

# AFTER ACTION

report



# AFTER ACTION report

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## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In this issue of the *After Action Report*, you will read about warriors who returned home from war only to face another battle. Combat stress is something no warrior is prepared for or should fight alone. Recent estimates report nearly 300,000 veterans currently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression, and 320,000 veterans experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI) in deployment (RAND, 2007). Although combat stress affects every warrior differently, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is here to help through our unique programs and initiatives.



We're proud of warriors like James Rivera (cover) who have experienced a transformation through their involvement with WWP. After returning from Iraq, PTSD was defining James. Today, he is defined by motivation and enthusiasm. Not only is he jumping out of airplanes, but he also credits TRACK for turning his life around. He is an inspiration and an example of why WWP is expanding TRACK to San Antonio, Texas (see page 13). We want to reach many more warriors like James who can be empowered through their education and by addressing their combat stress.

WWP can be anything a warrior needs ... A listening ear through our Peer Mentoring program ... An athletic motivator with our adaptive sports programs and partnerships ... A learning and growing opportunity at Project Odyssey... Or a helping hand with combat stress through our new program, WWP Restore (see page 5). No matter what battle a warrior is facing, WWP is here to help and is always seeking innovative ways to improve our programs.

I want you to be the next James Rivera. I want to see what adventures you were able to conquer after battling combat stress. WWP is here to help you find your "new normal."

Sincerely,

Steve Nardizzi  
Executive Director

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**ON THE COVER**  
Wounded Warrior James Rivera,  
who suffers from PTSD, skydiving in  
Deland, Florida during Complete  
Parachute Solutions' Defending Freedom  
Warrior Weekend.

**GOT AN IDEA OR COMMENTS**  
about *After Action Report*?  
Email editor@woundedwarriorproject.org

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## IN THE COMMUNITY



San Antonio TRACK Dean of Students, Mike Owens and wounded warrior Juan Arredondo take a break from cycling to sightsee during Soldier Ride – Israel.



Project Odyssey was held in Lake Powell, Arizona in October 2010. Participants took day trips to go fishing and to the Grand Canyon.



Marine Corps First Lieutenant Greg Moynihan and Leigh Swiger donated money from their 2010 wedding in Annapolis, Maryland to Wounded Warrior Project.



Visually impaired wounded warrior Jeff Henson rock climbs during the Disabled Sports USA – Operation High Altitude event in Mammoth Lakes, California.

Photo Credit: Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra; Operation High Altitude

# WW PROFILE: BRENT WHITTEN



US Army, 11B Infantry, Medically Separated  
Residence: Topeka, Kansas  
Injury: Second and third degrees burns to face and body, a broken pelvis combined with soft tissue damage, and traumatic brain injury (TBI)  
Alive Day: September 9, 2006

## Still Standing for What's Right.

In many ways, Brent's life has been shaped by what he describes as "small-town life" growing up in Topeka, Kansas.

"Topeka is a decent sized city with the feel of a small town. We can't go anywhere without running into people we know. My parents still live in the same cul-de-sac."

He cites the Bible and Medal of Honor recipients as his greatest inspirations. Brent joined the Army because of a love of history and weapons, as well as the sense of duty he felt to protect his family and nation.

Brent enlisted in 2004 with the 4th Infantry Division. In September 2006, he was "gunning" on a Humvee in a Baghdad neighborhood when a suicide bomber crashed into the side of his vehicle. The bomber and three civilians were killed in the explosion.

Brent would survive, but his injuries were numerous. He sustained second- and third-degree burns to his face and body, a broken pelvis with soft-tissue damage, and a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

He was treated in Iraq before being sent to Landstuhl, Germany. From there, Brent was sent to Brooke Army Medical Center where he would spend a month as an inpatient. During his initial recovery, Brent says the greatest challenge was the pain.

Today he is getting on with his life—a life that remains instilled with his small town values.

