

## Wounded Warrior Project Recognizes Exceptional Efforts of Warrior, Supporters



**JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Oct. 11, 2021** — Each year Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) hosts a special celebration to showcase warriors' transitions to civilian life and recognize supporters that honor and empower wounded veterans. This year's Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner may not have taken place in person, but the impact the 2021 awardees have had on wounded veterans remains strong.

WWP recognizes the following awardees:

### **2021 Courage Award: Ryan Kules**

#### ***Recognizing a warrior or family member who best exemplifies bravery, courage, and strength***

On Nov. 29, 2005, Army Capt. (Ret.) Ryan Kules' vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED) while his unit was returning to base. The blast killed two soldiers in Ryan's vehicle and resulted in the amputation of his right arm and left leg.

“Knowing that two of my guys had not made it back I think really drove me to realize that I had a chance to move forward,” Ryan said. “If I was to squander that or have what happened to me get in my way, that would be a discredit to them and all they have given.”

Ryan first connected with WWP when he received a backpack full of comfort care items while recovering from his injuries at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in 2005. He now serves as the director of [Project Odyssey®](#), a WWP [veteran mental health program](#) that uses adventure-based learning to help warriors with invisible wounds.

Ryan was also instrumental in getting the [Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing \(SAH\) Improvement Act of 2019](#) passed through Congress. The law reinstates SAH benefits to eligible veterans every 10 years to accommodate moving and normal life changes.

“Being able to have that impact on folks, it makes me feel good and very much fills that bucket of knowing you’re doing the right thing,” Ryan said.

## **2021 Empowerment Award: National Football League**

### *Recognizing an organization’s exceptional effort to support WWP injured veterans and their families*

The NFL has supported WWP since the inception of its [Salute to Service](#) campaign in 2011, which honors military service members, veterans, and their families. For more than a decade, the NFL has engaged warriors and their families at a variety of events, including the [Super Bowl](#), [Pro Bowl](#), and [NFL Draft](#).

It has also responded to a variety of WWP needs, including recently during the pandemic.

“The NFL came forward with additional funding so that we could increase our mental health services that were so desperately in need. They also garnered support from their players and NFL legends to surprise and delight many of our warriors virtually,” said WWP Chief Development Officer Gary Corless. “So much has happened in the last 10 years but I honestly think our partnership and their commitment to those who’ve served and sacrificed is increasing every year.”

The NFL remains one of WWP’s longest-standing corporate partners.

“I’m really excited to see our partnership continue to grow,” said NFL Senior Director of Social Responsibility Melissa Pardi. “I think there’s so much more we can do together. We’re going to continue to integrate warriors in our events, we’re going to continue to honor them, and we’re going to continue to get out there and play some football.”

## **2021 Service Award: Walter Osborn (posthumously)**

### *Honors community supporters who have gone above and beyond in their efforts to serve warriors*

Walter and his wife Grace hosted the Patriots Night Dinner in Staten Island, New York, for 13 years, which was the longest running community fundraising event for WWP. The event raised more than \$300,000 for injured veterans and their families. Walter, an Air Force veteran, passed away on his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday in September of 2019.

Wounded warrior, National Guard veteran, and fellow Staten Island native Antoinette Wallace knew Walter well and attended his event often.

“I just think of all the lives that have been changed and touched. It just warms my heart,” Antoinette said. “I get goosebumps thinking about it.”

Grace and the many volunteers of the Patriots Night Dinner plan to host the event in Walter’s memory.

“I think sometimes you have to take what God gives you and be thankful that you can do what you can do,” Grace said. “But at least you’re giving back. That’s what my husband did — he gave back with his heart.”

Stay tuned to the Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner<sup>®</sup> [website](#) for updates on the 2022 event and how you can get involved.

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### **About Wounded Warrior Project**

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

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