COMMUNITY

KPN: Reklaw Fly-in and More

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TX -- The Montgomery County charity dedicated to preventing Combat Veteran suicides, Knowledge Point Network, USA (KPN), has been busy as of late with new initiatives to enhance the quality of life for Veterans and their families, many of whom who have had devastating life changing events as a result of intense combat causing injury and/or post traumatic stress disorder that have altered their lives forever. The organization was also in attendance at the recent Reklaw Fly-In, October 25-27, to bring awareness to the Veteran struggles, as pilots sometimes offer Veterans rides on their planes during the event. It was also an excellent time for the organization's donors to meet up and resume their friendships through service. In addition, KPN recently announced another initiative to offer service dogs to PTSD Veterans at no charge, and the organization is driving on with its ‘Dream Catcher Collaborative Grant Writing Workshop Series,’ helping Veterans with the dreams to help themselves and others through grant writing projects.

The Reklaw Fly-In, is an event in which pilots and flying enthusiasts descend on the privately owned Flying M Ranch Fly-In and Campout every year in October to celebrate flight. The grounds are located just outside the tiny town of Reklaw, Texas, about two and a half hours northeast of Montgomery County. KPN Founder Ed Ponikvar, and his team recently donated a portable tower to the grounds to enhance the safety of fly-in pilots and flying enthusiasts, since their grounds are not subject to FAA Regulations. KPNs presence on the grounds is part of their ‘Catch a Falling Star Program,’ that was created to blend the principles of Optic Flow with the thrill of their already popular off-roading motorcycle and track chair program. In fact, KPN’s caderie of motorcycles

were on site, for Veterans and donors to explore the off-road trails associated with the 150 acre property.

“We are slowly building a tradition where the Reklaw Fly-In will be a gathering place for KPN donors, and the Veterans of the program can come and gather and commune with nature,” said Ponikvar. “It’s an opportunity for our donors to go from the tall timbers to the sky.”

This innovative program offers veterans who seek adrenaline-pumping experiences a low-cost way to engage in all the vital elements of KPN while finding purpose in piloting themselves and others back to wellness. The idea is to capture the therapeutic benefits of movement and adventure by incorporating off-road vehicles, and possible flights, to veterans in a dynamic and exhilarating platform to break free from the confines of their mental and emotional challenges. The KPN program emphasizes the transformative power of movement, transporting participants from feeling stuck in their own abyss to finding salvation and purpose.

KPN’s Optic Flow aspect is a core principle, which motivates individuals with life-affirming activities to help them overcome sedentary lifestyles and mental health struggles. By combining this approach with off-roading activities, veterans can experience the benefits of physical activity and the joy of adventure, fostering a deeper connection to their surroundings and themselves.

The program elements include Skills Development: which allows veterans to train in off-road motorcycles, as well as focus on safety, navigation, and environmental stewardship which involves trail maintenance, and empowers Veterans with new skills and confidence. Community Engagement: Gets Veterans involved in the community to mentor and guide others, which creates teamwork and mutual growth in support of the community. Therapeutic Benefits: Offers the Veteran the idea of movement, the thrill of odd-roading, as well as environmental stewardship, it's another form of therapy for veterans, with having human interaction with therapists.. And finally, Purpose and Fulfillment: By engaging in meaningful activities Veterans find a renewed sense of purpose and direction, which not only benefit themselves, but their community as well.

At the heart of the issue is KPN’s philosophy of being in the transportation business, not just physically, but metaphorically. They see movement as healing Veterans from being trapped in their own struggles and providing an outlet to a better horizon. At KPN, they foster pathways to personal growth and communal well-being.

Judy Suan of ‘Pawsitively Sharing Aloha Service and Therapy Dog Training,’ has joined KPN under the banner of Health and Wellness. They are currently training labradoodles, to be matched with PTSD Veterans.

“It takes about two years to go through the entire process of training a service dog,” said Suan. “Our goal is now to educate people and find donors to the new program.”

For the time being Suan and her team are training two service dogs, and by next year should be able to train two more. Once a Veteran is matched with a dog, the canine lives with the Vet during the training period to become used to each other. Her team is always looking for more volunteers to raise puppies so the program can proceed at a faster pace.

“I started training labradoodles decades ago,” said Suan. “As soon as they are born, there is human imprinting to get them used to being around people. We get them their shots, and continue human contact, in order to provide an emotional balance to the Veteran.”

One Veteran, Trey Prendergast, under the auspices of Veterans and Patriots United, a Huntsville based Veterans charity, has already received a dog for training. Although his Army service was cut short due to injury in 1997, he worked in the corporate world selling insurance, until another injury aggravated his condition, causing his addiction until he reached out to VPU for help.

“I was incarcerated for drug possession, but they overlooked my Veteran status for years,” said Prendergast. “I would have been treated with different options if they would have noted my military service.”

The pandemic also didn’t help Prendergast’s need to help himself get back his life. He eventually got help, but his time at VPU for about 19 months now has totally changed his life. He swears by VPU Founder Amos Savell, who is happy to work with KPN in getting the help that Veterans need to get right with life. Prendergast’s service dog is now a part of his life, helping him to deal with life stressors, and giving him more reasons to stay alive than attempt any whims at self-harm.

KPN also works with Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare in getting services to Veterans to show self-worth. They have Apps to help track volunteer hours to show progress in setting their lives on the right track.

The Dream Catcher Collaborative, which is KPN’s Grant Writing Workshop, is free for Veterans or a small fee for individuals or organizations that are interested in submitting grants to secure funding for their projects and initiatives. Ed and his team are behind the dreamers in understanding the vision of the project, and assists in firming up their written wishes to grant achievement.

“We take the idea of the Veteran on paper,” said Ponikvar. “Then I use my decades of experience in grant writing and render back a vision using the right terminology to get results for the Veteran.”

For more information about the Knowledge Point Network: KPNUSA.com kpnusa.com/ways-to-give/#donate or knowledgepointnetwork@gmail.com

For the Reklaw Fly-In: reklawflyin.org

For Veterans and Patriots United: veteranspatriotsunited.org

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