-clock  
**Confidential Call Center 877-927-8387**



**AMBASSADOR ATHLETES**

**OVN Ambassador Athletes**

Operation Vet NOW Inc.  
(OVN)  
<https://opvetnow.org/>  
[tony@opvetnow.org](mailto:tony@opvetnow.org)  
412-347-1767 Voice only,  
not text

**Operation Vet NOW** is dedicated to meeting the **Needs** of veterans through, **Opportunities** to fortify their health and **Wellness**.

Volunteer to help, connect with a battle buddy, or just a Veteran in need? Reach out through Tony Aubrey. We would love to help and have your help!

**Featuring OVN Ambassador Athletes:**

- Veterans or Active-Duty Military Members
- Compete in organized sports series from amateur to professional
- Help carry OVN's message of suicide prevention solutions
- Most importantly – have the passion and commitment to help our veterans
- Compete throughout the country in multiple sports
- Participate in honoring fellow service members

With nearly 20 ambassador athletes on the team, the impact they are having on the Veteran community is amazing! – Check out the team and the competition schedules at: <https://opvetnow.org/ambassador-athletes>

If you or you know of a Veteran athlete that is interested in joining the team in the mission to help our Veterans, contact Tony at [Tony@opvetnow.org](mailto:Tony@opvetnow.org) to learn more.



## Veterans Breakfast Club

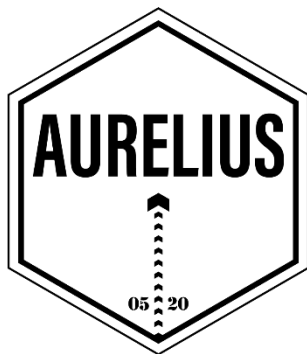
<https://veteransbreakfastclub.org>

Todd DePastino – Director  
[todd@veteransbreakfastclub.org](mailto:todd@veteransbreakfastclub.org)  
or  
[betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org](mailto:betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org)  
412-623-9029



412-431-2096  
<https://vietnamveteransinc.com/>

**Vietnam Veterans Incorporated**  
P.O. Box 97765  
Pittsburgh, PA 15227



(724) 967-1628  
<https://aurelius520.org/>

7000 Stonewood Drive,  
Suite 115a  
Wexford, PA 1509

**The Veterans Breakfast Club** creates communities of listening around veterans and their stories to ensure that this living history will never be forgotten. Through this work, people will be connected, educated, healed, and inspired

### Todd DePastino and Shaun Hall head up the Programming

- Weekly live online conversations: VBC Happy Hour and VBC Greatest Generation Live
- In-person storytelling breakfasts
- Weekly podcast - The Scuttlebutt: Understanding Military Culture
- Weekly email newsletter: VBC Bulletin
- Quarterly magazine: VBC Magazine
- Ongoing Veteran History Interviews: Veterans History Project
- Travel to veteran-related places like Washington, DC, and Vietnam

Open to all . . . veterans, and nonveterans, alike.

### Vietnam Veterans Inc was founded to:

- Foster, encourage and promote comradeship and “Esprit de Corp” among Vietnam Veterans
- Promote the physical, cultural improvement and growth, development, self-respect, and self-confidence of Vietnam Veterans
- Weekly Breakfast Social
- POW-MIA Vigil – Annually as Soldiers and Sailors – 9/17-9/18, 2023

### Breakfast

- Every Thursday morning. All welcome
- Gianna Vias Restaurant, 8:00 AM – 9:30 AM

### Monthly Meetings

- Soldiers and Sailors or VFW Post 1810

### Annual Picnic

- **June 24, 2023**
- Holy Trinity Serbian Picnic Grounds, 1420 Hamilton Road, Pgh, 15234

**Honor Guard-** help by volunteering  
[info@vietnamveteransinc.com](mailto:info@vietnamveteransinc.com)

### Holistic Healing

**Aurelius** was formed from the foundation of **Adventures in Training With a Purpose**, a Christian Nonprofit Organization created to confront health and movement-related issues in vulnerable populations who no longer have the benefit of paid rehabilitation.

The core focus of **Aurelius** is helping active military, veterans and first responders suffering from depression and PTSD overcome their obstacles and achieve exceptional post-traumatic growth.

Give **Caleb Kolb** a call to learn about the holistic program **Aurelius** offers integrated over the twelve (12) weeks. **Aurelius'** team consists of mental health professionals, naturopathic doctors, exercise and human performance specialists, and wilderness adventure guides.

**This program is 100% confidential, stigma-free and free of charge.**  
[aurelius@adventurestraining.org](mailto:aurelius@adventurestraining.org)

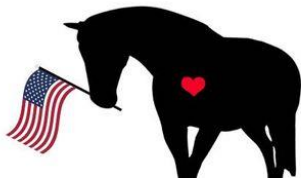


**Boulder Crest Foundation**  
<https://bouldercrest.org/>

33735 Snickersville Turnpike  
PO Box 117, Bluemont, VA  
20135  
540-554-2727

Locations:  
Virginia  
Arizona

Mobile Training Team  
Boulder Crest deploys our  
(MTT) across the nation to  
deliver Warrior PATHH  
program close to you.



