

## Veterans Get on Board with Wounded Warrior Project Surf Day

FORT PIERCE, Fla., Oct. 18, 2016 /[PRNewswire-USNewswire](#)/ -- A group of injured veterans and guests recently joined Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) for a day on the waves during a surfing excursion at Fort Pierce Inlet State Park. Participants spent the day enjoying the ocean and bonding with their service brothers and sisters.

This was the fifth year for the highly anticipated gathering, where volunteers from the community spent the day teaching wounded warriors how to surf.

"Surfing has always seemed like good exercise to me," said Army and Army National Guard veteran Richard Vreeland. "It's a sport I've always wanted to learn."

In a [WWP survey](#) of the injured warriors it serves, 32 percent of veterans said physical activity helps them cope with stress and depression, and nearly 47 percent said talking with other warriors boosts their ability to manage their mental health. Social events like this surfing day highlight the importance of managing mental health through physical activity and connecting with others.

"WWP physical health and wellness events get us out of the house and remind us no matter which obstacles we are facing, it is possible to participate and thrive and be active and healthy," said Army veteran Erika Bellwoar. "I will continue to sign up for activities like this because they benefit my long-term well-being. I have been blessed to see so many positive results when I take part in these programs."

Erika attended the Fort Pierce surfing event in its inaugural year, and was eager to get back to it and see if she still had what it takes to conquer the waves.

"I wanted to see if I could be a little bit of the adrenaline junkie I had always been before," she said. "I was nervous because I hadn't attempted anything physical since being injured, but that day lit a fire in me. Not only did I develop a love of surfing, I discovered that – with a little modification – I can still pursue my adventurous dreams."

These fun gatherings support the long-term recovery needs of warriors by reintroducing them to the unique bonds experienced during military service – in settings that accommodate their injuries and social anxieties.

"It was great being in the water with fellow wounded warriors, as well as all of the incredible volunteers who helped out," said Marine veteran Hipolito Arriaga. "It's important because it allows for the building of community, and it helps bridge the gap between veterans and civilians."

After the warriors and volunteers tired themselves out on the water, they headed back to the sand for a barbecue. Socializing with other veterans can help injured warriors feel less isolated.

"It is amazing to be around people who are coming from the same place with the same struggles," Erika said. "That and the enjoyment of accomplishing something physical together can't be beat."

WWP offers a variety of programs and services that assist injured veterans with mental health, physical health and wellness, career and benefits counseling, and connecting with other warriors and their communities. Generous donors make it possible for wounded warriors to take part in outreach activities and benefit from

program resources at no cost to them.

To see more photos and learn more about how WWP's programs and services are making an impact on the lives of wounded warriors, visit <https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/>.

### **About Wounded Warrior Project**

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. The WWP purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members, to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org).

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