



## Marin residents promote nonprofit to aid traumatized combat veterans

Brent Ainsworth

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Jeff Tarran (left) and Louis Briones are helping a new nonprofit that helps military combat veterans as they deal with post-traumatic stress disorder. (IJ photo/Frankie Frost)

If two Marin men have their way, combat veterans who have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder will be coaxed out of their depression with nature outings, yoga and meditation through a nonprofit they have helped establish.

"It's very Marin-sounding, I know," said Sausalito resident Louis Briones, the CEO of San Francisco advertising agency Wayfinder.

Briones and Terra Linda resident Jeff Tarran, Wayfinder's president, are key players in Expedition Balance, set up two years ago by several veterans to

soothe the stress of wartime experience. Briones' cousin, Carl Salazar of Houston, is the founder and chairman.

Briones and Tarran believe the beauty of Marin County could serve as the perfect backdrop for the Expedition Balance program. So far, six-day outings only have taken place in Texas.

"With all our parks here, it seems like the perfect place to do something like this," Briones said.

Salazar attended the U.S. Naval Academy and served 11 years, including time on the USS Ford during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf. Briones said it didn't take much convincing for him to commit to a position on the nonprofit's board of directors.

"With America involved in two wars, it was a good time to get involved," said Briones, who did not serve in the armed forces. "On a personal level, I want to do anything I can to help people coming back from war with some pretty big problems. We owe it to them."

The Rand Corp. has reported that 300,000 military personnel who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan have PTSD or major depression. Expedition Balance's directors believe the constant threat of civilian attacks take the stress to an unprecedented level and that psychological tolls of the wars will be disproportionate to physical injuries.

Walter Reed Army Medical Center and its associated health care system serve more than 150,000 veterans; a study by the center showed the positive effects of yoga and nature treatments in reducing combat-triggered stress. Expedition Balance's holistic approach, which includes time with peers, relaxation methods and focus on proper diet, is

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Tarran, whose father was an Air Force captain, said Wayfinder adopted Expedition Balance because it was natural to use its marketing skills to get the word out about fundraising efforts.

The ad firm is using social media to entice contributions, Tarran said. About \$20,000 has been raised so far. "Our whole agency is galvanized behind this effort," he said.

Expedition Balance has long-range plans to have outings for veterans all over the United States, but Briones wants Marin to become a standard location for such outings sooner rather than later.

"Natural beauty is a big part of the program, and we certainly have that here," he said. "Yoga is especially popular in Northern California and I think the idea (behind Expedition Balance) would be received well here."

Novato's John Sammons, an official with the Military Officers Association of America and a 30-year U.S. Navy veteran who served in Vietnam, said he can't conceive what the men and women of the armed forces are going through in Iraq and Afghanistan, but he knows first-hand about PTSD. He said the only help he got was "marrying a strong woman."

Sammons called the Army's record of dealing with PTSD "abysmal" and has hopes that Expedition Balance will fill a void.

"If it works, it would be a great thing," he said. "Post-Vietnam, we had nothing. This could be super for them."

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