

A Warrior Returns

Pat Tillman Award Winner, Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team Member Danielle Green Coming to Akron for Charity Doubleheader

[The Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team](#) (WWAST), a group of veterans injured in combat who compete against teams of able-bodied players in exhibition softball games across the U.S., is returning to Akron on Saturday, July 15 for a charity doubleheader at Canal Park. Proceeds of the event will go to support the [Laura Williams Dunlop Memorial Stand Down](#), an organization dedicated to combatting veteran homelessness, and Donovan's Kids Camp (*learn more on page 5*).

Making her return with the team to Northeast Ohio – the site of her first game with the WWAST – is Danielle Green, a U.S. Army veteran whose story of perseverance, as an athlete and soldier, netted her the Pat Tillman Award for Service during at 2015 ESPY Awards.

Green's WWAST journey began May 25, 2004. A member of the Military Police stationed in Baghdad, her day started like many others with an hour of early morning riot training. She returned to her barracks, thinking the day was all but done, but then her unit received last-minute orders to report to the local police station. When they arrived, Green immediately suspected something wasn't right.

"When we got there, I realized there were no civilians," she recalled. "Usually the civilians would greet us – the women and children. We get there and there are no police officers, just detainees. And we're shorthanded."

Standing atop the station's rooftop during her turn on security detail, Green dropped to a kneeling position following an explosion against a barrier



Photo: Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team

Danielle Green, U.S. Army veteran and Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team member

two stories down. As she flipped the lever on her service rifle from safety to fire, a second explosion hurled her to the deck. First she felt numbness. Then it turned into excruciating pain.

A rocket-propelled grenade claimed Green's left arm that day, but she never lost her resolve. She had plenty of experience to fall back on, of course.

Green had already spent much of her life overcoming obstacles. Growing up with a mother who was addicted to drugs and refusing to become a victim of circumstance, she worked diligently to give herself a better life, taking two trains and a bus daily for four years to attend a better high school, joining

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In Remembrance of Byron Morris

Former VSC Commissioner Leaves Lasting Legacy

The VSC recently lost one of its valued family members, former Commissioner Byron "Barney" Morris, who passed away May 3 at the VNS Hospice Care Center in Akron. He was 72.

Commonly referred to as Barney by friends and family, Morris was a veteran of the U.S. Army, having served in Korea and Vietnam. Following his active duty career, he returned home and married his wife, Myra, on July 15, 1967. Together they had a daughter, Brigette Spidle, with whom Morris was very close. She described her father as passionate about helping others, adding he was someone people always could count on to do things "by the book."

"My dad was very disciplined and followed the rules," Spidle said of her father. "At the Veterans Service Commission (VSC) he was known as the man who wasn't afraid to tell a client no when they didn't follow the rules."

Spidle added that her father instilled a lot of discipline in her as well.

"Growing up, he taught me right from wrong, how to manage money and other invaluable life lessons," she said. "He made sure I was

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Director's Corner



Services for Vets

We assist veterans with basic living needs; these services are available to eligible veterans, their dependents and widows. Services are subject to change.

Bill Aims to Limit Firearm Restrictions for Veterans Using a Fiduciary

A bill moving through Congress that could make it easier for veterans who can be considered mentally incompetent to carry a firearm has pitted those concerned with high suicide rates among veterans against others who say they have been unfairly stigmatized.

Under federal law, veterans who have been assigned fiduciaries – people who manage their finances – can be deemed mentally incompetent. Backers of the H.R. 1181 Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act say that the law has been applied too broadly against veterans who remain fit to carry a firearm.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.), prohibits the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from sending the name of an individual to the FBI for inclusion on the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), unless there has been a specific determination by a judge, magistrate or other judiciary authority that such individual is a danger to themselves or others.

Under a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program, the agency appoints a fiduciary. In this case, the VA notifies the veteran that the department proposes to determine if the beneficiary is incompetent and may need a fiduciary. The beneficiary has the right to request a hearing.

Such a hearing only reviews evidence that informs a judgment about whether or not a beneficiary is capable of managing his or her VA benefit payments. The hearing does not address whether the beneficiary presents a danger to themselves or others or if the beneficiary should be prohibited from purchasing, possessing or operating a firearm.

That means the agency also can classify veterans as mentally incompetent and submit their names to the FBI for inclusion in the NICS database, banning them from buying or owning a firearm or ammunition.

Charles Schmidt, national commander of the American Legion, which supports the bill, said in a Newsweek column that it merely transfers the power "to strip a veteran of their 2nd Amendment rights" from the federal government to the courts.

