



## Wounded Warrior Voice

### AW2 HEADLINES

[From the Desk of COL Karcher](#)

[From the Desk of COL Karcher:  
Nonprofit Spotlight](#)

[Health Update: Breast Cancer  
Awareness](#)

[Blog Update](#)

## From the Desk of COL Karcher: Moving Forward

Friends,

I have been serving as the Director of the Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2) for the past three months, and it is a great honor to serve in an organization with a mission of assisting and advocating for our severely wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers and Veterans, along with their Families and Caregivers. As I was transitioning into this position, one of the first decisions that SGM Bob Gallagher and I made was to change the AW2 tagline from "For As Long As It Takes" to "Building Paths To Independence."

When I first heard of AW2 and learned that the program's tagline was "For As Long As It Takes," I was uncomfortable with the lack of an end state. This tagline implied that 40 years from now, an aging AW2 Advocate would still be calling me frequently to check up on me and my Family. This seemed counter intuitive. AW2 is about empowerment. Whether it's medical rehabilitation, adaptive reconditioning, career and education counseling, or professional development, AW2 works to provide severely wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers and Veterans with the skills and tools to move forward.

For me, during my own personal recovery and rehabilitation, my primary motivation was to heal, get prosthetics, learn to walk again, and regain my independence so I could get back to work.

I observed a similar goal in many of my buddies, both with physical injuries and behavioral health challenges. It seemed like everyone just wanted to get back to the way things were, before they got hurt. Additionally, the Families and Caregivers of our wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers also seemed to long for the day when they could return to a "normal" life.

I acknowledge that for many of us, things will never be the same as they were, but they do get better with time. I remember the first several months after leaving the hospital, before I learned to drive with hand controls, the feeling of being a burden to my wife when I would ask her to drive me somewhere. She never made me feel that way, but I believed that I was. Then, I learned to drive with hand controls, got my truck modified, and realized I had regained a little independence. It was a great feeling to no longer be a burden to the woman I loved. Similar feelings of regaining independence occurred as I learned to walk on prosthetics, started to travel alone, and returned to work. I always say that my best therapy was returning to work. It's

during this part of my journey that I started to feel normal and independent again. And now, my path has led me to AW2.

There is simply not one way to regain lost or diminished independence, but there are as many "paths" as there are Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and Caregivers in AW2. So we chose the phrase "Building Paths to Independence," to reflect this. I see it as my duty, and the reason that AW2 exists, to assist all of you along the way to realizing your full potential.

I am here to ensure the program is doing everything it can to help you reach your goals, and I will continue to find ways to improve AW2 so that this happens. I believe that our goal is to help you get to a point where you say to your Advocate, "Thank you, I really don't need you anymore...."

That is what right looks like to me.

## From the Desk of COL Karcher: Nonprofit Spotlight

Each month, I plan to highlight one of the nonprofit organizations that exist to assist our severely wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers and Veterans. I believe that these organizations may be of great assistance to our Advocates as we attempt to guide our Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and Caregivers along a path to regaining their independence. Many of these organizations are in the [Community Support Network](#), where you can find a wide variety of organizations that support our population, and I encourage you to continue recommending organizations as well.

This month, I would like to highlight Homes for Our Troops, which is also part of the Community Support Network. Homes for Our Troops provides no-cost specially adapted houses for our severely wounded and injured servicemembers. Like AW2, this organization focuses on helping servicemembers who were wounded or injured after September, 11 2001. Homes for Our Troops does limit participation in their program to those wounded or injured as a result of combat operations.

Homes for Our Troops was founded in 2004, by John Gonsalves based on his concerns about what would happen to a severely wounded Soldier, after he/she recovered and left the Army. Since that time, Homes for Our Troops provided over 100 homes to severely wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers and their Families, providing these individuals quality housing suited for their needs, at no cost.

Homes for Our Troops is run by a board of directors chaired by retired GEN Richard "Dick" Cody, former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. Additionally, retired Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth Preston is the president and director of the foundation. Both of these gentlemen are avid supporters of our wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers, thus it is no surprise that after retirement, these two leaders are still taking care of Soldiers, Veterans, their Families, and Caregivers.

