



Overview: **Marineland Military Support Retreat (MMSR)**

The overall purpose of the **Marineland Military Support Retreat (MMSR)** is to promote community based non-profit integrative intensive retreats for service members and their primary support persons and to inspire long-term plans to create a wellness/healing restoration center for military personnel in the Town of Marineland.

According to a recent Pew Research Center Study some 84% of post-9/11 veterans say the public does not understand the problems faced by those in the military or their families. The public agrees, though by a less lopsided majority—71%. Recently, communities, the DoD, the VA, and academic institutions have joined together to create retreat modalities by forming non-profit organizations to bridge the gap and supplement the existing DoD/VA efforts to reintegrate Veterans (this term will be used to represent both active duty, reserve, national guard and military service members) after deployments.

These retreats are designed to assist warriors/families affected by deployment exposures by using holistic, supportive, and educational approaches structured to provide reconnection to one's self, peers, family and community. Within the retreat structure the veteran can safely share stories about their deployment experience, including impacts on their significant relationships. Group learning can help attendees understand and express their views on the "new normal" of life and will provide them with opportunities to discover effective adjustment strategies. Additionally, the exposure to coping skills and education within a group setting allows the veteran and family to struggle through tough issues while being surrounded by a supportive network. The common deployment physiological changes in body reactivity can be addressed by numerous modalities: Healing by return to the beauty of nature, recreation, equine, dolphin and canine therapy, yoga, breath awareness, guided meditations, and other expressive activities. The opportunity to explore on one's own terms in such a supportive setting can improve relationships, health conditions, and promote healing where needed.

The staff and advisory board of the retreat are experienced veterans, DoD/VA experts local service/support providers, and community members. Although the retreats are not a clinical intervention, the retreats provide vital resource information and serve as a pre-clinical/post-clinical experience that encourages help seeking.

The Need

According to the 2010 census there are over 165,900 veterans living in Florida. The number of civilian veterans in Jacksonville is about 93,000, or 17 percent of the total population (National average is 12.70%). The Town of Marineland sits between St. Johns & Flagler County and there are 19,000 and 11,300 respectively in these two neighboring counties alone. There are numerous military bases in Northeast Florida including Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Naval Station Mayport, and Camp Blanding Joint Training Center. Since there is such an extensive military community in Northeast Florida, there is a tremendous need to provide support for those transitioning to civilian from all of these local military bases. The high demand for veteran service and support in the regions heightens the need to coordinate and bring together all available community resources at this inclusive event.

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Background

Holding retreats and establishing a long-term military wellness and restoration center at Marineland was inspired by a working group of passionate experts, business leaders, and community stakeholders coming together and realizing the healing potential of the idyllic coastal community of Marineland. In 2012, Jim Jacoby (chairman & CEO of the Jacoby Group) & Lewis Jordan (former COO of Flying Tigers/Continental Airlines & CEO of GratitudeAmerica) brought together a team of national experts to start a Marineland working group to help turn the dream of retreats and a local long-term restoration center into a reality. These experts that include Victoria Bruner LCSW-C, RN, BETS (Retreat Facilitator/co-organizer, (Volunteer Clinical Consultant, DoD Deployment Health Clinical Center), John Bradley MD (Chief of Psychiatry and Deputy Director for Mental Health, VA Boston Healthcare System), Terence Keane PhD (Assistant Dean for Research & Professor and Vice-Chair of the Department of Psychiatry, Boston University School of Medicine), James P. Kelly MA, MD, FAAN (Director, National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE)), John A. Parrish, M.D. (Edward Wigglesworth Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Dermatology, Harvard Medical School, Executive Director and Founder, CIMIT (The Center for Integration of Medicine and Innovative Technology)), & Steven Schachter MD, FAAN (Chief Academic Officer and Program Leader of NeuroTechnology CIMIT, Professor of Neurology, Harvard Medical School) have come together to create a future for Marineland that could augment the healing energy that already flows naturally from this restorative coastal place. John November Esq. (event co-organizer & Developmental Coordinator of GratitudeAmerica) is tirelessly working to mobilize local veteran's service and support organizations to cooperatively plan and administer the first retreat. This event will not only show this beach town's potential to assist in healing, but will also illustrate what can be accomplished when individual groups with shared goals come together on a project that is beneficial to the entire community.

Goals

-Promote veteran connection: *We believe that the most important moments in any Veteran's road to recovery is the support and interaction with those who have the shared experience of deployment. Veterans have the ability to relate with each other, share techniques, and provide a much-needed sense of camaraderie when the sense of isolation begins to prevail. Experienced facilitators will facilitate group discussion.*

- Focus on the Veteran and Primary Support Person/Spouse: *We believe that the veteran and the spouse/primary support person must be treated as a single unit in order to achieve long-term success. It is increasingly recognized that the stresses placed upon military spouses/primary support person, both during a deployment and in dealing with the effects of PTSD, can itself be traumatic. Spouses/primary support persons are strongly encouraged to participate in each event/exercise, and the facilitator of group discussions will ensure that their voice is heard.*

-Promote community, state and resource involvement: *It is critically important to recognize that this is a Florida-based retreat generated by Florida communities to help Florida veterans. The retreat incorporates cultural components of the State of Florida and highlights the beauty of the surrounding natural environment. To be successful, communities and the State of Florida must take ownership and pride in this*



program. Not only will veterans and their primary support benefit from the retreat, their home communities will become further equipped to continue support once the retreat is complete. On Sunday evening a community forum will be held immediately at the conclusion of the retreat to bring the veterans, community leaders and resources together.

