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Big Red uses the healing power of Navarre's waters to treat patients

By Sandi Kemp

skemp@navarrepress.com

The saying "one thing leads to another" is a perfect fit for how things have gone for Navarre resident Craig "Red" Shelton and his wife Patty.



Shelton

The Sheltons moved to Navarre nine years ago and incorporated their Wyoming outdoor lifestyle into a new one in Navarre and started a business, Big Red Kayak Fishing Adventures. Red and Patty both took jobs at Twelve Oaks Treatment Center in Navarre, with Patty working in medical records and Red helping out in several different positions. Through kayak fishing, Red was introduced to the non-profit group the Emerald Coast Chapter of Heroes on the Water (HOW), and he was hooked. In fact, his side business as a fishing guide has taken a backseat to HOW, and he has incorporated the HOW mission into his job at Twelve Oaks and developed a first-of-its-kind program.

The equipment that Red uses at Twelve Oaks is owned by HOW, which also provides the insurance. Since incorporating the program in July of 2013, Red has taken 143 trips with 300 patients. "A lot of military go through Twelve Oaks for PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) treatment, but the treatment of being on the water works with all patients," said Red.

"They are all experiencing anxiety of one sort or another, whether it is military- or life-induced. Being on the water



Patricia and Craig "Red" Shelton catch a redfish while out kayak fishing.

Photos by Sandi Kemp

gives them a chance to decompress," said Patty.

Diane Vchulek, Director of Clinical Services for Twelve Oaks Treatment Center agrees.

"Water is very healing, and brings a calmness to anyone going through anxiety," Vchulek said. "You can't be impulsive out on the water. They talk and relax and it takes a lot of pressure off them."

Generally the fish that are caught in the Twelve Oaks program are released.

Red said it is rewarding to see and hear the results of the program. He recounts one of

his favorite quotes from a participant, "I found my God again and I paddled off a lot of regrets. Now I know the direction I need to take myself and my family."



The wife of a participant recently told Red, "Thank you! My husband came home today."

Another success story Vchulek shared is of a patient that said he was going to leave treatment and had already packed his bags.

"We got him out on the water with Craig, and he came back and un packed his bags – it happened that quick," said

Vchulek. "We are thrilled to be able to present this to all of our patients. It makes a huge difference. Our data is showing that the difference is phenomenal."

The Sheltons have seen some dramatic turnarounds, especially in TBI patients. "They tend to fall out very quickly but once they get back in and start paddling, it is like a reset for their brain."

The program is especially great for the Chronic Pain Group, said Vchulek.

"They are pleased to be out on the water, and their pain levels go down," said Vchulek. "In so many ways and on so many levels, it adds to their quality of life."

Red Shelton is featured in the Summer/Fall issue of

Kayak Angler Magazine in an article titled, "Big Red Adventure" by Jay Kania.

The local chapter of HOW is very active and is always looking for volunteers and equipment. The program provides basic kayak fishing instruction, angling clinics and paddling classes for participants with skill sets ranging from beginning to the most experienced paddlers. The program also assists in adapting these newly developed skills to their new abilities. Adaptive kayaks, kayaking accessories and angling equipment will be offered on an as-needed basis to accommodate participants' particular needs.

All Heroes on the Water (a 501c(3) corporation) activities are 100 percent

dependent on tax deductible financial donations. HOW welcomes donations of both cash and materials to fund the program, and is always looking for licensed guides, property managers and camp supervisors who would like to donate the use of their facilities for their trips.

For more information, call Frank Dailey Chapter Event Coordinator at teamdaileydeployed@gmail.com or on Facebook at Emerald Coast Heroes on the Water.



Heroes on the Water

Heroes on the Water serves our Nation's wounded veterans by providing healing and rehabilitating kayak fishing outings that are physically and mentally therapeutic through our nationwide community of volunteers and donors. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with national headquarters based in Allen, Texas, Heroes on the Water is supported by tax deductible donations of funds, gear, kayaks, food, housing, transportation, guide services, and other necessities by generous individuals and corporations.

Started at Brooke Army Medical Center in 2007, Heroes on the Water serves wounded military personnel at U.S. Army Warrior Transition Battalions, the Marine Wounded Warrior Regiment, Air Force Wounded Warrior, and Navy Safe Harbor, as well as at VA medical and rehab facilities, and medically retired veterans in communities across the country. Today, our unique kayak fishing program is provided to wounded veterans in 43 locations across 24 states at no cost to the veterans or their families. Our vast network of 1,100+ volunteers has provided over 6,100 vet days on the water since 2007.