As with many of the non-profit organizations that provide housing, Homes for Our Troops requires a wounded or injured servicemember to provide their Veterans Administration (VA) Specially Adapted Housing Grant to defray a portion of the cost of the home. Other than that grant, the servicemember receives the home mortgage-free, reducing financial concerns that our Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and Caregivers may face.

I understand that the opportunities provided by Homes for Our Troops are not always suitable for every Soldier or Veteran, as some of our folks are able to provide for themselves and their Families. I believe that you, as AW2 Advocates know best which of our Soldiers and Veterans are truly in need of this type of assistance. Retired SGM Preston said that he would like to be able to provide one of these homes to every severely wounded, ill, or injured servicemember, but that is just not practical, since these homes often cost over \$300,000 to build. As

Advocates, I expect that you know your Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and Caregivers best, so you will know who can best benefit from this type of assistance when asked for recommendations by Home for Our Troops.

I ask that you keep this organization and others like it, in mind as you help our Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and Caregivers develop plans for the future. Homes for Our Troops and other organizations exist to help the people that we help, so together we can better serve our Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and Caregivers.

Thank you for everything that each of you does to assist and advocate for our severely wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers and Veterans, along with their Families and Caregivers.

Visit the Homes For Our Troops website for more information here:

<http://www.homesforourtroops.org/>

## Health Update: Breast Cancer Awareness

**By MAJ Faith Junghan, AW2 Medical Officer**

As October rolls in, one thinks of the harvest colors of golds and reds. An increased national focus on Breast Cancer Awareness has introduced pink as another traditional color for October. We now play "Where's Waldo" spotting the color pink around us from athletes' shoe laces, to t-shirts, to common household appliances. The color pink symbolizes the national awareness for breast cancer research, education, and support. We will undoubtedly wear our pink to support breast cancer awareness, and local medical care facilities will unfold their pink too.

Breast cancer is now the second leading cancer death in women. Early detection is imperative. The Center for Disease and Prevention (CDC) recommends that women age 50-74 have mammograms every two years. Women age 40-49 or older than 75 should consult their primary physician to discuss their individual risks and benefits of having a mammogram. Additionally, screening for women's health includes having a cervical PAP smear. This test has shown to significantly decrease cervical cancer, once the leading cancer death among women.

The Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) Health Care for Women is designed to service the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) fastest growing subgroup of U.S. Veterans. With expected increases of women Veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the number of women Veterans is expected to increase dramatically. It is important to take necessary strides and address women's health care demands, and the VHA is committed to understanding their needs.

For more information visit

<http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/campaigns.asp>

## BLOG UPDATE: September 2012

**Army Dominates in Wheelchair Basketball Rematch**

<http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/army-dominates-marines-in-wheelchair-basketball-rematch/>

**Army Takes Another Win in Sitting Volleyball**

<http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/army-takes-another-win-in-sitting-volleyball/>

**Mixed Victory for Army Sitting Volleyball**

<http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/mixed-victory-for-army-sitting-volleyball/>

**Army Cycling Team Wins Big at the 2012 Warrior Games**

<http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/army-cycling-team-wins-big-at-2012-warrior-games/>

**Turning Disability into Ability at the Warrior Games**

<http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/turning-disability-into-ability-at-the-warrior-games/>

**Fourteen Organizations Join AW2 Community Support Network**

<http://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/06/fourteen-organizations-join-aw2-community-support-network/>

**Using Mental Skills in Shooting Competition**

<https://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/using-mental-skills-in-shooting-competition/>

**Army Sitting Volleyball Team to Compete for Gold at Warrior Games**

<http://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/army-sitting-volleyball-team-to-compete-for-gold-at-warrior-games/>

**2012 Warrior Games Opening Ceremony Honor Spirit of Athletes**

<https://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil/2012/05/2012-warrior-games-opening-ceremony-honors-spirit-of-athletes/>

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