

## Eagles Summit Ranch offers healing for WTB Soldiers

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Troubled by what most had seen at war and recovering from their injuries, 11 Fort Carson Warrior Transition Battalion Soldiers found refuge and solace last month in the Mountains of Colorado.

Nestled in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, just minutes away from the small town of Westcliffe, is Eagles Summit Ranch.

The ranch was established by Vietnam War veteran Dave Roever and associates in September 2004 and serves to help wounded warriors with their recovery. The Tragedy to Triumph Certificate Program offered there helps Soldiers focus on the possibilities their futures hold.



WTB Soldiers listened intently as ranch volunteer Beverly Shoemaker spoke about overcoming tragedy. Shoemaker's family endured significant trauma after a car accident caused by a drunken driver.

The WTB Soldiers had vague expectations as they began their week at the Ranch. All expected a good time with plenty of relaxation, but each received so much more.

"Initially I expected to get teaching on coping skills," said Pfc. Kyle A. Bookout. "But after four days I received inspiration and hope about life, that I can still achieve my goals and build a better future."

The recovery program focuses on helping the Soldiers gain the confidence to tell their personal stories in a group setting.

A series of four classes teaches the participants the fundamentals of public speaking; meanwhile emotional healing is taking place.

"There is something very real and medicinal about sharing your personal tragedies with others," said Academic Dean Matt Roever.

The program theorizes that by having Soldiers release their traumatic experiences through public speaking, they once again are able to focus on their futures.

Concentrating on an optimistic future enables people to overcome many of life's unfortunate events. "No other organization does what we do for the Soldiers; what we have here works," said Dave Roever.

The training sessions were held in the mornings, typically ending just as lunch was served. Throughout mealtimes the Soldiers enjoyed each other's camaraderie and laughter. By early afternoon they participated in numerous activities including bowling, touring a nearby attraction, and horseback and ATV riding. These activities allowed the Soldiers to experience the beauty around them and enjoy the company of townspeople.

"This place is a place of healing," said WTB cadre' member Staff Sgt. Andrew S. Peery. "The people here genuinely care about you... It's like having family when you're so far from home."

Peery attended the program twice, once as a wounded warrior.

"Like everyone else, at first I didn't know what to expect when I arrived at the ranch. But by the end of the week I was able to finally open up -- after 10 years -- about the things I had seen and gone through as a sniper; I returned home a calmer man," said Peery.

Because of his positive experience, he eagerly volunteered to return for this trip and guide more Soldiers through the process.



WTB Soldiers received certificates for completing the Tragedy to Triumph Certificate Program at Eagles Summit Ranch. Founder and Vietnam veteran Dave Roever, takes a moment to speak about the milestones these Soldiers reached in their journey to recovery while at the ranch.

At the end of the five-day program, the Soldiers presented their emotion packed, personal stories to their fellow participants, WTB and ranch cadre', and residents of Westcliffe during a pot-luck, barbecue dinner. Tears traced down many cheeks as wounded souls mended.

"It is a very emotional thing," said WTB cadre' member Master Sgt. John J. Brinkman, of the week-long program. "I don't consider myself an emotional guy, but I was touched hearing what the Soldiers went through."

By the end of the program, those who came to the Ranch with apprehension were amazed at the transformation within themselves.

"This week helped me dissect my life," reflected Spc. Daniel R. Updike. "I've learned that I can speak to people about [my circumstances]. This trip came at the right time in my life. It helped me confirm that it's alright to be emotional. It feels good."

For these WTB Soldiers the Eagles Summit Ranch and its Tragedy to Triumph Certificate Program was successful in giving them the tools to improve their lives.

"More than anything, I want these men and women to leave with a sense of honor and appreciation. That we appreciate them," said David Roever. "Above all, and most certainly, I want them to leave with a feeling of opportunity."



The horse ride and other outdoor activities helped the Soldiers appreciate the serenity and beauty of the Sangre de Cristo foothills.

To request more information about the Eagles Summit Ranch and its programs, visit <http://daverover.org/esr/index.php>. WTB Soldiers may speak with their Squad Leaders about attending future programs at Eagles Summit Ranch.