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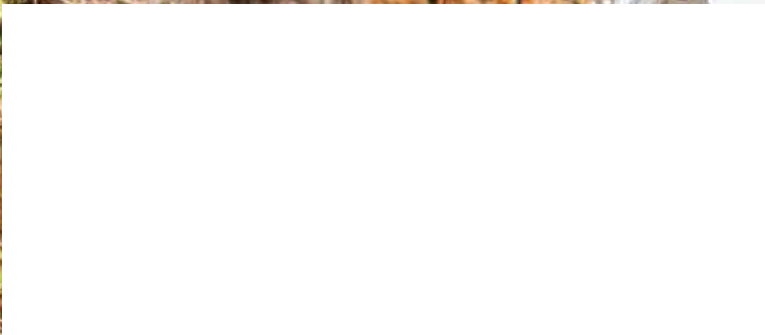


WARHAWKS
SERVING THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED US



Healing through hunting

*WarHawks helps vets
recover*



Alabama LIVING

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Reliable, affordable and clean

Former Speaker of the House Seth Hammett talks energy during recent meeting at WEC.

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On the cover: Navy veteran Toby Cochran helped found WarHawks, a nonprofit organization that uses hunting to make a difference in the lives of the vets and first responders.

Local vet uses hunting trips to help others heal

WarHawks, a vets-helping-vets nonprofit started in the Wiregrass

When **Toby Cochran** first came up with the idea to help wounded veterans and first responders by taking them on guided hunting trips, his friend told him to go for it.

“He just said, ‘Do it. You’ve got to do it. Do it now,’” says Cochran, a U.S. Navy veteran from Dothan who served two tours of duty in Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield.

Cochran wasted no time gathering a crew of vets and former police officers to form WarHawks, a Dothan-based, nonprofit organization that provides free, all-inclusive hunting trips by and for vets, active-duty military and first responders. Participants can

choose to hunt wild hog, turkey, dove and deer at no cost to them. They can also bring a guest free of charge.

“What we do is we go into the woods,” says Cochran, who has been hunting since he was 7 years old. “It’s very relaxing, and you can spend some time with people who may have been through some similar things.”

WarHawks, which formed on May 1, was recently the first organization to be awarded \$1,000 by Silent Heroes of the Wiregrass, a partnership between Wiregrass Electric Cooperative’s Operation Round Up and WTVY.

Spencer Bienvenu, general manager at WTVY, says the



Toby Cochran came up with the idea of WarHawks to help war veterans like himself, as well as active-duty military and first responders, by using safe, guided hunting trips as a means to cope with some of the stress of recovery and dealing with everyday life after battle and trauma.

concept for the award was simple: “We know there are many unsung heroes in this region who are trying to help others, and we wanted to recognize them for what they do.”

Each month for a year, an organization will be selected by an application process to receive \$1,000 to continue its mission, as well as TV spots on WTVY and videos on wtv.com and other social media, including WEC’s Facebook page.

Bienvenu says WarHawks was chosen because of its commitment to the military and first responders.

Brad Kimbro, chief operating officer of WEC, agrees.

“Our military and first responders are an important

part of our community,” Kimbro says. “We depend on them every day to make our community and our nation safe. We want them to know that we appreciate them, and we want to give back to them just as much as they’ve given us.”

Cochran says the Silent Heroes check and funding has already been a big help to the new organization, which spends several thousand dollars a year on transportation, feed, equipment and other expenses — most of which comes out of the founders’ pockets.

Between May 1 and Dec. 1, WarHawks sponsored 25 hunts and has dozens more scheduled through the winter and spring. Aside from several Marines,



participants have included former police officers, firefighters and soldiers.

“We consider anyone who has made it through boot camp and their first duty station to be a veteran,” Cochran says. “The only requirement is they can’t have a dishonorable discharge.”

He formed the group with **David Cochran**, also a Navy veteran, and board members **James Cochran**, a retired Navy vet; **Kenny Long**, a retired U.S. Army vet and retired Dothan police officer; and **John Hodgson**, an Army vet. Three of the five board members are combat vets, and two are retired from the military. Another is still active in law enforcement.

The group wanted to provide release and relaxation to those in the military or first-responder field, Cochran says. They also want them to have fun and maybe talk a little — but only if they want to, Cochran is quick to add.

“They don’t have an expense, and they can just come hunting with us,” he says. “Even for active-duty military it can be hard to find a place to hunt because you’re stationed in places where you don’t know anybody. They also get to be with some guys who maybe haven’t experienced everything they’ve experienced but that can talk on the same level. There’s a brotherhood there.”

So far, most of the participants have chosen wild hog hunts at night, Cochran notes. The night hunts tend to give the

hunter the advantage, he says, because they don’t have to be as still and the game is already out.

This worked especially well last year after the WarHawks crew was contacted by the wife of a Marine veteran who had been paralyzed from a gunshot wound during a tour of duty in Afghanistan in 2008-2009. Uncontrollable muscle spasms in his legs would have made hunting more difficult during the day because of the stillness required, Cochran says.

He adds that he and his board make the safety of the vets and themselves the No. 1 priority.

“What we do is when we get to the woods, they’re not allowed to touch the firearm until we actually get to the (hunting) blind,” he says. “When we get there, there’s a portable bench, and the guide takes the weapon and puts it in the holder for him. We’ll rack a round in it, put it on safety and tell him, ‘Alright. If something comes out, all you gotta do is shoot it.’”

At the end of the day, the guide will unload the weapon and put it back in the case.

WarHawks is committed to taking Wiregrass-area vets and first responders hunting first, but if they have a spot to fill, they’re happy to fill it with someone who needs it, wherever they live.

“If they can get to us, we’ll generally take care of the rest,” Cochran says. ■

Veterans and PTSD

▶ As of September 2014, there are about **2.7 million** American veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

▶ At least **20 percent** of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have post-traumatic stress disorder and/or depression.

▶ **50 percent** of those with PTSD do not seek treatment.

▶ Over **260,000 veterans** from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury.

▶ **7 percent** of veterans have both PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

(Sources: Study done by the RAND Corporation, the Veterans Administration, the Institute of Medicine, the US Surgeon General, and several published studies.)



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WIREGRASS
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
A PowerSouth Energy Cooperative
www.wiregrass.org

For more information on signing up a veteran, active-duty military member or first responder for a hunting trip, go to warhawks.com.

If you’re interested in donating, make checks payable to: WarHawks, 2149 Denton Road, Suite 1, Dothan, AL 36303.

For more information on Wiregrass Electric Cooperative’s Operation Round Up program, visit wiregrass.coop. For more information on Silent Heroes of the Wiregrass or to find video clips about WarHawks, go to wtvy.com.

To nominate you or someone else to become a Silent Hero of the Wiregrass, go to wtvy.upickem.net for more information and an application.