



Veterans' Rowing and Kayaking™

2015 Annual Report for Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc.

In This Issue

| | |
|---|----------------|
| <i>Greetings</i> | <i>Page 2</i> |
| <i>1st National VA Blind Veterans Rowing Program</i> | <i>Page 3</i> |
| <i>Sponsors</i> | <i>Page 24</i> |
| <i>A Year of Growth</i> | <i>Page 26</i> |
| <i>Board of Directors and Advisory Board</i> | <i>Page 27</i> |
| <i>New Program Development: TeleRowing</i> | <i>Page 29</i> |
| <i>Photo Highlights of our season year</i> | <i>Page 32</i> |
| <i>Our Thanks!</i> | <i>Page 36</i> |

Greetings!

What an amazing year we had this season!

I want to personally thank all our community sponsors, grantors, corporate & private donors, volunteers, staff and the many individuals who are nameless and contributed anonymously (you know who you are) for making this year such an amazing success. Without your dedication and continued support, we would never have reached or surpassed our goals for this year.

Where can I begin to tell you about all the blessings that our Lord has provided despite some very challenging obstacles? Let's look back to September 2014 when we received an unexpected email from a 1st year VA Blind Rehab Clinician employee named Amber Vaillancourt from the Providence VA Medical Center. Amber contacted us and requested information about our programs for severely disabled Veterans that we were running in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

She wanted to know if we could create a program for blind/vision impaired Veterans. This idea had actually come to me in 2013, our 1st year of operation, when I approached a colleague that I was working with and who was also blind and suggested it to him. He said to me that he couldn't imagine himself rowing or kayaking outdoors, despite my usual persuasive means to get people to try anything. I was rather disappointed at this set-back but in the back of my mind I always believed that it was possible to create a recreational rehabilitation/adaptive sports program for our blind/vision impaired Veterans.

So when we got this invitation from the Providence VA Blind Rehab Services department I had my hopes renewed. We began an email correspondence with all the Blind Rehab Service team members and quickly began a massive search of area community boathouse clubs and potential sponsors. We finally found what we believed would be an ideal host rowing club by the name of East Bay Rowing from Barrington, Rhode Island which was about 20-minute traveling time from the Providence VA. They agreed to come to the Providence VA and listen our presentation before the team clinicians which took place on November 26, 2014.

At the time of the meeting, I had no volunteer staff available to drive with me to Rhode Island to make the presentation but did have a program Veteran named Kent who insisted on coming with me. Kent was a stage 4 cancer patient who was a very strong advocate of our recreational rehabilitation programs and he often spoke openly about his cancer and how our program helped him get through the very difficult radiation and chemo therapy. He often said to me that, "your programs each weekend is what keeps me going."

Upon our arrival at the Providence VA Medical Center, we were quickly all huddled in a nice, warm, cozy office and ready for the presentation. Kent began by saying that he had

a rather difficult life and things only got worse with his cancer diagnosis. He said that he had very little support from the community because he was a new resident from out of state and had very few acquaintances.

He spoke about getting an invitation from our organization to come and participate at one of our outdoor rowing and kayaking events in MA and how he really enjoyed it. He met other program Veterans with various health related issues and he realized that he was not alone in his struggles. He quickly made friends and found his purpose which was to help encourage other injured Veterans by giving them support in our weekend events.

Kent's personal testimony was very moving and it is with great sadness that I have to report his passing which was in August of this year. We have created a memorial page for our program Veterans who are no longer with us and it is available to view on our website at www.veteransrowing.org

1st National VA Blind Veterans Rowing Program

Please meet our founding clinical and coaching team members of the 1st National VA Blind Veterans Rowing program:



From left to right: Kent, Donna, Adele, Debbie, Amber, Henry, Patrick.

Wonderful stories began to be written about this amazingly innovative program for blind/vision impaired Veterans. Here are just a few:

Providence VA Medical Center, Rhode Island *Tap, Tap, Row*



The author, Amber Vaillancourt, front and center, with Providence VA Row Cats members and coaches at 426 Fitness in Warren, R.I., March 10, 2015. (Providence VA Medical Center photo by Sid Petros, WaterRower)

By Amber Vaillancourt, Blind Rehabilitation Out-Patient Specialist
Thursday, March 19, 2015

Providence Veterans Get Oars Wet in New All-Blind Vets' Crew Team by Amber Vaillancourt, blind rehabilitation outpatient specialist, Providence VA Medical Center

It may not be the Providence River or even One Hundred Acre Cove, but one group of Veterans has turned the rowing studio at 426 Fitness in Warren, R.I., into their own personal body of water. This is not a group of college-aged rowers, or even a group of Veterans who all served their country within the last 20 years. No, they are not your average team of athletes; they have specialized skills, and are able to work in incredibly challenging environments.