-Provide a safe nature based environment with participatory education and skill development: The town of Marineland's history and ecology will create the ideal environment for healing. Marineland, once Florida's premier tourist destination, remains a Florida icon and is officially designated by the state as Florida's first "Remarkable Coastal Place". Founded as its own small city in 1938, it was home to the world's first Oceanarium. Marineland remains on the leading edge of marine science biotech research and education. The research that emerges from its renowned Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience leads to the development of critical medical health advances. Marineland has become a center for conservation of the natural environment and a center of outdoor recreation as well. The River to Sea Preserve is a 90-acre corridor of publicly owned land in the town that stretches from the Intracoastal Waterway and Matanzas River to the Atlantic Ocean. A seaside promenade runs the length of the public beach and the river side of the preserve has magnificent hiking trails that are surrounded by live oaks draped with Spanish moss and rich groves of magnolia, palm and hickory trees. Moreover, the historic Oceanarium has been redeveloped as the Marineland Dolphin Adventure. Marineland lies directly on the beach and is a gateway to the National Scenic Byway for A1A, known as the Scenic and Historic A1A Coastal Byway. Marineland is one of the last stands of old Florida, to be enjoyed quietly and with renewal, just as it has continued to renew itself over the ages for the public good. Participants will kayak, boat, walk, and relax in a setting that will result in unique outdoor experiences and even may allow participants to learn new skills related to enjoying and gaining peace while in the great outdoors.

-Follow-up Care: Retreat participants will be provided contacts to gain access to coordinated post-retreat services including support groups, psychological counseling, employment assistance, transportation services, volunteer opportunities, and legal assistance.

Program Structure

Participatory Group Education: Group sessions are designed to approach deployment adjustment in three phases – The Past, the Present, and the Future. Maximum participation and interaction is highly encouraged for each Veteran dyad. These sessions are facilitated by the lead retreat facilitator and are the central modality for encouraging dyad interaction and learning.

Dyad Facilitated Group: These sessions designed to help the dyad reconnect with each other and understand the commonality of adjustment issues. These sessions are led by a licensed facilitator with experience in working with deployment adjustment issues.

Yoga: Yoga facilitates the individual to reintegrate the body with the mind. Researchers believe that war zone experiences may cause the mind to disconnect from the body as the body's subconscious survival



mechanisms take over, causing a physiological imbalance.¹ Empirical findings indicate that yoga is effective in helping regulate stress, emotions, and helping the autonomic nervous system regain balance.² Yoga classes are conducted by a certified yoga instructor from Florida. Yoga and meditation have now become mainstream military and can support anyone in their daily life.

Opening Color Guard and Welcome -Color Guard from the Flagler VFW and Women's Auxiliary will greet dyads and community members as the retreat begins. Posting of the colors will occur and the short film, "Still There", is a tribute to military service by acknowledging and embracing the sacrifice of the individual service member and family will be shown. The poignant insight that "every great society is measured by its legacy of compassion" is epitomized by this film's interpretation of Francis Scott Key's sacred text in "The Star-Spangled Banner". Director Theresa M. Sloat's film exudes personal gratitude while honoring the truth of abandonment and pain experienced by the veteran and primary support.

Canine & Equine Therapy –Canine and Equine interaction is an emerging form of therapeutic intervention in which the animals are used as tools for veterans to gain self-understanding and emotional growth. Canine assisted psychotherapy is a type of animal assisted therapy, a field of mental health that recognizes the bond between animals and humans and the potential for emotional healing that can occur when a relationship is formed between the two species.³

Dolphin Interaction- The Marineland Dolphin Adventure attraction has graciously provided a "touch and feel" program and a "behind the scenes tour" of the attraction for retreat participants.. Retreat participants will get up close and personal with one of Marineland's resident dolphins.. Participants will meet, greet and feed one of Marineland's amazing bottlenose dolphins in this fast-paced and exhilarating program.

¹ "Healing the Wounds of War: Yoga Used to Treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" - <http://www.yogatherapyweb.com/yoga-for-depression-and-anxiety/healing-wounds-war-yoga-used-treat-post-traumatic-stress-disorder>.

² "Mind-Body Skills for Regulating the Autonomic Nervous System." Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury March 2011, p. 9.

³ Vetnews.com "More on Equine Assisted Therapy" <http://www.vetsenews.com/equine-assisted-psychotherapy.shtml>