



WEDNESDAY

SEPTEMBER 11

WWW.VETERANSTEE.ORG | #TEE2019

It was a windy day on Malletts Bay in Lake Champlain.

In short, the perfect day for what Shannon Blake planned, taking other disabled Vets out on the water as part of his nonprofit group, Warrior's SOAR, along with his dog, "Freedom."

Nobody has to convince this former Huey helicopter pilot that recreation therapy can help heal wounds physical and unseen. He's experienced it himself and is paying it forward.

Blake, who gets care at White River Junction VA Medical Center, retired from the Army in 2006 and went through "three or four years of tough times," before coming around to adaptive sports.

"I've lost buddies in combat and to suicide," he said. "I found this was a good outlet to help me, that just playing golf was kind of a way to deal with my anxiety and PTSD and all the mental stuff. I enjoy being outside and being around with other Veterans. It makes it more comfortable to discuss things and it's a way to manage life's obstacles."

In 2017, he started Warriors SOAR—Support, Outreach, Assistance and Recovery—as a way to help his fellow Veterans heal. The Vermont-based program takes Veterans golfing, sailing, snowshoeing, kayaking and even to a

Boston baseball fantasy camp in Florida.

"It's a total lifesaver," he said. "I knew it would work because I had already been fundraising for other Veteran groups and adaptive sports because those programs helped me get out of the shadows and off the couch."

This will be his third year at the TEE Tournament. And even if someone doesn't like golf, he still has advice for those still struggling.

"Find something to focus on. Find something small and just continue working on it. Take a course. Do something. There are so many programs out there. You might not like one, so try another one. As hard as it is, there are great programs and great people who can assist you.

"It takes more than three days," he added. "You can't go to an event then go home and go under the camo in the basement. Keep reaching out. Keep calling your buddies, or have your buddies call you. It's hard. It's taken us quite awhile and it's a slow process, but when you are around other Vets, it's a lot easier."



Hosted by DAV (Disabled American Veterans)
and the Department of Veterans Affairs





MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Army Veteran and DAV life member Eldon Miller has not only participated in the National Disabled Veterans TEE Tournament every year since its inception, he helped create it.

Miller was left legally blind after we has injured during an Army training accident in 1974.

Years later, he heard about the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Colorado, an annual rehabilitation event for Veterans with a variety of disabilities. His experience there—along with his love of the outdoors—sparked his inspiration to help create the TEE Tournament,

which had just 36 participants at its inaugural event in 1994.

As one of the four founders of the tournament, the Kolona, Iowa, native has had the pleasure of experiencing its growth over the years into the national event it has become today, with nearly 300 Veterans attending this year from across the United States.

“When DAV came on board that made a big difference,” said Miller. “They really gave us the means to support everyone, and it’s just a fantastic event thanks to them and the VA.”

“The partnership we have with the VA allows these Veterans the chance to prove to themselves that their disabilities don’t have to limit their quality of life,” said DAV National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. “We are glad to be a part of this event that wouldn’t be possible without the VA and all of our tremendous volunteers.”

“They’re just superb,” Miller added. “A lot of them have been coming here year after year, and it doesn’t go unnoticed. We really appreciate them.”

Beyond the volunteers and organizers, Miller says the camaraderie is one of the biggest reasons he keeps coming back.

“You look forward to these events to get out and do something and visit with people who have your same disability and know what you’re up against so you can exchange stories on how to do this and how to do that,” he said. “It helps you tremendously in everyday life.”

Perhaps Miller’s attitude toward that life is what helps him the most.

“I don’t call myself disabled. I just have an inconvenience.”

DAV[®] FROM OUR NATIONAL COMMANDER

Inspiration doesn't strike like lightning. It is instilled in those who bear witness to incredible acts in the face of adversity. I must say, I am deeply inspired by you all today.

The sight of so many men and women choosing to take a swing rather than sitting idly on the sidelines of life makes me swell with pride.

Whether deliberate or not, you are serving as a shining example of what is possible, even after enduring injuries many of us will never honestly know. The painstaking steps you have all taken in the pursuit of your goal of being here is alone inspiring. You know, perhaps more than most, that nothing worth achieving ever comes easy.

The TEE Tournament is more than a chance to show off your sharpened skills. Your presence will undeniably inspire those stepping off the battlefield to live life to the fullest, regardless of their wounds—both the invisible and those which are easily seen.

While you may no longer wear our nation's uniform, you continue to lead from the front. Because when you are living the best possible version of yourself, you inspire others to do the same.

We at DAV and our partners at VA cannot thank you enough for granting me the privilege of standing by your side. You have all certainly inspired us.



**Veterans
Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

Today's Schedule

6 – 7:30 a.m.

BREAKFAST BUFFET at your hotel

7:30 a.m.

LOAD BUSES (Each team has the same bus all day)

8 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES

8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

COMPANION ACTIVITIES

11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. **LUNCH** – Riverside Event Center

5:30 – 7 p.m.

DINNER – Riverside Event Center

6 p.m. – 9 p.m.

WELLNESS NIGHT – Riverside Event Tent

All are encouraged to participate in NDVTEE Wellness Night. Prizes given away all evening. Must be present to win!

*Shuttle between hotels run 8 – 11 p.m. (Shuttle pick ups on the hour)



Get Social Inspire other veterans, family, friends and people everywhere by sharing your experience through social media. Don't forget to use the hashtag **#TEE2019** when sharing photos and videos from this week.

VA

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