"I go to school at the University of Kansas, do homework, and hang out with my family. Although I walk unassisted, I experience pain if I put too much



Brent with his wife, Rachel, son, Colter, and dog, Greta outside his home in Kansas.

stress on my pelvis or if it's about to rain. I have a lot of headaches that I never had before the attack. I like playing basketball, which I can do just as well as before—I just expect to be sore for a few days after a hard game."

Brent is planning to graduate from Kansas and pursue a job in radio broadcasting. After his injury, Brent says he remains especially proud of his service and protecting his country. When asked what he would like to be remembered for, Brent answered simply, "Standing up for what is right and raising a good family."

## Q&A

What was your favorite childhood television program?  
*Salute Your Shorts*

Did you receive a Purple Heart?  
*Yes*

How did it make you feel when you received it?  
*Proud and humbled at the same time*

How do you celebrate your alive day?  
*Force my mom to buy me a Dairy Queen ice cream cake, throw a party at my house with friends, and talk to my old commanding officer who was also in the vehicle at the time of the attack*

What is your most memorable military moment?  
*When I received my Combat Infantry Badge*

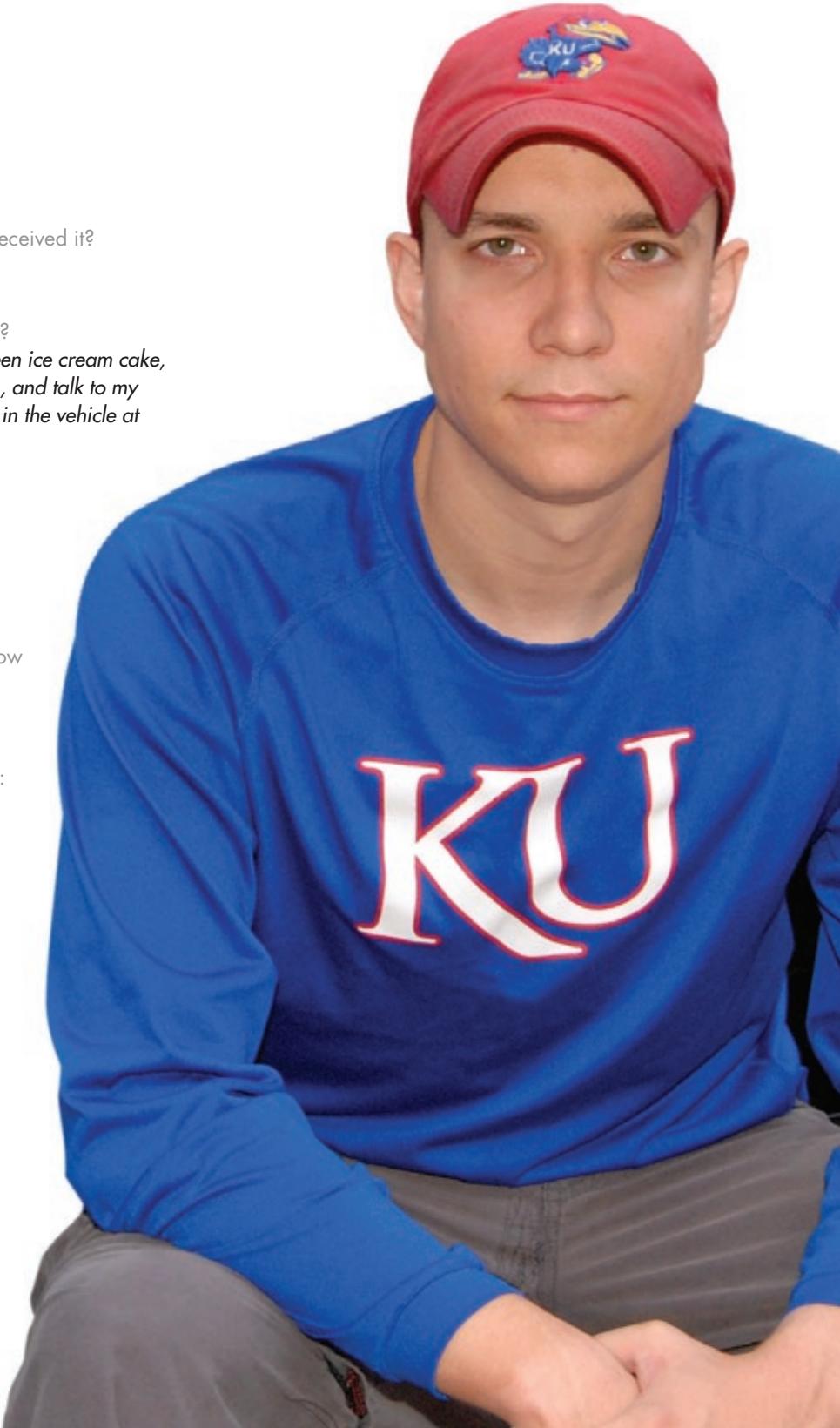
Name one thing not many people know about you:  
*I am an expert parking spot finder*

