

DAV, Spartan Alliance Partner to Fight Veteran Suicide

Spartan Weekend Brings Together Veterans with Sacred Pledge

Cold Spring, Ky. (April 26, 2016)—DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and Spartan Alliance are teaming up to fight veteran suicide by launching Spartan Weekend, May 6-8, 2016. Hundreds of ill and injured veterans and their caregivers will participate in a weekend of activities at Fort Belvoir and in Washington, D.C., aimed at raising awareness of veteran suicide. Each day, 22 veterans take their own lives: that's nearly one veteran every 65 minutes.

The event is scheduled to culminate on Sunday, May 8, with a service at The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C., where dozens of veterans will take an oath against suicide, known as the Spartan Pledge. The pledge is a promise a veteran makes to reach out to their "Battle Buddy" before doing harm to themselves. A newly created Spartan Sword, made from 25 pounds of steel melted down from the fallen World Trade Centers, will be used to administer the pledge.

Veterans commit suicide at a 50 percent higher rate than those who did not serve in the military, according to a study published last year from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The 2015 *DAV Veterans Pulse Survey* found that one in four veterans see suicide as one of the biggest challenges facing those who have served.

"Suicide is far too prevalent in the veteran community," said DAV National Commander Moses A. McIntosh, Jr. "Yet, we know and studies confirm, that veterans who have strong social support networks and are engaged in VA care are at lower risk of suicide. Spartan Weekend and the Spartan Pledge are the

kinds of activities that connect our veterans with the support systems and resources they need to thrive.”

“Eliminating veteran suicide seems like a nearly impossible undertaking,” added Spartan Alliance founder Steve “Luker” Danyluk. “But it’s not as daunting when you tackle it one veteran at a time. Taking a pledge alongside a Battle Buddy creates accountability that will make a veteran think twice before hurting themselves. We believe the Spartan Pledge is making a difference.”

The Spartan Weekend of events kicks off on Friday, May 6, with a bike ride, golf scramble and concert at the Hard Rock Cafe headlined by Kristy Lee Cook. On Sunday, May 8, at 9:30 a.m., a non-denominational service officiated by Father Matt Pawlikowski, Army chaplain from West Point, will honor Gold Star and Blue Star Mothers, two organizations representing moms whose sons or daughters are actively serving or who have lost their lives in service. The ceremony will close with dozens of veterans taking a mass Spartan Pledge.

Throughout the weekend, special guests will share stories of how their lives have been impacted by veteran suicide. Guests include Joseph Galloway, an American newspaper columnist who worked alongside troops in the Vietnam War and was awarded the Bronze Star; Major General Mark Graham, an Army veteran who lost a son in combat in Iraq and another to veteran suicide; and Lynsey Addario, an American photojournalist who has photographed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, Congo and Haiti.

To participate in the Spartan Weekend or learn more, visit <http://www.spartanweekend.com/>. For resources and benefits assistance for veterans and their families, visit www.DAV.org.