

Wounded Warrior Project Honors Peer Leader of Year



Warrior Chante Franco was named WWP's Peer Leader of the Year for 2026.

Veterans Charity Spotlights Top Volunteer

JACKSONVILLE, FL (July 14, 2026) – Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) named Army veteran Chante Franco it's 2026 Rusty Baggett Peer Leader of the Year.

During her time volunteering for WWP®, Chante has gone out of her way to support her fellow veterans, including helping warriors register with the organization and assisting another veteran with a traumatic brain injury to keep them engaged.

"Chante embodies everything Wounded Warrior Project is about," WWP CEO Walt Piatt said.

"Her kindness has a great impact on so many. It is very moving to hear her say that 'helping others helps her.'"

Her honor also led to a special experience – being a guest at this year's Indianapolis 500.

"I absolutely loved the energy and the vibe of Indianapolis during the event," Chante said. "The intensity of the fans during the race was amazing and somehow inviting."

WWP strategic partner Bridgestone® invited Chante through its brand Firestone®, a sponsor of the IndyCar race series. Along with the race, Chante picked a Taste of Indianapolis experience and had dinner with the drivers.

"They had so much energy," Chante said. "They were so generous with their time, and taught me so much about the sport."

She is among four regional winners of the annual award, with one honoree selected for national recognition. The award is named for Army veteran Rusty Baggett, one of WWP's first peer leaders who later became a teammate before his passing in 2020.

Army veteran Chante Franco (second from right) is the national WWP Peer Support leader of the Year.

REGIONAL WINNERS:

- **Northeast:** Chante Franco **
- **Southeast:** Joel Grace
- **Central:** Lisa Smith-Marshall
- **West:** Dan Riem

*** National Winner*

WWP has more than [100 peer support groups](#), from Alaska to Puerto Rico. Peer leaders are trained to host monthly gatherings to empower warriors to help one another.

"I love volunteering," Chante said. "Wounded Warrior Project gave me my life back; I wanted to repay that."

Her dedication to fellow warriors is inspiring.

"Chante has moved us beyond connecting to belonging together," Walt said. "That takes a special person."

Chante also used her experience at the Indy 500 to promote WWP.

"I was able to sign three veterans up with Wounded Warrior Project."

Connection saves lives. Learn how WWP is helping [bring veterans together here](#).

Contact: Rob Louis, Public Relations, rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org, 904.627.0432

About Wounded Warrior Project

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is the nation's leading veterans service organization, focused on the total well-being of veterans, service members, and their families. Our programs, advocacy, and awareness efforts help warriors thrive, provide essential lifelines to families and caregivers, and prevent veteran suicides. [Learn more about Wounded Warrior Project.](#)

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