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PATRIOT OUTREACH AND CERNER WORK TO HELP VETERANS WITH PTSD

Article jennifer Higgins and Rachel Murphy Photography Provided



The Vietnam conflict is not an easy subject for most veterans to discuss. Scott Blaney can attest to that. The 30-year Army veteran spent time in Vietnam and in Desert Storm. Although he doesn't talk much about his experiences, the wounds are there, as his wife, Carol, can attest.

Healing those wounds and the other effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is the mission of Patriot Outreach and one application of Join-Up, a program run by the 'Horse Whisperer' Monty Roberts and intended to teach gentle, effective alternatives to

violence and force. COO and CFO of Patriot Outreach, Jack Shafferman, Army Colonel (Ret.), saw the benefits of the Join-Up program first hand and has facilitated area veterans to take part in the program through the financial support from Patriot Outreach.

“Patriot Outreach has partnered with Monty’s Learning Center to provide instructors, courses for training equine operations, standards of operation, and skill PTSD workshop for our warriors. We first heard about it six years ago. After visiting and checking out the program, we really liked the program Monty was doing. We provide funds for warriors with PTSD to go to the ranch for help. As one recent attendee said, ‘You experience firsthand the use of non-verbal language with horses, a proven coping strategy to combat daily stress and PTSI’, ” Shafferman says.

That nonverbal communication is what Roberts is known for. His ranch, Flag Up Farms in Solvang, California, provides a calm, peaceful setting for people that wish to complete the Join-Up program., which involves working one on one with a horse, learning nonverbal cues and communicating with the animal.

Carol and Scott Blaney enjoyed the program recently. They were each paired with a horse and learned to work with the horse to calm their minds, still their fears and work with the animal toward a common goal. The program encourages the development of trust and acceptance by teaching the use of nonverbal skills with the horses.

Beyond the work with the horses, Join-Up creates a safe place for veterans to speak freely about their experiences.

“There was a bunkhouse that single soldiers could stay in and everyone gathered in the main house in the evenings. That’s when people really opened up about their experiences. Monty really made it a welcoming experience for everyone and people that wouldn’t normally talk about their experiences, like Scott, felt comfortable enough to share. It was a really amazing experience,” says Carol.

Health information technologies company Cerner, based in Kansas City, recently reached out to Shafferman, looking to further help the community and make a deeper impact with the level of care received by service members and veterans. Out of a list of 10 potential programs Shafferman was looking to receive funding for, Join-Up was the one selected by Cerner. With Cerner’s help, Shafferman hopes to build more ranches and is appreciative of their support.

“Although Cerner has always held a deep interest in helping people outside of traditional care settings like their doctor’s office or a hospital,” Travis Dalton, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Federal Services, says, “we want to focus even more on our nation’s service members and veterans. Since we began working with the U.S. Department of Defense a few years ago, we see daily what these service members go

through so have developed an even deeper passion for helping them, especially after they leave service. Jack's group is unique and we were very inspired by his passion and mission."

While Patriot Outreach typically sends veterans to established programs for help, they are interested in building more ranches in the immediate region that can continue the work that Monty Roberts' program has begun. With their commitment to serving our veteran community and the support of forward thinking companies like Cerner, Patriot Outreach is making strides toward mental health for those that have given the most.

For more information on how to help and learn more about Patriot Outreach, visit **PatriotOutreach.org** (<http://www.PatriotOutreach.org>). To learn more about Monty Roberts and Join-Up, visit **MontyRoberts.com** (<http://www.MontyRoberts.com>).

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