



Photo by Dan Neuland

PVFF volunteer Don Lee assists wounded veteran Joe with fly fishing on a local trout stream.

PVFF introduces veterans to the soothing joys of fly fishing

Outdoor experiences are among the best ways to relax the mind and body. Each spring, the Potomac Valley Fly Fishers team up with Project Healing Waters to help a group of wounded veterans relax and enjoy the pleasures of a day of guided fly fishing on a private section of a trout stream in northern Frederick County.

This year, the event was held June 16 with more than a dozen PVFF members volunteering as guides for 11 wounded veterans from the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda. For wounded veterans who are recovering from injuries sustained while in the service of our country, a day of mountain air alongside a pristine trout stream is often exactly what the doctor ordered.

All of the participating veterans were successful at catching trout with the fly rod, several for the first time. Two veterans fished from their wheelchairs. One of the wheelchair veterans brought his wife for support. She was able to fish alongside her husband and was successful at catching her first fish ever on a fly rod, a very special moment indeed for the couple.

Al Warner runs the PHW program at Walter Reed and works closely with the wounded veterans. "It is impossible to say how much our guys enjoyed the day fly fishing. Great hosts, great food on a stupendously beautiful stream ... what more can you ask for, thanks so very much!"

Wounded veteran Erik, who's last name is not being used for patient's privacy rights, wrote an email to PVFF after the event thanking the group for sponsoring the special day, "I was able to enjoy the moment and completely forgot about my headache and shoulder pain. It was so much fun! I have a newfound interest and can't wait to get out fishing again."

This outing is also beneficial to the volunteers. PVFF member Andy Merkelberg explains,



Today's Sportsman

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"It was so satisfying to participate in the event. It gave me a renewed appreciation of the joy of fly fishing, by seeing it through someone else's eyes, especially someone who gave so much to the country and needed the experience of the relaxation of getting out of their everyday life," he says. "It was fun to assist and to celebrate his experience of catching fish in a great location."

PVFF president Larry Forte was recently approached by David Folkerts, chief operations officer for PHW, about creating a PHW chapter at Fort Detrick. "We are close to signing a Memorandum of Agreement with PHW," said Forte. Basically, that would begin the process of PVFF starting a program at Fort Detrick. Right now, there is no program at Fort Detrick. PVFF would start it, promote it and begin having regular meetings for folks at Fort Detrick and the surrounding area. The program would be open to active military personnel and disabled vets.

PVFF is seeking a team of volunteers to run the program. The main component is a program lead and several program assistants. "We have a club member that has volunteered to be program lead and a couple of assistants are ready to go. The amount of volunteers that we had on Saturday was impressive. We had 14 volunteers. I think

there is strong support for this with the PVFF members. Once you see firsthand the positive impact that fly-fishing can have on someone, it's a no brainer," said Forte.

Anyone interested in joining PVFF can contact Larry Forte at: lbforte@verizon.net.

For more information on PHW visit www.projecthealingwaters.org.

LYNWOOD CLARK 6TH ANNUAL TRAP SHOOT

The sixth annual Lynwood Clark Trap Shoot was held at Calectin Fish & Game Protective Association in Myersville on June 9. Each year the Philanthropic Masonic Lodge No. 168 of New Market sponsors the charity event to support an organization dedicated to veterans. CFGPA donates the use of their clubhouse and trap range and provides all the targets at no cost in support of the event.

This year, a total of 55 trap shooters competed in teams of five for cash prizes and trophies. The top three individual winners included PJ Hinch, Chuck Farmer and Elmo Keller. Altogether, a total of \$3,780 was donated to Freedom Hunters, a military outreach program dedicated to honoring veterans.

Freedom Hunters reflects the outdoor community's appreciation to our troops by taking select active duty and combat veterans, families of fallen heroes, children of the deployed, as well as those wounded or injured, on outdoor adventures. With support from civic organizations such as the Freemasons, in addition to conservation groups, outfitters, corporations, government agencies and landowners, Freedom Hunters honors individuals from all branches of the military.

For more information, visit www.freedomhunters.org.

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