List three goals on your life's to-do list:  
*Raise a Godly family, become a Green Bay Packers shareholder, and earn a pilot's license*

What would be your dream job?  
*Being a producer for a talk radio show*

What is your favorite quote?  
*"You have only the rights you are willing to fight for"*

What do you miss most about the military?  
*Knowing you had the most important job in the world*



# TOP 10 LIST

## Top 10 Things You May Not Know About Wounded Warrior Project:

- 1 WWP just launched a Resource Center to solely support warriors, their caregivers, and their families. In addition to responding to specific internal and external resource requests, the center proactively reaches out to warriors and caregivers to engage them in available programs and services. To contact our Resource Center, call 888.WWP.ALUM (888.997.2586) or email us at [resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org).
- 2 Our Warriors to Work program assists warriors with the transition back into the civilian workforce, providing career counseling services and job placement assistance. There are over 440 warriors currently enrolled in the program and 230 companies with hiring opportunities. For more information, visit [wtow.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://wtow.woundedwarriorproject.org).



WWP founders Ryan Kelly, Heath Calhoun, and Chris Carney celebrating in the Pacific Ocean after completing one of the first, cross-country Soldier Rides.

- 3 Transition Training Academy provides warriors with the necessary information technology (IT) skills to return to the American workforce. Classes are taught in a modified setting, with a flexible schedule, to accommodate participants' medical and duty requirements. Over 746 warriors have graduated from the program since 2006. Visit [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org) for more information.
- 4 Nine of our 13 board members have Purple Hearts. All but one have served in the military.
- 5 WWP is not just for physically wounded warriors. It also supports warriors with mental injuries and combat stress.
- 6 Have you heard we're growing to support more warriors? WWP may be adding an office in a city near you! Over the next three years, WWP will be developing offices in Chicago, San Diego, San Antonio, and many more cities! Be on the look out!
- 7 WWP's purpose is not only to serve wounded warriors but also to educate the public. We have a mini-museum in Jacksonville, Florida, known as the Sacrifice Center, which is open to the public for tours.
- 8 Soldier Ride also is open to supporters! WWP now offers registered rides where family members, friends, and the community can ride along in support of the warriors. For more information, visit [soldierride.org](http://soldierride.org).
- 9 WWP does not charge warriors to participate in programs. All expenses are covered, unless noted otherwise, thanks to the generosity of our donors.
- 10 Soldier Ride was born on a barstool in Amagansett, New York by a group of civilian friends who wanted to help wounded warriors. The first Soldier Ride was a cross-country ride from New York to California.

## Welcome to Restore!

Restore is a website designed to help warriors deal with the invisible, mental health wounds of war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and combat and operational stress.

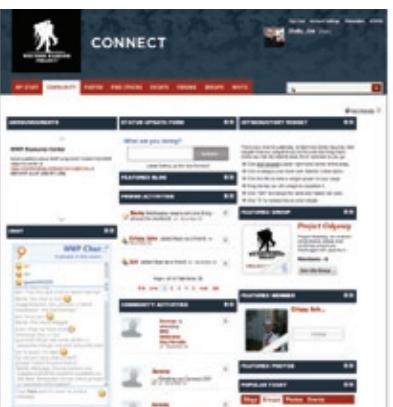
Accessible only to WWP alumni, Restore is completely private and anonymous. The interactive website offers tools and self-help strategies. It features videos of warriors sharing their personal experiences with combat and operational stress-related problems and the coping strategies they used to overcome these issues.