So who are these Veterans, what is their common thread? Well, none of them have ever rowed crew before and they are all legally blind.

The Providence VA Row Cats is the new team out of Providence. I started working with the Department of Veterans Affairs last year with the very strong belief that recreation

can and should be a major component of a person's rehabilitation journey when it comes to vision loss. Being hired by the VA was like a dream come true, because it was known to me, and others in the vision services field, that there are no services comparable to those at the VA.

The resources available from the federal government via the VA for vision care, the association with the medical treatment model, the partnership with others in a VA hospital, and the acknowledgement that vision rehabilitation can be provided in a therapeutic way, similar to physical or occupational therapy, and the support and opportunity to do so, are all a dream come true for a little ol' peripatologist -- also known as an orientation and mobility specialist -- like me.

Now, I am so proud to be a BROS (a blind rehabilitation outpatient specialist) and have some of the very best patients in the world. They are so resilient and motivated; nothing can stop them from pursuing their goals. They have been so brave in their lives, and that bravery and courage is their foundation for living their best life, not passing or settling, but living. As I say to my Veteran patients, "Doing your thing."

Recreation contributes to a person's overall well-being, physical and emotional health, and social and community connections. For a person with vision loss, fighting off isolation and feeling like you have lost your independence can be some of the toughest challenges.

The chance that I was given by Paul Stephen Varszegi last November was to provide him with Veteran patient athletes to make up a rowing team. I would also handle the team's logistics, which included things like transportation, obtaining clearance from doctors, scheduling of appointments and mobility training, as well as any group support in terms of vision adaptations and accessibility, much like a manager.

Paul and his organization, Veterans Rowing & Kayaking Inc., would line up coaches, a boat house, sponsors, and meals after practices and equipment. With support from the Providence VA Medical Center's vision impairment services team coordinator, Adele Geringer, my supervisor, Anita Solomon, the voluntary services director, Donna Russillo, and recreation therapy assistant Henry Rea, we covered the VA side of responsibilities.



Providence VA Row Cats team members and coaches participating in indoor rowing practice during a Providence VA Row Cats training session at 426 Fitness in Warren, R.I., Feb. 10, 2015. (Providence VA Medical Center photo by Amber Vaillancourt)

Paul identified two dynamite coaches, Deb and Patrick Sullivan, who also recently opened a community boathouse in Barrington, R.I., and had excellent ties to 426 Fitness in Warren, R.I., a local facility that houses a gorgeous rowing studio packed full with WaterRower rowing machines. Paul, who had helped to create the first rowing team through Veterans Rowing & Kayaking Inc. last year out of West Haven, Conn., was able to extend sponsorships from the Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation, corporations like Subway and Boston Market, and also smaller, more local companies, like Kelly's Four Plus Granola, WaterRower and Concept2, to support the, now, two rowing teams.

Paul even accommodated a wish I had bestowed upon him: I wanted our rowing program to additionally feature an indoor season to provide my Veterans with something they could participate in during more than just the fair-weather months in New England; I wanted them to learn how to use rowing machines, because that would enable them to practice the sport year-round, and on their own if they wanted to.

I think it is important at this point to acknowledge all of the cardiologists, nurses, counselors and primary care physicians, both within and outside of the VA, who engaged in conversations with me about the program and their patients, and who were receptive to the ties between quality of life and overall health, and how recreation can impact both of these things.



