

 [print this page](#)

Bringing veterans to 'higher ground'

Pentagon chooses Sun Valley Adaptive Sports as model

by *MEGAN THOMAS*

Sun Valley Adaptive Sports Executive Director Tom Iselin found himself walking through the Pentagon last month. During the trip, Iselin visited the offices of Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as representatives of all military branches, the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Defense.

"I was impressed with how friendly and gregarious they were ... And how exceptionally willing to help the service men and women," Iselin said.

The visit culminated with a new relationship formed between the Ketchum-based Sun Valley Adaptive Sports organization and the U.S. Department of Defense.

"The Department of Defense has chosen Sun Valley Adaptive Sports to help them develop a pilot program, to fold in how non-government organizations can work with the government to provide rehabilitative services to wounded servicemen and women," Iselin said.

Sun Valley Adaptive Sports will serve as the model to create a structure for the government to work with non-government organizations to help provide recreational rehabilitative services to injured servicemen and women.

"We are the pilot program to see how this can work," Iselin said.

The Sun Valley Adaptive Sports nonprofit organization recently launched the Higher Ground program for wounded service members. The program provides recreational rehabilitation experiences for injured veterans. It introduces veterans to, or reacquaints them with, activities like alpine skiing, whitewater rafting, fly-fishing and pottery. The Higher Ground program invites groups of approximately five veterans for winter and summer events, all in the Wood River Valley.

The Higher Ground program also provides a one-on-one experience, known as Dream Come True, with individualized recreational rehabilitation.

"As far as I know, no one else in the country is doing this. Dreams Come True focuses on injured service members' dreams and aspirations as it relates to sports and recreation," Iselin said.

Similar to the concept of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the Dreams Come True program grants sports- and



While driving in Iraq, Army Spc. First Class E-7 of the 172nd Core Support Group Jerry Ezell was hit by an explosive device, leaving him with a paralyzed right leg, hearing loss and short-term memory loss. Through Sun Valley Adaptive Sports' Dreams Come True program, Ezell learned how to help children with disabilities during an individualized trip to the Wood River Valley. Courtesy photo.

recreation-oriented dreams of severely injured veterans. Wounded servicemen or women and their spouses or a family member are invited for a free week of recreational activities in the Wood River Valley. To date, Dreams Come True has hosted two injured servicemen. The program will host seven more this year.

"We engage the resources of the community, businesses, volunteers and Sun Valley Adaptive Sports to make dreams come true," Iselin said.

To ensure that the dreams of more wounded military personnel are granted, Sun Valley Adaptive Sports will work with the government to eliminate the bottleneck arising from the difficulty in reaching soldiers once they are discharged from military medical centers. Often, injured soldiers can benefit from adaptive sports organization programs, but privacy rules are a stumbling block to match the organizations with soldiers.

"The biggest challenge is how to make our services available to servicemen across the country and not violate privacy rules," Iselin said.

To solve the dilemma, plans are in the works to host a conference in Sun Valley to finesse how non-government and government organizations can better communicate on behalf of injured servicemen. The conference with the Military Severely Injured Center, a branch of the Department of Defense, and other adaptive sports organizations, will likely take place in the next year or two.

[Copyright © 2006 Express Publishing Inc.](#)

All Rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part in any form or medium without express written permission of Express Publishing Inc. is prohibited.

The Idaho Mountain Express is distributed free to residents and guests throughout the Sun Valley, Idaho resort area community. [Subscribers](#) to the Idaho Mountain Express will read these stories and others in this week's issue.