A key goal of Restore is to help warriors identify their stress and help evaluate their progress. Restore includes a brief self-assessment questionnaire with individualized, specific areas of concentration. For more information, visit [connect.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://connect.woundedwarriorproject.org).



A behind-the-scenes look at the filming of the Restore videos.

## WWP Connect



New and improved social network for warriors and caregivers. In the new WWP Connect environment, you will be able to create your own blog, receive email alerts about updates regarding forums or groups, upload multiple photos at once, and easily control your profile and privacy settings. Visit [connect.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://connect.woundedwarriorproject.org).

## Web Advocate

It is the first of its kind! Web Advocate is a high-tech tool that empowers WWP alumni to identify what benefits they have earned. Armed with the knowledge they gain from the site, warriors can address their benefits and compensation concerns with WWP counselors and be better informed when working with the VA. For more information, email [webadvocate@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:webadvocate@woundedwarriorproject.org) or visit [webadvocate.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://webadvocate.woundedwarriorproject.org).



## My Care Crew



Through this easy-to-use, private online community powered by Lotsa Helping Hands, caregivers, friends, and family have the ability to list needs that can be fulfilled by approved family, friends, and community volunteers. My Care Crew utilizes a virtual calendar to enlist and manage help from family and friends in daily caregiving and support tasks. Caregivers or crew coordinators can post photos and journal entries to update the community on the warrior's progress. Create a free My Care Crew community by visiting [mycarecrew.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://mycarecrew.woundedwarriorproject.org).

In October 2005, Christine Schei and her husband, Gordon, were struggling with the advice Bethesda Naval Hospital doctors had given them about their son, Eric.

Twenty-one-year-old Army Sergeant Eric Schei had been shot by a sniper in Iraq near Baghdad. The 7.62 mm bullet entered one side of his helmet and busted through the other. Doctors recommended taking Eric off life support.

"In the intensive care unit," recalls Christine, "I asked the doctor to show me how they know all Eric's brain waves were gone."

The doctor didn't have an answer.

"Then that's the end of the discussion," Christine demanded. "Don't ever mention it to me again."

But the severity of Eric's condition remained a reality. Eric's skull had been shattered. Surgeons removed part of it above his eyebrows all the way across his ears, inserting what the doctors called the largest prosthetic they'd ever created.

"Doctors told us Eric would never walk, never talk, and be in a persistent vegetative state for the rest of his life."

They were wrong, but the VA in Minneapolis still refused to take Eric back because they believed he would never get better. They advised Christine to put Eric in a home.

"They said, 'ma'am you can't do this,'" recalls Christine. "'This is way too hard,' they told me. 'He needs 24/7 care, and you've never done it. And you're not a nurse,' they said. And I said, 'I can try. We're not going to give up.'"

Christine took control, but she knew it was the beginning of a long struggle. It required faith and love from the entire Schei family. Gordon

***"They said he would never talk again; yet, now, every day he says to me, 'Mom, I love you.'"***



changed his job so he could work closer to home. And Christine took their five-year-old daughter Anneka out of kindergarten and began to home school her.

The Scheis built a therapy pool in the courtyard of their home, and they converted a bedroom into a therapy room. Christine also has Eric working with a retired nurse who is a massage therapist, and another doctor treats Eric using a hyperbaric pressure oxygen therapy chamber. Eric gets a one-hour session, five days a week.

Slowly, all of the pieces of the recovery puzzle came together.

"We can feel him trying. We're creating new pathways to his brain. Eric loves to listen to music. He loves movies. He loves to eat. He loves to go out to the mall and flirt with girls. And he loves hanging out with his brother, Deven. Eric is his big brother and his idol."

That made it even harder for Christine when Deven joined the Army. Her greatest fears were realized when she learned Deven was hurt in Afghanistan when his truck was hit by three rockets.

