

Injured Service Members Test Their Artistic Talents for Valentine's Day

Pizza and Paint Make for a Romantic and Fun Evening for Wounded Warrior Project Alumni

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Feb. 14, 2016 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Wine and pizza may not sound like the most romantic of meals, but for a group of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Alumni and their significant others, it was a date night to remember. 20 couples recently gathered at Wine and Canvas in Jacksonville for an early Valentine's Day celebration of food, drink, and painting, sponsored by WWP.

Marine Corps veteran and WWP Alumnus Lewis Taylor attended the event with his wife, where they were able to reconnect with local friends.

"We sat down and chatted with everyone there. We saw old friends, and as we got to know the other couples there we found some had come a long way to meet new veterans and spend time together," said Lewis.

WWP Alumni Josh and Sara Wathen own and operate Wine and Canvas, and Lewis was happy to give them his support.

"Painting was a new experience for me. Not many guys do artsy stuff like paint or make pottery, but I loved spending time with my wife," said Lewis. "But the shop is veteran owned and I was just happy to have a chance to support their business."

The couples were tasked with completing a joint picture, made of two canvases. The finished product was the Jacksonville skyline at night, with a heart in the stars that would connect when the couple's paintings came together.

"The owners came out and painted two canvases and then asked the couples to paint one half each. The end result was two canvases making one painting," said Lewis. "By the end of the night, everyone was eating pizza, drinking wine, and laughing pretty hard. It's hard not have a great time with such a relaxed atmosphere and an amazing group of people."

Many wounded service members face similar challenges adjusting to their injuries and civilian life. The WWP Alumni program creates support through shared experiences and builds camaraderie by bringing injured veterans together. By bonding through events, these veterans learn they are not alone. Currently, more than 100,000 wounded service members, their family members, and caregivers receive support each year through free WWP programs and services.

"The WWP staff are always so passionate about how they help the injured veterans they serve," said Lewis. "I'm always glad to see how much the WWP staff care for us. They planned an amazing evening and made sure that we all enjoyed ourselves and our time with the other couples there. Having that ability to socialize and spend time with other veterans is always such an amazing experience."

The Alumni program is one of 20 free programs and services WWP offers wounded veterans, caregivers, and families. Most recently, WWP launched Warrior Care Network™, a \$100 million investment to battle the invisible wounds of war and reach those who might otherwise go untreated. This is a first-of-its-kind

partnership between WWP and four national academic medical centers of excellence including Emory Healthcare, Massachusetts General Hospital, Rush University Medical Center, and UCLA Health to connect thousands of injured warriors with world-class care.

Since being founded in 2003, WWP has evolved its programs and services to meet the growing needs of the constituency it serves. Through a high-touch and interactive approach, the WWP vision is to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation's history.

About Wounded Warrior Project

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. WWP's 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.


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