

Wounded Warrior Project Honors Peer Leader of the Year



Army veteran Tito Cortez was named Wounded Warrior Project's Rusty Baggett Peer Leader of the Year.

Texas Veteran Recognized for Selflessness

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., June 12, 2024 [/PRNewswire/](#) -- Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) announced Ernestor "Tito" Cortez is the Rusty Baggett Peer Leader of the year. Tito served 24 years in the Army, but caring for his troops didn't end when he retired from the military. Tito regularly demonstrates his selfless dedication as a peer leader for WWP™ serves as a selfless leader.

Last year, Tito joined other WWP-registered veterans to tackle the Bataan Memorial Death March, a way to commemorate the U.S. and Filipino soldiers who were captured by Japanese troops and forced to march to confinement camps during World War II. Tito finished the march earlier than the other warriors. WWP teammates noticed that Tito did not head inside after finishing. He waited at the finish line for every other warrior to finish the 26-mile trek. That wait lasted five hours.

"It's not about how you finish, it's about who you bring with you," Tito said after being surprised with the honor.

Tito first became a peer support leader in 2018. Since then, he has worked to live the logo, helping carry fellow veterans and the organization that aided him in his transition to civilian life.

"Wounded Warrior Project helped me get back out there. At first, there is denial – I don't need help – but truly deep down, I did need help."

It isn't just direct support. Tito has also taken part in roundtables with WWP's advocacy team to inform Congress and other government agencies about the challenges warriors face.

WWP started the Rusty Baggett Peer Leader of the Year Award in 2021 to honor and empower wounded warriors who give back through volunteering.

The award is named after Rusty Baggett, an Army veteran and WWP teammate. Rusty, who passed away in 2020, was one of the organizations first peer support leaders. The award helps honor his service to fellow veterans.

WWP nominates more than a dozen peer leaders around the nation. Four are selected to be regional winners, with one being

honored as the national Rusty Baggett Peer Leader of the Year.

Warriors Tito Cortez, Ysabel Cardona, Barbara Tompkins, and Dexter Thames were honorees for the Rusty Baggett Peer Leader of the Year Awards.

This year's honorees are:

- **West:** Ysabel Cardona
- **Central:** Ernestor "Tito" Cortez
- **Northeast:** Barbara Tompkins
- **Southeast:** Dexter Thames

For Tito, the honor reminds him to keep pushing to help more warriors.

"It tells me I am doing the right thing," Tito said. "Volunteering helps me in a lot of ways. It's life-changing to work with fellow warriors."

WWP has more than 100 peer support groups around the nation. These veteran-led groups meet regularly to rekindle the camaraderie lost when these men and women left military service. The support helps create communities of veterans around the country.

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. [Learn more.](#)

For further information: Rob Louis -- Public Relations, rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org, 904.627.0432

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/2024-06-12-Wounded-Warrior-Project-Honors-Peer-Leader-of-the-Year>