"He lost a chunk of his calf, needed a skin graft, was all cut up with shrapnel, and his eardrum was busted. What's worse, three discs in his back were like pancakes," Christine recalls.

The entire Schei family was devastated, especially Eric. He wanted to see his brother immediately. So they got on a plane and flew to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, where Deven was in surgery.

"At the hospital, when they rolled Deven in, he saw us and his face just lit up. He looked at the doctors and said, 'I told you my mom would be here.' Eric was smiling and crying, and I just had a big old grin on my face, because I saw his smile. And I looked down and I thought, okay, we can do this. This is okay. He's talking to me, he has a smile on his face. This is going to work out okay."

## A LIVING MIRACLE: FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

Through it all, Christine continues to count her blessings. She understands how close she came to losing both her sons.

"Deven is improving, and we expect they will medically discharge him. We're blessed that Eric is talking. He's communicating. He's expressing himself. Yes, he gets frustrated because although he's improved cognitively, his body is far behind. He's in a wheelchair. He's just starting to move his arms. But he has his sense of humor back, and he teases us – and we tease him – all the time. Best of all, he's always smiling."

Christine says hers is a simple message to other caregivers and families with loved ones struggling with traumatic brain injury (TBI): "Don't take no from anybody. Go with your gut. Reach out to other caregivers to share information. There are people out there who can help you."

She has lived it firsthand – calling Eric her miracle.

"Yes, he has proven everybody wrong. His progress continues. They said he would never talk again; yet, now, every day he says to me, 'Mom, I love you.'"

Eric, along with his mother, Christine, and father, Gordon, at the 2010 Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner in New York City.



# ALUMNI SUMMIT

## THE UNBREAKABLE BONDS OF SERVICE



From l to r: Alumni Thomas Marcum and Rodney Price team up with Maurice Jackson, WWP's senior benefits liaison, at TPC Sawgrass.

*"All of us have a common bond."*

This statement was echoed again and again by the 30 warriors and caregivers who attended Wounded Warrior Project's 2010 Alumni Summit in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

"We've all been wounded, and we're there to support each other both physically and emotionally and know that we're not alone," says Bill Roy, who was wounded in Afghanistan.

"To come out here and physically share your stories with one another where you know who's done what, where they've been, and you both shared some of the same land, you can't take that away from us," says Scott Alan Adams, Sr. "It's a bond you'll never lose between one another."

*"Whatever I can do to get the word out to the public, I'm going to do, because one voice is all it takes to start a chain of command."*

Whether it's their branch of service, deployment, or unit, these individuals are connected to one another through their military service. That bond grows even stronger amongst those wounded in the line of duty. The Alumni Summit provided a forum for warriors to gather as a unit once again, with the common goal of reaching out to the newly wounded.

"The reason I asked to come to this summit is to bring this program up to Minnesota where I'm from," adds Adams, who was wounded in Iraq. "Whatever I can do to get the word out to the public, I'm going to do, because one voice is all it takes to start a chain of command."

The focus of the Alumni Summit was to create a small army of advocates who are equipped with program knowledge and resources to raise awareness for Wounded Warrior Project in their communities across the country.

"It's therapeutic for me to be able to help other folks," says Rodney Price. "After this weekend I'm going to recruit some of the other wounded soldiers to help." Price plans to reach out to his fellow wounded at the VA in Leavenworth, Kansas.



Alumni Michael Ryan, Michael Heller, and Scott Alan Adams, Sr. team up with Jason Martinez, WWP's regional manager of health & wellness (2nd from left), at TPC Sawgrass.

The summit featured program briefs, feedback sessions, and speaker training. Motivational speaker Larry Broughton shared his story of success and explained how his military background helped him become a leader in the boutique hotel industry.

But the weekend wasn't all business. The warriors and their guests were treated to spa therapies, a casino night, and golf at The PGA TOUR's TPC Sawgrass.

"Playing golf is a bonus," says Adams. "I've met and made 28 new friends ... and that's meant more to me than anything."