According to the bill's sponsor, "The freedoms granted by the Constitution" should apply to all Americans – especially the men and women who have been willing to risk their lives to protect those freedoms. This common sense bill would ensure no veteran or beneficiary is declared "mentally defective" simply because they utilize a fiduciary.

In Appreciation,

Executive Director



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If you are a veteran in financial need or need help with your VA claim, please visit us at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd., Akron, or call

330-643-2830

The Genetics of Trauma

New Study Finds Evidence PTSD Risk is Passed Down Through our DNA

A recent study conducted by the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium might lead to the development of much needed new treatment options for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after providing researchers with the first credible molecular evidence suggesting that the risk for developing PTSD is passed down genetically.

PTSD, a debilitating mental condition characterized by chronic hyperarousal, occurs in some people following a traumatic event. Often affecting military veterans who have experienced combat overseas, PTSD causes sufferers to:

- Re-experience their trauma through flashbacks and nightmares;
- Take extra precautions to avoid stimuli that bring back traumatic memories;
- Become easily startled;
- Experience severe mood swings; and
- Have difficulty sleeping.

PTSD can develop at any age. In the U.S. alone, one in nine women and one in 20 men are expected to meet the criteria for a PTSD diagnosis over the course of their lives.

The study, published in April in *Molecular Psychiatry*, pooled genome-wide, case-control molecular genetic data from 11 separate multiethnic studies to compare hereditary risks for PTSD. Expanding upon previous findings, the new study analyzed data from 20,730 individuals to try to shed light on why some people exposed to trauma develop PTSD and others do not.

"PTSD is one of the most pressing issues affecting armed forces veterans today, and the VSC is committed to both fighting unfair stigmatization associated with this debilitating condition and helping those who continue to relive the horrors of combat," said David Burden, VSC project manager. "We're hopeful that studies such as this will serve to further our understanding of the underlying causes of PTSD and lead to improved treatment options for those suffering from it."

Using common genetic markers, the consortium found strong evidence of overlapping genetic risk between PTSD and several other mental disorders. Those at higher risk of developing schizophrenia, and to a lesser extent bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder, also face a higher risk of developing PTSD in the aftermath of a traumatic experience.

The findings expand on previous studies of twins



documenting PTSD heritability that also indicated genetics played a role in the disorder and similarly showing moderate overall heritability for PTSD and higher risk for women.

The study concluded that heritability for PTSD overall is comparable with that of major depressive disorder, but female heritability is closer to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. As to why female heritability is higher than that in males, researchers are not certain.

In addition to sex-based biological and symptomatic differences, contributing factors could include differences in the type and frequency of trauma exposure, which often varies by sex. (Likewise, particular types of trauma also vary in how often they lead to PTSD diagnosis.) For example, many more men than women in the study came from a military background. The consortium also suggested that lower reliability and validity of PTSD diagnosis in males could play a part.

According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#), scientists in recent years have made significant progress with regard to uncovering the mental and biological foundations of PTSD.

Researchers have analyzed how fear memories are impacted by learning, physiological changes and sleep patterns and have focused on developing ways to mitigate or prevent the development of PTSD following trauma exposure. ★

Fighting PTSD: An Exercise in Resiliency

By [David Burden](#)
VSC Project Manager

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and third-party agencies offer outstanding treatment and support solutions for returning combat veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and coping with severe injuries.

Maj. Ronald W. Sprang, in his article *"A Silent Warrior's Struggle: PTSD and Leader Resiliency,"* noted that, according to the National Center for PTSD, PTSD can manifest itself through four primary symptoms: flashbacks or reliving the event; avoidance or disassociation issues; feeling numb; and hyperarousal or hypervigilance. In addition to these primary symptoms, there are a myriad of ongoing issues that impact PTSD sufferers along with their family and friends.

Not every combat veteran suffering from PTSD responds to it the same. External factors, like exposure to different levels of trauma, environment and interactions with others, can have a powerful effect on how a combat veteran adjusts to combat exposure. In his book *"Once a Warrior Always a Warrior,"* Charles W. Hodge argues that "the higher the frequency or intensity of combat – and particularly, the more personal the trauma is – the higher

the likelihood of developing PTSD." He cited recent studies that show varying rates of PTSD development for combat veterans deployed during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)



and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), 10 to 20 percent of whom developed symptoms within one year of coming home.

The question becomes, how can combat veterans find resiliency and bounce back from traumatic events experienced on the battlefield? Sprang offered this assessment: "Through my experience, I have found that human beings by nature are resilient, and programs like the Army resiliency program remind us that resiliency is innately in us all." He offered five major personal strengths veterans with PTSD must develop to

grow resiliency: face one's past; seek help; forgive oneself; honor and never forget those who've been lost; and move forward.

