

PATRIOT HILLS

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SARANAC LAKE

Reintegration, Transition & Therapeutic Healing for America's Warriors and Veterans

ISSUE

"As long as I am Secretary of Defense, I will continue to work to improve treatment and care for every single wounded warrior."

Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense

The transformation of the U.S. Army Warrior Care program began in April 2007, with the development of the Army Medical Action Plan (AMAP). Over the past few years, the Military has institutionalized numerous programs to enhance the care and the transition for wounded warriors back to duty or into civilian life as a productive service member or veteran. These initiatives are important first steps, but more reintegration and reentry support services are needed for active military personnel, reservists, veterans and their families.

NEED

Because of an increased number of multiple deployments and related stressors, our military personnel and their families continue to suffer increased rates of divorce, suicide, spousal abuse, child neglect, depression and substance abuse. According to the RAND Corporation, almost 40% of current service men and women coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or some other form of mental, emotional or psychological damage.

Veterans, as well as active duty Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen, are having increased difficulty assimilating back into mainstream culture. One of the consequences of the current all-voluntary military is that fewer families share the experience of a returning veteran. This compounds the difficulties of reintegration and assimilation into a non-military culture. Often our returning military personnel feel isolated and alone when dealing with their unique reintegration and reentry issues.

ACTION

In response to the growing need felt by our service personnel, communities and state, Patriot Hills of New York, Inc. (PHNY) was founded as a not-for-profit Soldier and Family Initiative. The goal of PHNY is to develop the first respite center of excellence for the transition, reintegration and therapeutic healing for our Nation's warriors, veterans and their families to serve the Northeast Region of the United States. This initiative has been endorsed by the following military organizations:

- Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States of America
- Squadron A Foundation, NYC
- The Greater Statue of Liberty Chapter, Association of the United States Army Metro New York, Long Island;
- Chapter 120, The Retired Enlisted Association
- The Eastern Chapter of American Military Retired Association

Having developed the model for a comprehensive respite, reintegration and reentry facility, PHNY concluded that a critical element for success was locating it in a community prepared and eager to embrace returning warriors, veterans and their families. PHNY identified Saranac Lake, New York, as that community, based on Saranac Lake's continuing work and innovation in Soldier and Veteran care. And, a new partnership, Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake was forged to establish the facility.

Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake will be a truly comprehensive facility that knits together a broad based consortium of existing community partners to serve our warriors and their families. These partners include: medical and healthcare facilities; addiction and physical rehabilitation facilities; colleges and universities; veteran organizations; nationally recognized experts in Soldier reintegration and reentry; and private industry. (See attached chart)

Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake will provide a healing and nurturing experience where Veterans and military families will have an opportunity to work and recreate with fellow warriors and peers in a cathartic atmosphere of respect, admiration and understanding. This experience will be provided in a retreat setting and focus on comprehensive soldier fitness, suicide prevention and marriage counseling, leadership training, grief counseling and youth programs as well as anger management and other issues commonly associated with military personnel and their families. Programs will include: vocational training; job placement; career enhancement; Veteran employment; as well as year-round indoor and outdoor recreation in the Adirondack Mountains.

As a holistic wellness center, Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake is bringing a new type of treatment paradigm to our nation's warriors and their families. By partnering with an open community chosen for its healing tradition and nurturing support, Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake will provide a unique opportunity that will increase Soldier resiliency, prepare families for deployments, assist our veterans in overcoming trauma, and help Soldiers cope with their reintegration and reentry issues. Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake represents an unprecedented model for warrior wellness which can be replicated across America.

The Patriot Hills model will have significant multi-level economic impact through regional job creation and job education, training, and career development for soldiers and veterans. We have retained professional consultants to measure the economic impact of this project on the region and we will provide those results when complete.

NEXT STEPS

Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake is seeking funding from both public and private sources. It is working closely with private corporations, veterans groups and legislators to establish services during 2010 within the Saranac Lake community. It is our hope to have the Patriot Hills at Saranac Lake retreat and integration facility fully operational by 2013.

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