The 2010 Alumni Summit brought wounded warriors together for a weekend full of forums and fun. They met with one goal in mind – to make this generation of wounded warriors the most successful in our nation's history. They not only helped in trying to make this goal a reality, but left with memories and new life-long friends.

# 2010 WARRIOR EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT:

Washington, DC

In September, Wounded Warrior Project hosted its first annual Warrior Empowerment Summit (WES) in Washington, DC. The event brought together a group of exceptional Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans who have battled chronic post-traumatic stress. Over a three-day period, these warriors and their family members discussed their experiences with combat stress, VA counseling and treatment, and the challenges and barriers to fully readjusting.

Despite their varied backgrounds and unique personal journeys, these men and women reached remarkable agreement on what VA assistance has worked, what has not, and what needs to change to help those warriors coming home behind them. What was strikingly evident was how helpful Vet Centers have been to participants, and, with only limited exceptions, how frustrating and even negative some of their experiences with VA medical facilities have been. Several important themes and avenues for change emerged from these crucial discussions.



During the 2010 WES, panel discussions were held to understand the needs of OEF/OIF veterans who are battling post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



The entire WES group in front of the US Capitol in Washington, DC.

Participants identified issues with VA outreach, noting the VA did little to bring veterans into the system or help them navigate through the many barriers and services once enrolled. One participant described VA services as "secrets spread by word of mouth" and many echoed the sentiment that they were added to the system not because of VA outreach, but instead because of their family members and peers. The group agreed that outreach to family, community, and the involvement of peer support are essential to assisting OEF/OIF veterans in their transition and along the road to recovery.

On the final day of the summit, the warriors were given the opportunity to voice their concerns and potential solutions to officials from VA, DoD, the White House, and Congress.

WWP plans to use the insight of these warriors to continue to work with Congress and the VA to implement current law in a manner that will make tangible changes to the VA system and improve the experience of veterans recovering from combat stress.

# MARINE AT HEART: SEVERA RODRIGUEZ

One out of five soldiers returning from Afghanistan suffers from it. And the estimate is as high as one in three for those returning from Iraq. Trouble is, they often suffer in silence.

Marine Corps Sergeant Severa Rodriguez knows this and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) all too well: bad dreams, scary flashbacks, insomnia, angry outbursts, and thoughts of hurting yourself or others.

"It was real hard," says Severa. "I was still kind of bitter, still kind of angry, still motivated. I loved the Marine Corps and didn't want to get out. I was supposed to reenlist."

However, a sniper attack in Fallujah left her with a bad knee. Severa injured the knee again in a motorcycle accident ten days before her third deployment to Iraq.

"I messed it up in Iraq even more. I carried my MOPP (mission oriented protective posture) pack and my sea bag at the same time even though I wasn't supposed to have any pressure on my knee. But I never complained about it. I just bit on a piece of wood and kept going."

Severa worked with a Marine post office in Iraq that sorted at least 100 shipping containers of mail a day. "Mail is a priority. Loved ones back home sending cards, letters, and care packages with jars of pickles, hot sauce, cookies, all sorts of stuff."

Her knee required surgery, so Severa was unable to reenlist like she wanted. She was discharged from the military in 2005, and went back home to Texas, trying to put it all behind her. But she

could never forget the Marine who lost his life in a mail plane that was shot down.

"When he passed away, I'm like, that's supposed to be me, not him. He has a wife and a kid. I had no kids. It just could have happened to me instead of him."

Back home, Severa discovered first-hand how difficult the adjustment to civilian life can be when you've dedicated your heart to the military.

"Civilians often don't understand you have discipline, leadership, organizing everything. I get emotional on Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and July 4. I'll defend my family and protect them because that's what I'm used to; you're supposed to protect."

Severa says her sister has helped her deal with PTSD and the isolation and challenges she faces.

"She's very motivating. 'You're a Marine,' she says, 'you don't give up.' She gets me through the day. She understands what I'm going through. My sister is very inspirational. She's encouraged me to speak to other female veterans. Because it can be hard on us."