A great example to live by is that of Geno Conley, a Navy and Army veteran from Northeast Ohio who suffered multiple service-connected injuries and developed PTSD following five deployments in the OIF combat theater. Not wanting to live the rest of his life in fear, Conley accepted his fate and sought ways to help others overcome and bounce back. He founded a construction company called [Band of Brothers Restoration](#) that specializes in home adaptations for people with disabilities – in particular, disabled veterans. When asked what resiliency meant to him, Conley replied, "The ability to realize that where you are now is not where you will be in the future. You have the power to bounce back and not allow your disabilities to define who you are."

Conley is one of many combat veterans across the country who are bouncing back through resiliency by maximizing their available resources and family support systems. The VA [VetCenter](#) is an excellent resource to help returning combat veterans readjust and find resiliency after experiencing trauma. In the end, it's not about how high you bounce – it's that you find the ability to bounce. ★

Morris, from page 1

prepared for anything."

Morris was a career employee of Pepsi Co., retiring in 1994. He joined the VSC in 1997, eventually becoming commissioner, a role in which he spoke at various association events, led monthly meetings and set up flags in veteran cemeteries on remembrance holiday. Morris' dedication and hard work – and especially his care and compassion – will be missed by many of those who came to know him during his time with the VSC.

"He was always willing to help others," said

Bob Giannone, retired VSC supervisor. "He was my best friend for 20 years. I couldn't have asked for a better friend and person to work with."

Morris' passion for helping others and devotion to his fellow veterans carried over into other veteran assemblies. He served as past commander and quartermaster of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 3383. He also was a member of VFW subsidiary Military Order of the Cootie, American Legion Garfield Post 566 and AMVETS. ★



ROTC and participating in as many sports as she could.

Her determination paid off through a scholarship to the University of Notre Dame, where she played Division I women's basketball from 1995 to 2000. A few years after graduating, she decided to fulfill another lifelong goal by joining the Army.

Even after her active duty career ended, the challenges didn't. Her husband Willie Byrd – who she had married shortly before her injury occurred – died of a heart attack in 2011, leaving her in a state of depression. It was at about this time that she learned about the WWAST.

"I was watching Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel and I saw these cool guys, these veterans with amputations, playing softball and giving back to the community," she said. "That was the first time I saw them, but I never reached out."

Green, who had been working as a re-adjustment counselor for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), opted in 2013 to take a supervisory position with the VA in South Bend, Ind., hoping a change of scenery would help

her heal. The move also facilitated her introduction to the several key players on the WWAST after she was invited to participate in an exhibition game against them at her alma mater. Two years later, the team invited her to play with them at Firestone Stadium. From that point on, she was hooked.



Photo courtesy of WWAST

"I went to the training camp in 2016 and I said, 'I can do this,'" she said. "I just needed the right adaptive device."

Though Green was then and remains the only active female on the roster, the team accepted her immediately. As a veteran, she was used to working with mostly men.

What she hadn't counted on was how many "layers" there were to the WWAST – and how being part of a team again would fill her with a sense of purpose.

"It goes beyond playing," Green said. "It's about inspiring and giving people hope that no matter what cards you've been dealt that you can overcome and conquer that. We've got a lot of people that want to win of course, but for me it's about getting out there and showing people the possibilities." ★



Tip of the H.A.T. Helping America's Troops

Donovan's Kids Camp Returns After Successful First Year

Following a successful inaugural session in 2016, [Donovan's Kids Camp](#), a free, weeklong overnight camping experience for children of military personnel and those with amputations, spina bifida and other limb differences, is making its return this summer. Scheduled to take place Aug. 6-11, 2017 at the Akron Rotary Camp for Children with Special Needs, the camp will provide children ages 8-14 with the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities, including arts and crafts, games, swimming, kayaking, singing and off-site events, among others.

Donovan's Kids Camp, sponsored by local non-profit group [Project Summit](#), aims largely to achieve the same goals as Project Summit itself – to help "educate, inspire and enable" Ohio children with amputations or other limb differences to "find new ways to develop in mind, body and spirit." Named after Harry A. Donovan, a World War II U.S. Navy veteran and Project Summit board

member, the camp serves to unite children with and without disabilities, facilitating new friendships and helping them to better understand the common challenges.