**STAT®** Ligonier  
Therapeutic Center  
24 Stom Road,  
Ligonier, PA  
To learn more and apply:  
<https://hushforms.com/stat-veteran-programs>  
(607) 223-4176  
cmarkosky@statinc.org

## **Boulder Crest: Retreat Opportunities**

*Founded by US Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) vet, who was severely injured in a parachuting accident. After healing he went on to make over 1000 parachute jumps and lead men and women on thousands of high-risk missions. His story is a great example of Posttraumatic Growth.*

**Boulder Crest** offers no cost programs to eligible veterans and to first-responders.

Their mission is to train people to thrive in the aftermath of their trauma.

### **Warrior PATHH and Couples PATHH**

- a peer-based training program
- educational and experiential activities for the purpose of teaching life skills, increasing community integration and involvement, and promoting physical, emotional, relational, financial, and spiritual health.

### **Family Rest and Reconnection**

- Combat veterans and their families
- Families stay free of charge at either of the two location for 2-7 nights
- Relax, reconnect, and restore connections in private, peaceful resort settings

### **Songwritingwith:Soldiers (SWS)**

- three-day program
- Uses Posttraumatic Growth PATHH sessions and collaborative songwriting as a catalyst to help participants express themselves and gain deeper insights into their life journey.

### **Struggle Well Training**

Struggle Well training teaches participants how to integrate healthy principles into their lives and is based on five core elements of Posttraumatic Growth

- Education
- Regulation
- Disclosure
- New Story
- Service – We showcase the importance of using our struggle and story to guide and support others walking the road from struggle to strength.

## **Healing w/ Horse Power since 2007 - STAT® Ligonier Therapeutic Center**

STAT® helps Veterans, their families and caregivers heal, learn, and grow alongside horses through:

- 🐾 Equine Assisted Learning (EAL). Individual and group programs and classes that are mostly ground based.
- 🐾 Hippotherapy (Physical, Vestibular, Occupational, and Speech Therapy) utilizing evidence-based and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement as a therapy tool to engage sensory, neuro motor and cognitive systems, promoting improved functional outcomes. (Doctor prescription required)

## **Veteran programs at STAT are paid for from funding through the VA Adaptive Sports grant VA-SPORTS-22**

### **More about STAT®**

- Professional team sensitive to how past trauma can impact learning and connection. We are a Trauma Informed Care (TIC) Organization.
- Provides options that best fit needs and respect privacy.
- Staff are Veterans with Veteran or Active-Duty family members.



Institute for Military & Veteran Family Wellness, Dell Medical School

https://veteranspousenetwork.org/

The Veteran Spouse Network is a peer support community. The work is guided by the understanding that veteran families rely on strong supportive communities while facing their unique challenges.

Veteran Spouse Resiliency Group

- Peer-led, curriculum-driven, evidence-based peer-support support groups offered in virtual and in-person formats.

VSN Social Clubs

- Online and in-person peer-support groups
Participants are provided a safe space to discuss topics that interest them and create opportunities to connect, socialize.

EmpowerEd

Topic-driven seminars and discussion groups

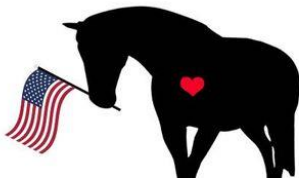
Veteran Volunteers Needed



https://opvetnow.org/cont-act-us

Operation Veteran NOW is always looking for ways to connect veterans with opportunities.

- Help with Veteran Village events
Grassroots veteran opportunities like the Campfires and Bush crafting
Bingo at the Southwestern Veteran Center, one Sunday evening a month
Monthly Community Coffee events bringing veterans and VSOs together in a relaxed atmosphere
Veteran Family Events Initiative (New)



STAT

https://www.statinc.org/apply-to-volunteer

STAT Ligonier Therapeutic Center is always looking for volunteers.

Volunteers can be selected for:

- Hands on with Horses
Grooming, tacking, feeding
Facilities maintenance, barn chores, grounds maintenance
Assist Therapists and STAT Staff
Side walking, leading a horse during Hippotherapy sessions
Programs and Administration
fundraisers, photo/videotaping for social media projects.

Volunteers MUST be at least 18 years old, and obtain two mandatory clearances. NO fees associated with the Mandatory clearances for Volunteer position.



844-VLP-VETS or getinvolved@vlpwpa.org

Veterans Leadership Program welcomes the support of volunteers.

