

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### ***Respite for Combat Vets -- Medicine for Wounded Souls***

July 6, 2015 --- It didn't take long for emotions to kick in at the Warfighters Independence Weekend (WIW) on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend in Peabody, MA. Combat veterans and Gold Star families (of those killed in action) attending the charity respite started sharing tears and smiles immediately.

Some of the guests hadn't seen each other since they redeployed from their battle space in Afghanistan. Gold Star moms, wives, girlfriends, sisters, brothers and children hadn't met each other. It was definitely medicine for their wounded souls.

The event was organized by a group called Warfighters Anonymous (WA) and was the brainchild of SSG Justin Coletti, one of WA's founders. SSG Coletti was formerly of the 2-87 Infantry, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, a unit which had been through four very difficult combat tours in Afghanistan (Justin had been in two of them) and had lost many of America's best on the battlefield and also later to suicide. He thought WIW would bring the men together, along with the families of those lost, and help them all heal.

"Our event is designed to be group therapy without the therapist," said Coletti. "We wanted to create a family-like environment where everyone can be themselves, all while seeking to heal and move forward."

Coletti had reached out to AaSP's President, Alan Krutchkoff, and asked him to help WA fund this watershed event for the Troops. It was right in AaSP's wheelhouse on so many levels.

"Our brave men and women are having such a tough time transitioning from combat to civilian life," said Krutchkoff. "When Justin came to us and asked for help, we jumped at the chance!"

"Too many are taking the suicide route and leaving even more tragedy behind them. Our charity sees so many that just can't adjust, get a job, hold a job or make ends meet. It's a national tragedy."

Soldiers and Gold Star families came in from across the country, from as far away as Hawaii. They were picked up at the airport and brought to the Peabody Marriott Hotel, which opened its doors for the Vets and provided an environment where everyone was comfortable. All at a significantly low rate to keep costs down.

On Friday night, the Peabody Historical Society opened its doors at their historic Smith's Barn on Brooksby Farm, where some of America's first settlers from England built their homes in the 1600s. Guests were greeted with special mementoes and various donated gifts. A buffet dinner was served. The National Anthem was sung by retired Raleigh, NC, fire captain, John "Woody" Woodall. Roll call was taken, including the names of the missing and then came one of the most important aspects of the evening – the Spartan Pledge.

The Spartan Pledge is a short oath given to ensure that those who consider suicide call the person who administered the oath before taking drastic action. It's a way to add a layer of safety to the mind of a fragile person. The Pledge was administered by SGT Jeff Barillaro, aka "Soldier Hard," a Warfighter hip hop artist whose music deals with the traumas of war. Soldier Hard, who came in from California, released a new album on July 4<sup>th</sup>, while at the event. No one who has taken the pledge has yet to commit suicide, reported Barillaro.

The event was full of surprises and great moments. A Sheriff's deputy from Richmond County, NC – Sgt Travis Bohman – drove up from North Carolina with "Dasty," his tracking K-9. Dasty had been SSG Coletti's working dog while in Afghanistan. It was an amazing reunion.

On Saturday, July 4, there was a Bar-B-Q at Coletti's grandparents' home in Peabody. Speeches were made, toasts were hoisted and a special guest was introduced -- Medal of Honor recipient SSG Ty Carter. Arriving quietly as an "ordinary Joe" on Thursday, Carter was not officially introduced until Saturday during the Bar-B-Q. There he donned his Medal and took pictures with anyone who wished, visited Justin's Grandfather in a sub acute care facility and shared experiences with the guests.

The number of suicides by Veterans is reported to be 22 a day (that doesn't include three states). That's one too many! Another suicide by an active duty member of the armed forces happens every day. And there are probably tens of thousands of men and women dealing with the after effects of war through Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The transition to civilian life from combat is difficult at best.

As a watershed event, it is hoped that WIW will start a trend throughout the country. The bonds and networks started here will provide our Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen with an outlet to talk about their issues and get help when needed. It's medicine for wounded souls.

**About Adopt-a-Soldier Platoon, Inc.** (AaSP): AaSP is an all-volunteer, NJ-based, 501 (c)(3) public charity whose mission is to improve the morale of the U.S. Military and their families. It devotes its resources to sending care packages to troops in harm's way; providing Morale Welfare Recreation trips overseas and to domestic military installations; and helping returning Wounded Veterans with appropriate and necessary assistance to help them heal and deal with the transition to civilian life from combat. 100% of all monies for our Wounded Veterans go to that purpose. All others programs operate on approximately 95 cents/\$1.

**About Warfighters Anonymous (WA):** WA is an all-volunteer group comprising combat veterans and others dedicated to helping those who have been to war. Its main current ambition is to curtail Veterans' suicide and provide a network for those Veterans dealing with emotions from wounded souls.

Pix and cut lines:

WIW Group Shot Close –

*WIW attendees gather for group picture. In front row, Sheriff's Deputy Sgt Travis Bohman and K-9 "Dasty" with event organizer SSG Justin Coletti smile for camera.*

WIW Committee –

*Committee from Adopt-a-Soldier Platoon and Warfighters Anonymous:*

*Top (L2R) – Diane Casey, Lauren Costa, Capt. "Woody" Woodall, Allan Virginia, SSG Justin Coletti, Rich Schultz, Jose' Santiago, Ralph Romine; Bottom – Alan Krutchkoff, Joan Virginia, Mary-Edna Krutchkoff, Kim Daves*

WIW SpartanPledge -

*SGT Jeff "Soldier Hard" Barillaro administers Spartan Pledge to US Army Veteran SGT Joshua Furlong.*

WIW Toast –

*Veterans and Gold Star wives toast to their loved ones.*

WIW Warfighters in Field

*Warfighters join with Gold Star Daughter in field. Event organizer, SSG Justin Coletti in front row with black t-shirt.*

WIW ChrisTyDJAnthony

*SSG Ty Carter, MoH, with several Warfighters*