

Sanctuary for families



Vets and their families rest and reconnect during a Project Sanctuary retreat.

COURTESY OF PROJECT SANCTUARY

PROJECT SANCTUARY (projectsanctuary.us) is an organization that provides outdoor therapeutic and recreational retreats to military families at no cost. Founded in 2007 by Costco member Heather Ehle, Project Sanctuary—a 501(c)(3) nonprofit—brings military families together in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and elsewhere in the country, after deployments, to help them reconnect.

Staffed with professional counselors, recreational therapists and social workers, as well as hundreds of volunteers, the “retreats are a blend of healthy marriage, money matters and family matters classes, as well as youth programs to mirror what the adults are learn-

ing, group recreation and family time,” says Ehle, a registered nurse.

However, the retreats aren’t an end, but a beginning. “We don’t believe that healing, trust and learning new tools can all happen in a weekend or six days,” says Ehle. “These families need time to de-stress and be open to new techniques and therapies, so we also follow the families for an additional two years, providing the support that they need.”

Follow-up family support beyond the retreat includes help with housing, job placement and veterans’ assistance. To date, Project Sanctuary has hosted 59 therapeutic retreats and is providing support and services to 476

families, 80 percent of which include wounded warriors.

“Our results speak for themselves,” says Jason Strickland, chief development officer for Project Sanctuary. “No retreat participant has committed suicide, despite nearly one veteran suicide each hour of each day; over 90 percent of our families are still intact, which is a stark contrast from the 50 percent divorce rate across the U.S.; and all veterans [in the program] who want a job have a job, which is significantly lower than the post-9/11 veterans unemployment rate of 7.9 percent.”

“Project Sanctuary saved us,” says Nora Biggs McMahon. “My six children would not have a father and I would be a widow without it. I have a future with my best friend again.”

Explains Ehle, “As a registered nurse I knew I wanted to help people. Having my eyes opened to what military families sacrifice and live with made it clear that it was my time to serve those who served us.”

—T. Foster Jones



In our digital editions

Click here to watch Heather Ehle discuss Project Sanctuary. (See page 14 for details.)

Barbara McNally

IT MACMILLAN

A day of pampering

BECAUSE COSTCO MEMBER Barbara McNally lives in San Diego, she has three branches of the armed forces in her own backyard: the Navy, the Marines and the Coast Guard.

A physical therapist, she frequently crossed paths with women who told her how war transforms families—not just the recently returned soldiers, but their life companions as well.

“There’s always a need,” McNally points out. “Women take care of others, but nourishing themselves allows them to recharge.” So in 2008, she founded Mother,

Lover, Fighter, Sage (unbridledfreedom.com) and Spa Day for Wives of Wounded Warriors.

Every September, women take part in a day of massages, facials, yoga on the beach, guest speakers and lunch by the pool at Hotel del Coronado. Professional counselors are on hand to discuss their new lives as wives of wounded warriors.

Two hundred and forty women have participated in

the event over the last six years, and a natural support group has grown from the network of Spa Day attendees. As more than 1 million men who served recover, McNally and her foundation are helping their caregivers and families heal alongside them.—Alexandra van Ingen



MONKEY C. MEDIA