After participating in WWP's Project Odyssey, an outdoor rehabilitative retreat for warriors dealing with combat stress, Severa enrolled in TRACK where she took college classes with other wounded warriors. The experience made her socialize more and helped to shape her post-military future.

"I really want to work with Wounded Warrior Project. The program is awesome. I want to volunteer and help other people out, so that way, I know I'm here for a cause. I'm here to help others."

# DIGI-CAMO

## So Hot Right Now

Wounded Warrior Project partnered with Under Armour® (UA), a leader in sports performance apparel, footwear, and accessories in 2009. Since then, UA has supported WWP through donations, apparel, and resources. Under Armour's Baltimore, Maryland headquarters has recently become the distribution center for WWP's backpacks, which provide comfort items to newly injured service members.

For the second year in a row, select Under Armour-sponsored NCAA football teams showed their support for Wounded Warrior Project by gearing up in customized WWP uniforms. The participating teams were Utah, Maryland, and Texas Tech. On the backs of each jersey, player names were replaced with WWP's warrior character traits: duty, honor, courage, commitment, integrity, country, and service. Nine wounded warriors served as honorary captains for the games.

"The custom uniforms and gear provide us with an opportunity to engage college football fans and athletes, while uniting together to support the overall mission of Wounded Warrior Project," said Kevin Plank, founder and CEO of Under Armour. "We are committed to honoring our nation's troops who risk their lives protecting our house and we are proud to support them through these games and beyond."



During the University of Utah home football game on November 6, 2011, U.S. Army Major Ted Putnam, and retired Army veterans Terrance Peterson and Adam Mattis were honorary captains for the pregame coin toss. All three men were injured in the same IED explosion in 2005.

All uniforms and gear were auctioned off after the games and proceeds went to WWP. For more information or to purchase gear, visit [underarmour.com/freedom](http://underarmour.com/freedom).

# FREEZE FRAME



Wounded warrior David Guzman, who suffers from PTSD and TBI, was honored before the Texas Christian University football game in Fort Worth, Texas on September 11, 2010.



## WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT® A L U M N I

### Enter to Win

Submit a photo of yourself wearing WWP logo apparel. The most interesting pictures will be featured in our electronic newsletter and in the After Action Report. At the end of the year, alumni will vote for the best picture to win. Good Luck!

Submit your photos to  
[alumni@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:alumni@woundedwarriorproject.org)

# TRACK: SAN ANTONIO



Bottom Left: James Rivera and Sevara Rodriguez join their peers at TRACK Cohort 3 Graduation in Jacksonville, Florida.

The first TRACK cohort in San Antonio, Texas will report to a brand new facility on January 3, 2011, home to both TRACK, the first education center in the nation designed specifically for wounded warriors; and program staff to serve warriors throughout the region. WWP's first TRACK program in Jacksonville, Florida, began in August 2008, and has educated five cohorts totalling 70 warriors from across the country.

WWP is focused on opening this innovative education and workplace-training program to as many warriors as possible who meet the admissions criteria. In the yearlong TRACK program, warriors learn as a cohort and can earn up to 24 credit hours with Florida State College at Jacksonville or the Alamo Colleges in San Antonio. Warriors earn a student grant while they progress through the TRACK program and follow a curriculum centered on healing and restoring a warrior's mind, body, and spirit.

A new TRACK cohort reports every August and January. The program consists of two academic semesters and a three- to four-month externship focused on workplace training in the warrior's field of interest. In addition to college courses, warriors receive physical fitness training, peak performance training, financial guidance, and other life skills lessons. The cohort model helps veterans transition to civilian life amongst their peers, helping to ease the adjustment to college and the workplace.

The addition of the San Antonio facility will allow more warriors to experience this life-changing program and achieve success in the college classroom and civilian workplace.

Please refer to [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org) for more information, including admissions criteria, or, email [track@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:track@woundedwarriorproject.org).

TRACK

# CONQUERING KILIMANJARO



Dan Nevins and Neil Duncan celebrate at the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro after a six-day climb to the top, which tested their stamina and their prosthetics.

Photo credit: Disabled Sports USA