

Reaching Beyond Boundaries: Steve



Steve, US Army Retired Major, was a participant in NCEFT's Veteran's Program and Lava Lakes adaptive riding program.

"Do it with integrity. Do it fairly. Do it right." Important, special words made even more meaningful because of the man to whom they belong. They are the personal motto of Steve, Retired US Army Major. Steve, a West Point graduate, served in combat engineering and assault units in Somalia, Kuwait, Iraq, and elsewhere throughout the world.



Steve is a West Point graduate.

A conversation with Steve will quickly convey just how much he cherishes his time spent in the Army, and most importantly, the relationships he developed and the experiences he shared with his fellow troops. But while he values his time in the service enormously, the sacrifices he made for it, including close proximity to too many blasts, have left him permanently challenged by traumatic brain injury (TBI).

According to the Mayo Clinic, TBI occurs when an external mechanical force, such as a violent blow or jolt to the head or body, causes brain dysfunction. TBI can have wide-ranging physical and psychological effects, with the possibility of some symptoms appearing immediately after the traumatic event and others appearing much later. Symptoms might be physical, sensory, or cognitive—or all of the above. They include experiences such as loss of consciousness or disorientation, headaches, fatigue, sleep disorders, dizziness, blurred vision, ringing in the ears, light and sound sensitivity, memory or concentration problems, mood changes or swings, and feelings of depression or anxiety. It's a dramatic, heart-wrenching list of challenges representative of the costs of wartime, costs that are paid first by those who serve and second by those who love them.

Steve's goal is to help others recover what they've sacrificed in service to their country, but he realizes that in order to be effective, he first must help himself. With the help of his VA recreational therapists, Steve discovered NCEFT. He came here willing to reach beyond his boundaries in order to take another step forward in his ongoing recovery.

NCEFT's Veterans Program offers active-duty and Veteran military personnel the chance to participate in any of NCEFT's treatments at no cost.



Steve cherishes the time he spent serving in the US Army, particularly the relationships he developed and experiences he shared with fellow troops.



For over 45 years, NCEFT has tapped into the power of the human-horse relationship to change the lives of thousands of children, adults military Veterans, and First Responders with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Lava Lakes is an eight-week-long program that culminates in a horse camping trip to the beautiful Lava Lake ranch in Hailey, Idaho near the Sawtooth National Forest. In this program, Veterans are placed in small groups with their peers to learn the basics of horsemanship and riding. From grooming and saddling to staying balanced and in control of their horses, instruction is adapted to meet the needs of the group. Participants gain knowledge, strength, and confidence under the careful supervision of supportive NCEFT staff and volunteers. The preparatory experience for the trip to Lava Lakes Ranch is by itself is profoundly healing. NCEFT, the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, and Lava Lake Ranch each play a vital role in creating this comprehensive process.

Participants can engage in physical, occupational, and speech therapy conducted on horseback, adaptive riding, equine-assisted mental health sessions, or a special group adaptive riding experience called the Lava Lakes program. All NCEFT Veteran services are designed to encourage physical, cognitive, and emotional rehabilitation. NCEFT receives no governmental funding (including from the VA), relying instead on the generosity of our supporters to fund the program.

Steve's participation in the NCEFT Veterans Program began with sessions in the Lava Lakes program.



Participants in NCEFT's Lava Lakes program learn horsemanship starting from the ground up. Here, an early lesson in the parts of the horse.



Steve, pictured at NCEFT with his wife, daughters, and service dog.

Steve credits his ongoing recovery first to his wife and daughters, but also praises "the patient and tolerant therapy horses and staff of NCEFT." He says, "At NCEFT, I found the relationship with the horses and staff to be unique in how it helped me deal with the challenges I face."

In September 2014, NCEFT was honored to have Steve speak at our annual Heroes and Horses, Jewels and Jeans Gala. His powerful words moved everyone in the audience that evening.

"Do it with integrity. Do it fairly. Do it right." Steve's motto and our call to action as we strive each day to help people with special needs reach beyond their boundaries through equine-assisted therapies, education, and research.