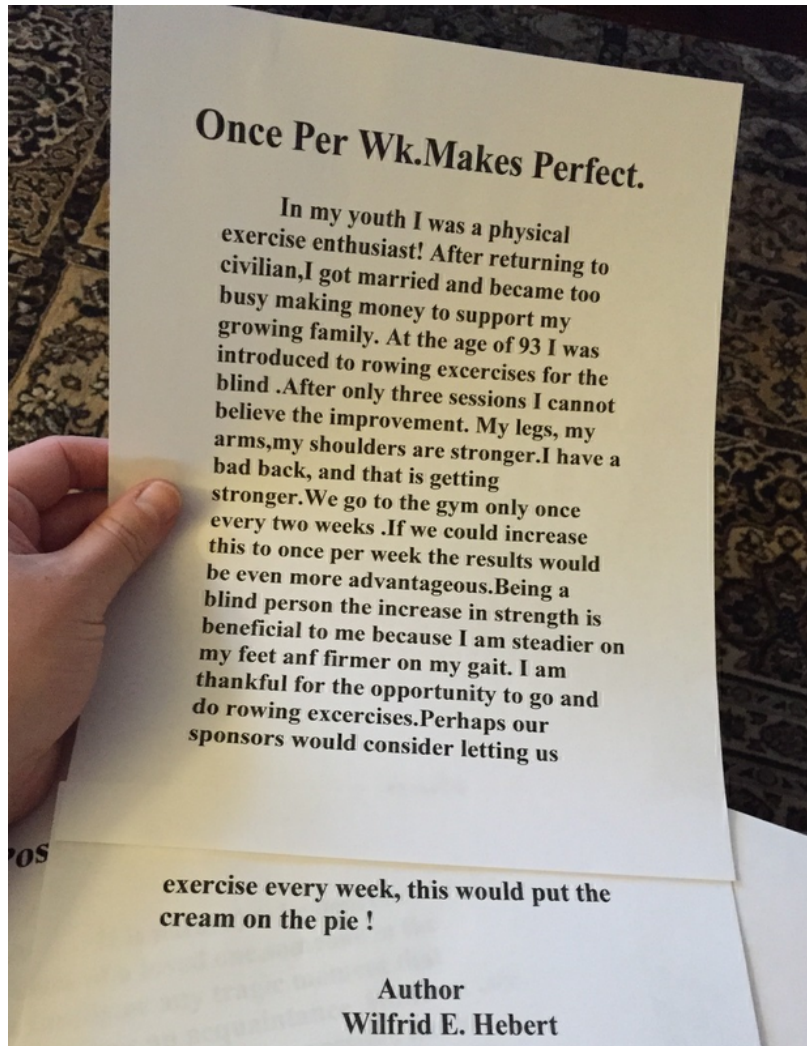
Barbara Henry, left, a blind rehabilitation program volunteer, Veteran Ginny Beltz, middle, Judy Cohen, right, spouse of another Veteran participant, and Veteran Jack Ringland, in the back, practice underhand rowing, completing a stroke that works muscles similar to a bicep curl, during a Providence VA Row Cats training session at 426 Fitness in Warren, R.I., March 10, 2015. (Providence VA Medical Center photo by Amber Vaillancourt)

We are now in the inaugural first season of the Providence VA Row Cats, the all-blind Veterans rowing team. As I prepare for our next team training, I think about our successes so far. The biggest one feels like having lost only one Tuesday training to the snow. Being able to launch with all the snow that has fallen on southern New England this winter has been a victory all on its own!

Another victory is that each practice has brought both returning and new members, and it appears that this trend will continue. Athletes taking breaks from the team, and returning after addressing other health issues, shows commitment and dedication, but also how much these Veteran athletes look forward to this opportunity. I was lucky enough to attend a Home Based Primary Care staff meeting recently and mentioned the rowing team. The support, interest-based questions and cheers I received from these colleagues -- most of whom I only knew as a last name from a note -- honestly had me feeling a little choked up and even more revved about this team.

The team also has the chance to serve as a vehicle for delivering knowledge about vision loss, not only within the VA and Veteran community, but also in our medical center, the city of Providence and the rest of the "sighted world." Row Cats Veterans can serve as ambassadors of vision loss and blindness within our community, thanks to the interest and support of the public, and all those who made this program possible. The Providence VA Row Cats are a shining example for all of us that what you can accomplish is limited only by what you are brave enough to try.

This story was followed by a letter from a WWII program Veteran:



It is very important to note here that many wonderful sponsors and organizations came together very rapidly to make this program so successful. They include the following:

Providence Row Cats
Rhode Island VA Healthcare System
Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation
Lions Club International
East Bay Rowing
426 Fitness
Water Rower
Kelly's Four Plus Granola

Subway
Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc.

Now ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to introduce this wonderful team leader clinician who had the guts and fortitude to even consider dreaming up this innovative recreational rehabilitation/adaptive sports programing for blind/vision impaired Veterans. Please keep in mind that her contribution *cannot be measured or a value added to it because it is priceless!*

Now let me tell you why:

When we view blind/vision impaired Veterans objectively what do we see?

- Individuals with limitations (Can't really do anything!)
- Individuals who are isolated due to their disabilities (Always alone, poor gal/guy)
- Individuals that we are confused about how to help (What can I do for him/her?)
- Individuals that we feel very sorry for and may have our own personal guilt (because we are so blessed)
- Individuals with many challenges and prohibition's (Oh, they can't do that!)
- Individuals that we want to help but are afraid to help (personal liability)

This young lady's name is Amber Vaillancourt and she is a BROS clinician that *opened the door for untold blind/vision impaired Veterans*, who up to now, have been relegated to their homes with family or caregiver support if they are lucky. Some blind/vision impaired Veterans may be able to live on their own but most have to rely on some kind of human interaction support.

So, we have identified the *physical* limitation which is blindness/vision impairment. How about obesity or weight gain, joint weakness and pain, balance and coordination, loss of strength in legs, arms, back and shoulders?