- Sorting donations (Pittsburgh and Johnstown)
Monthly food distribution events
Career development partnerships
Corporate volunteer days
Veteran mentorship
Peer Mentors for Allegheny County Veterans Court



# Veteran Campfires

All are welcome [stevedilembo@gmail.com](mailto:stevedilembo@gmail.com)

FB <https://www.facebook.com/ThePlaidandPaisleyBarn>



**Fire nourishes the soul!** Scientific evidence shows that watching the flames, and hearing the sound of a crackling fire actually lowers blood pressure. **Steve DiLembo didn't need a scientific study to see the value of a campfire.** He experienced the goodness and is driven to share with other veterans.

Sitting in a circle creates a feeling of connectedness to others. A campfire is both a unifier and a neutralizer. Connected by the warmth and embers there is no need for pretenses, just the act of fueling the fire, and losing your defenses. The "mask of fire" invites fellowship and a growing bond.

A career path in the Air Force commencing on July 20, 2004, was hijacked in 2007. Steve went home to Pitcairn, PA to try to move on. With triggers of authority figures, uniforms, and government plates Steve was not in a good place. It was becoming more challenging to function. Haunted by regrets, bogged down by irreconcilable anger, he saw the institution designed to help veterans, failing to help him. The VA mental health prescription of worksheets and medication was not the right shield for the way life was coming at him. The VA gets it right for some, but Steve was ready for an opportunity greater than the walls of a waiting room could offer.

Several years ago, he and his wife bought a piece of land in Westmorland County. Remembering the power of the campfire at Sempre Fi Odyssey with General Jones and a few gatherings with other military buddies in West Virginia, Steve knew the lasting power of meeting in a positive way, at a campfire, instead of just gathering to grieve or vent.

There is no agenda, just a campfire. Veterans from all eras are welcome. Dinner and drinks are always provided. Just bring yourself and plan to relax and have a good time. Find your soul in the in the dancing light. Hear forgiveness in the darkness. The offer is here. For more information on how to get to the next campfire contact Steve at [stevedilembo@gmail.com](mailto:stevedilembo@gmail.com) or FB <https://www.facebook.com/ThePlaidandPaisleyBarn>

## **BE THERE Veteran suicide is real.**

There are more than 19 million veterans living in the United States. We hear numbers about how many take their lives every day, but ONE death by suicide is too many; an act of desperation to escape some sort of pain or struggle. Every day, how many of our veterans struggle silently with depression, loneliness, food insecurity, homelessness, trauma recovery, moral injury, underemployment, family struggles and lack of purpose?

We need to **BE THERE** for them and be part of the solution; connecting, empowering, supporting and listening well before crises.

**Volunteer with an organization that helps veterans.**

**Share this newsletter . . . and most importantly, reach out to a Veteran you know today, and let them know you care and are there for them.**



## **Bushcraft for Veterans - All Veterans Welcome**

Reach out to Sam on the contact page and you can arrange a meet. <https://www.vvwoodworks.com/>

Sam Boyle reached out to OVN after a post on a Facebook page “Looking for veteran-centric/ veteran-friendly opportunities. Working to connect veterans to veterans through a skill, activity, craft, or hobby. (Pittsburgh Vets FB <https://www.facebook.com/groups/PittsburghVets> )

He has a story wrapped in the promise that after a life-changing event, each day would be intentional. “Everything from my eggs in the morning to the next axe handle I pull out of a tree trunk is done with intentional thought. I love to pass on knowledge more than anything. Providing someone with a skill or ability that can be expanded on is one of the best ways to improve mental health and overall clarity and purpose. I’ve set my life up to be a giant learning experience and look forward to continuing to share it with like-minded people.”

“For a lot of veterans, feelings often get sacrificed for the mission whatever that may be.” With situational awareness and a view from the sidelines of others in bad situations, Sam made a personal conviction to be different; in part, to live with intention. There are many life metaphors and lessons to be learned in nature. The properties of the materials, how wood expands and contracts, the best conditions for landing a trout, or how to process wood to create a cooking fire, are examples of the situational awareness needed to survive in nature through bush crafting.

Sam, who lives on a beautiful piece of land in Gibsonia with his wife, six beautiful chickens, and a curious beagle, is ready to share the lessons learned and find some new ones with other veterans. Join fellow comrades and unleash your inner outdoorsman. Whether you're a curious novice, experienced axe wielder, leatherworking newcomer, forging tenderfoot, fly-tying expert, or just enjoy a good campfire gathering, there's something for everyone. Unwind in the outdoors and connect with other veterans who share your love for nature, desire to learn, and interest in Bushcraft. Sam invites you to share an unforgettable experience! Best in small groups or 1:1, you and Sam can figure out your time together. Depending on what you are interested in there may be a cost for materials.

Use the contact page on the V.V Woodworks website to reach out. Then post some pictures for us to see! <https://www.vvwoodworks.com/> Thanks, Sam!

### Thank You

Whether you help through monetary donations, volunteering your time, or spreading our mission through word-of-mouth, thank you. We couldn't accomplish our goals without the help of supporters like you. OVN is a 501 C)3 Organization.



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