Greg Rybka, Project Summit board member and director of camp activities for Donovan's Kids Camp, said expectations are high for 2017. Last year's camp saw 20 participants – most of whom already are registered to attend again this year – and several new names have joined the list. New registrations will continue to be accepted until the start of camp.

Rybka, who was born with fibular hemimelia and has had both legs and his left arm amputated, said he sympathizes with children with disabilities – who often grow up with limited resources – and sees his involvement with the camp as a bit of a passion project.

"It's definitely given me an outlet to give back," he said. "In my own personal experience, I never really had a camp like this to attend when



I was a kid. I see this as a way to give back to the community that, in a lot of ways, has given me so much."

And doing so comes easy to him, he added.

"Dealing with amputees and having conversations with them, it's something that I've been through, so it's not like trying to learn a new language for me," Rybka said. "So I kind of understand how they think and what they're struggling with, but at the end of the day they're just kids."

For more information on the 2017 Donovan's Kids Camp or to download an application, visit the [Akron YMCA website](#). ★



School Clothing Voucher Applications Coming Soon

Summit County veterans who demonstrate a financial need may be eligible to receive school clothing vouchers, available through the VSC, that are good toward the purchase of non-uniform and uniform school clothing, including winter outerwear. Applications will be available July 17 through Sept. 29, 2017.

Recipients must be the child or qualifying dependent of an honorably discharged veteran who has been a resident of Summit County for at least 90 days. The VSC will accept completed applications Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at its headquarters at 1060 E. Waterloo Road in Akron. For more details, call 330-643-2830.

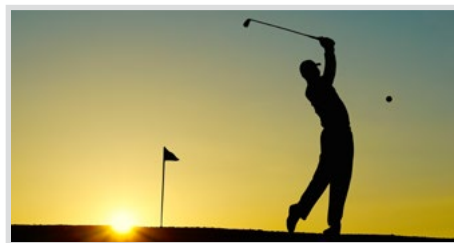
Wounded Warriors Softball Returning to Akron July 15

The Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team (WWAST) is returning

to Northeast Ohio on Saturday, July 15, 2017, for a charity doubleheader at Canal Park, located at 300 S. Main St. in Akron. The team will face off against two teams of local celebrities, with all proceeds from the event supporting the [Laura Williams Dunlop Memorial Stand Down](#) and [Donovan's Kids Camp](#). The WWAST will play against the Celebrity Team at 5 p.m. followed by Team Red, White & Blue at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$8 per person and are available for purchase online at [AkronRubberDucks.com](#).

Golf Outing Supporting ALS Scheduled for Friday, Sept. 1

The First Annual James Seminaroti Golf Outing is scheduled to be held Friday, Sept. 1, 2017, at the Fox Den Golf Course at 2770 Call Road in Stow. Tee time is 10:45 a.m. The cost



to participate is \$75 per person or \$300 for a foursome, with all profits being donated to the [ALS Association Northern Ohio Chapter](#). To register,

contact Gordon Dean at 330-643-2805.

Second Annual Donovan's Kids Camp Scheduled for August

For the second year in a row, Project Summit, Akron Rotary Camp for Children with Special Needs and Akron Children's Hospital will support Donovan's Kids Camp, a weeklong overnight camping experience for children who have amputations or other limb differences, use orthotics or are related to military personnel.

The camp will take place Aug. 6-11, 2017, at the Akron Rotary Camp, 4460 Rex Lake Drive in Akron. The camp is free for children ages 8-14 and will include activities such as swimming, kayaking, arts, crafts and games. To register, visit [AkronYMCA.org](#).

Akron VA Clinic Putting on Veteran Appreciation Picnic

The Akron Community Multi-Specialty Outpatient Clinic has scheduled a veteran appreciation picnic on Wednesday, Aug. 2, 2017, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 55 W. Waterloo Road in Akron. The picnic is free to all veterans who bring an ID confirming their military experience and \$3 for all others. Acceptable forms of identification include a DD Form 214 certificate or Veteran ID card. ★

Contact Us for Your Free e-News Subscription

In addition to financial, transportation and VA claim assistance, the Veterans Service Commission of Summit County is dedicated to providing local veterans with news relevant to these and other topics in the form of our EyesRight quarterly newsletter, now available exclusively in a digital format.

Did you find the information in this newsletter informative and valuable? If so, **sign up at** www.vscsummitoh.us/eyesright-signup, and we'll be sure to keep you up-to-date with the latest news and information impacting Summit County veterans and their families. ★



Created in 1886 to aid veterans upon their return from duty, the Veterans Service Commission of Summit County provides comprehensive support services to Summit County residents who have served in any branch of the military.

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