

Wounded Warriors Treated to Chesapeake Cruise

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Ever wonder what you might do for a wounded veteran of our armed forces? Ever think to yourself, "If only I could help, in some small way, to bring a smile to those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom"? For the Northern Virginia Sail and Power Squadron, a Division of the United States Power Squadron, there was an answer right at our doorstep, or should I say, at our marinas.

Working with Walter Reed Army Medical Center and in cooperation with the Chesapeake Yacht Club in Shady Side, MD, we offered boat rides to a group of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans over Labor Day weekend. Despite threatening weather conditions, 18 soldiers and family members showed up for our gala event. Our guests were greeted by a large welcoming group and each was given a wonderful box lunch. The weather turned out to be beautiful all afternoon, and the hearts of everyone involved grew in size and depth as friendships were formed and stories of personal tragedies were shared.

Some made it over to St Michaels, others up to Annapolis for a cruise around the Naval Academy, while others enjoyed the Rhode and West Rivers and their tributaries, and a few toured the lighthouses on the nearby Chesapeake Bay. The soldiers truly enjoyed the relaxing rides on our sailboats and power boats.

The soldiers appreciated the experience. Most were patients at Walter Reed for about a year; many were looking forward to heading home within the coming months. The average stay at Walter Reed for returning warriors is eighteen months.

According to Walter Reed officials, boat rides have become one of the favorite recreational activities of our soldiers - one service member commented to his advisor: "Since returning home from Iraq over 8 months ago I had not slept at night nor been able to relax in the day, but following that boat ride I slept my first good night's sleep and I can relax again."

Upon returning from our voyages, our guests were treated to a wonderful evening including dinner, friendship and enough great food to feed an army! (Pun intended.) Following dinner the soldiers were given boating shirts and hats donated by the Chesapeake Yacht Club's Auxiliary.

As the evening drew to a close, the soldiers expressed appreciation for the thoughtfulness and kindness of the Power Squadron and the Club, words were shared and hugs were exchanged. No one wanted to depart, neither the soldiers nor the captains and crew. There was hugging of old timers and young soldiers bonded by the unspoken experiences of combat separated by generations, or simply admiration of our service men and women for their courage in this day of an all volunteer force. It was enough to make this grown man tear up and be proud of it for what it meant!

The United States Power Squadron is dedicated to boating safety. For information on the courses we offer to promote boating safety, please contact our Education Officer at runis_320@yahoo.com.