

California Challenge kicks off in San Francisco

Dozens of injured troops along with celebrities, athletes, and elected officials will participate in the 7 day, 420-mile 2008 Road 2 Recovery California Challenge. Actors Mike Vogel (Cloverfield), chair of this year's VA National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans, Gary Sinise, and Ed Begley Jr. are among the participants joining dozens of injured veterans to raise funds to support Spinning® and outdoor cycling programs at Military and VA locations around the U.S. and help wounded warriors overcome obstacles they face. The ride will pass several military bases in California

Former Olympian Wayne Stetina and local cycling club, Team Z, will be among more than 100 cycling enthusiasts who will join wounded warriors from the VA and Military Wounded Warrior Transition Units.

You will be able to follow the ride on Major Jason Bryan's daily blog on the road 2 recovery.us.com website with daily updates including pictures and video.



LTC Patty Collins is back for California Challenge

The Road 2 Recovery California Challenge is the kick off of a National Fundraising effort to establish a R2R Mobile Tour for 2009. The USO and other organizations are supporting this fundraising effort.

The R2R Mobile Tour will be able to train and service all VA and Military WTU locations across the US as well as support the R2R events. The Mobile Tour will be available to appear at R2R partner Corporate or Organization national events and conventions.

Some of the featured warriors include:

Corporal Chris Lawrence who is a proud member of the United States Marine Corps. He departed to Iraq in April 2007, to the Al Anbar province. In August he was carrying a radio on a foot patrol as an IED was detonated under his feet while crossing a bridge. "I have no memory of the events that took place afterwards. I woke up in National Navy Medical Center, not knowing why I was there. I received severe injuries to my legs and left side." He spent 6 months recovering from his injuries. Due to the injuries on his left side, he can't run, so his future focus is going to be on cycling to rehabilitate and exercise.

Staff Sergeant Nicolas J. (Nick) Lerma has spent 18 years in the Marine Corps, during which he served in Desert Storm, Somalia, and OIF all as an infantryman. While conducting a raid in 2003, he and two other Marines were severely injured when the ground under them gave way sending them falling. Upon returning to the States he had a total of five knee surgeries on both knees and one shoulder surgery. Then, during his recovery period he was supervising the firing of shoulder-launched rockets when one of the rockets exploded in the tube just two feet away. "Myself and the gunner were severely injured with shrapnel and TBI." The gunner never fully recovered and remains under care to this day. The TBI impaired Lerma's speech, memory, and cognitive reasoning. The blast caused him to fall to the ground unconscious where he broke the L4 and L5 vertebrae in his back. This led to arthritis in his knees, shoulder, and back.

Soon the pain became so bad he could no longer play with his two sons, then ages 10 and 15. "I felt less than a man. I sat alone in my garage almost every day and cried." Then one day he overheard his oldest son talking on the phone, "Dad just stays on the couch now or in the garage...I miss him."

. "Then I was sent to the PTSD center where I met Gil Ramirez" who invited him to join a bike group. He told Ramirez that he had tried it at the Poly Trauma center but didn't like it because "we rode around the hospital like children being handled with kid gloves and it was embarrassing." Ramirez told him to come out anyway. "We road twelve miles that next day and I thought I was going to die. The rest of my PTSD brothers gave me encouragement and for the first time in a long time I felt like a man again. I could do something and challenge myself."

"My time at the PTSD program was a rebirth. I learned how to look at life again, not for what I no longer had, but for what I could have and did have. The bike played a huge part of that: it was a visible symbol of what I could still do. Now I go on 50-mile bike rides. I think about the friends I knew and the things I've been through and I ride the next mile for them and for me. I am Nick Lerma: father, husband, son, brother, friend, and US Marine and now all these people are more proud of me than they ever were."

You can read more about the Profiles in Courage in the attachment and on our website.

Regards,

Road 2 Recovery

Making a Difference in the Lives of Wounded Warriors

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Supporters include USO, Star Trac, VFW, Giant Bicycles, League of American Bicyclists, Step Up 4 Vets, California American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Coca-Cola, Shimano, Veltec Sports, Hincapie Sports, Alternative Vehicles, Hansen's, Clif Bar, Rudy Project, DeFeet, Park Tool, Speedplay, ProMax, Chamois Butt'r, CytoSport, and Bicycling Magazine. R2R is an America Supports You Homefront Group.

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