On the road to recovery

Michael Valila, a DAV benefits advocate, stands behind his friend and injured Army veteran Ryan Scott-Fleming at his home in New Ipswich, New Hampshire. Valila had connected Scott-Fleming with resources and equipment vital to his recovery.

DAV connects two-time Purple Heart recipient with emergency community care after he suffers a serious motorcycle accident

Ryan Scott-Fleming received the Purple Heart twice in Afghanistan almost a decade ago, but it was a horrific motorcycle accident this past August that nearly claimed his life.
While riding at 55 mph up a winding road in southern New Hampshire, an oncoming driver attempting to pull into a driveway turned sharply across the lane, placing Scott-Fleming directly in the SUV’s path. Looking to minimize severe injury or worse, he brought his rebuilt Harley-Davidson as close to the ground as possible, sliding 70 feet before slamming into the automobile’s passenger side door.

Scott-Fleming was launched over the vehicle, into the air, and continued to slide after making contact with the unforgiving pavement. He was less than a mile from home.

“It felt like freezer burn,” said Scott-Fleming, who served for seven years in the Massachusetts National Guard.

He suffered two compound fractures in his left leg and significant road rash on his hands, arms, legs and torso. His motorcycle’s oil pan also ignited, which he said painted a scene all too similar to when an improvised explosive device wounded him.

“When I was lying on the ground, I was instantly brought right back to a motorcycle attack in Afghanistan,” said Scott-Fleming. “I was having flashbacks—I was screaming for morphine, expecting Doc Williamson to be there right away.”

First responders loaded him onto a helicopter and he was airlifted to a University of Massachusetts hospital to undergo emergency surgery.

Fearing costly medical bills from the helicopter flight, Scott-Fleming’s wife and caregiver—also named Ryan—phoned their friend and DAV National Service Officer Michael Valila to see if community care was possible through the VA MISSION Act.

“He already goes to the community for a lot of care since the closest VA is more than an hour away,” she said. “When I talked to Mike, he clued me in on how everything would work
for emergency care.”

The MISSION Act expands access for eligible veterans to receive care from a community provider network, paid for and coordinated by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

With the Scott-Flemings focused on getting Ryan the best care possible, Valila contacted the VA MISSION Act department at the VA medical center in Manchester, New Hampshire.

“We receive the bills, but everything through the VA has been set up, and they understand they’re paying them,” added Scott-Fleming.

“Normally, you’d get a referral from your [VA] doctor to visit a physician in the community,” said Valila, an Iraq War veteran represents veterans at DAV’s Boston office. “However, in the case of an emergency, you’d, of course, go get the care right away, but you have to contact VA within 72 hours to be covered under the VA MISSION Act.”

Valila’s assistance did not stop there.

Doctors estimated that Scott-Fleming wouldn’t walk for at least six months, since surgeons placed a metal rod in his left leg from his knee to his ankle. And since the couple was in a house with stairs, Valila knew Scott-Fleming would need the proper equipment to move around.

When Scott-Fleming came home after one week in the hospital, to his surprise, Valila had already acquired brand-new medical equipment from the DAV Department of Massachusetts, including a walker, wheelchair, two ramps and a daybed so he could sleep downstairs.

“The DAV stepped up,” he said. “Mike, his wife, the volunteers who came and helped—it tears me up thinking about it.”

Scott-Fleming and Valila met after returning from Afghanistan and quickly became great friends.
“There was an instant bond with us,” said Valila. “Our wives knew each other; we had a mutual friend; our kids are the same age—it was a brotherhood that hit off right away.”

Delivering medical equipment and ensuring coverage under the VA MISSION Act wasn’t the first time Valila helped Scott-Fleming. In 2017, he helped Scott-Fleming increase his overall VA rating.

“Once Mike started working for DAV, I thought, who better to have a hand in my case?” added Scott-Fleming.

Although Scott-Fleming is still on the road to recovery—he’ll require additional surgery to repair torn ligaments in his knee—the couple remains hopeful and thankful for all Valila and DAV provided.

“It’s humbling,” he said. “I’m used to being the one to help people out, so this means the world to me.”

“The veteran community we have in the area is excellent,” added his spouse, Ryan. “We go through periods where you don’t talk to people for a while, and then something like this happens and they are there, ready to help.”