Let's now look at the *psychological* limitations which could be any of the following blended mental health issues: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI); severe to moderate depression; anxiety and mood disorder; concentration and focus; sleep disorder; suicide tendency; hopelessness and burden to family or caregivers; substance abuse and so on...

If you were told that you could significantly improve the above physical and mental health conditions by way of a natural/holistic remedy and that it is very beneficial to your body, wouldn't you consider it?

It has been proven many medications cause side effects which leads to other medical injuries by way of toxic chemicals to your nervous system. Look at all the pharmaceutical advertisements on the television for new medications to treat every imaginable symptom. The ads all look great with happy people in them. The ads run about 1-2 minutes long and at the very end comes the disclaimer about all the *side effect*

it may cause! Many are more dangerous than the symptom being treated! How crazy is that?!

So what can we learn from this: *All medications are toxic to the body and can lead to other physical and mental health problems!* Think of all the money that the pharmaceutical industry is making off of sick people who only get sicker with the more medication that they are prescribed.

So, we now have millions of individuals here in the United States *addicted* to medication thanks to our culture of medicating people for anything under the sun.

Thank you Amber Vaillancourt for thinking out of the box with helping all your assigned blind/vision impaired Veterans with a very creative approach to improved healthcare delivery which focuses on repairing the mind, body and spiritual healing of untold future program Veterans! All without medication!

Coach Debbie Sullivan from the East Bay Rowing organization that partnered with us.







Our poster gift to the Providence VA Medical Center where we created the 1st Blind Veteran's VA Crew Indoor Rowing Program.



Now that our program with the Providence VA team of exceptionally hardworking clinicians was underway at *426 Fitness in Rhode Island*, it only made sense to use their fantastic program as a model for more blind/vision impaired rowing or kayaking programs closer to our home base in New Haven, Connecticut.

Enter one very ambitious and brave West Haven, CT VA clinician, Sarah Bowman who also works in the blind rehab department at that hospital. Sarah had evidently heard about our success at the Rhode Island Blind Veterans' Rowing Program so she began a collaboration with our organization which resulted with the creation of our 2nd National VA Blind Veterans' Rowing Program to serve all Connecticut blind/vision impaired Veterans. She referred 10-program Veterans which brought our total for both RI and CT registered program Veterans to over 30 as of this writing.

Just as we have expected, we gathered a very robust team of sponsors and donors to make our new indoor rowing studio at *475 Long Wharf Drive* in a *City of New Haven* donated building known as *Long Wharf Pier*.

This program also started to attract local media attention in a most positive way...



By: Tom Parent, News 8 Photographer and Dylan Hyman, WTNH.com Staff

HARTFORD, Conn. (WTNH) — A group of U.S. veterans in Connecticut is making history by being the first blind veterans rowing crew. The vets gathered on a training barge on the Connecticut River Friday to begin their training to become a full-fledged rowing crew.

Riverfront Recapture, based in Hartford, and The Veterans Rowing and Kayaking Organization, based in West Haven, partnered up to create the program.

“I am so proud that they’re brave enough to do this,” said Paul Stephen Varszegi, President and Founder of The Veterans Rowing and Kayaking Organization. “They’re the first national VA (Veterans Affairs) blind veterans rowing crew. Never been done before, we’re the first here in Connecticut.”

“This is our first outing on the physical water,” said Fred Chutester, one of the veterans who joined the program. “It was a little challenging for me, and to be out on the physical water on the Connecticut River, a little thought I had to give to it.”

While Chutester had some concerns about being out on the water, he is confident about finishing the goal he’s created for himself.

“I’m going to do it, just let me try,” he said. “If I mess up, I mess up.”

The veterans say that being the first blind rowing crew in Connecticut is something that they are looking forward to.

“Let Me Try:” Charities Establish Rowing Team Of Blind Veterans

September 6, 2015 by Scott Faith

We’re always interested in running stories about organizations that help veterans, particularly when those organizations offer a unique product or service for vets. So when we heard that two Connecticut-based charities have combined forces in order to give disabled veterans a unique opportunity, we knew this was something we needed to share.



Veterans Rowing and Kayaking Organization and **Riverfront Recapture** are putting together **a rowing team** consisting of blind veterans. Competitive and recreational crew are great events for veterans, as they emphasize two important aspects with which vets are already familiar: teamwork and physical fitness.

While the idea of crewing while visually impaired might seem daunting to some, participating veterans seem unconcerned. One veteran named Fred Chutester, perhaps typifying the “can-do” attitude of America’s veterans, **had this to say:**

It was a little challenging for me... (but) I’m going to do it, just let me try.”

If you are interested in participating in the rowing program, or to offer your support for it, please contact Veterans Rowing and Kayaking or Riverfront Recapture. Many thanks to all of our veterans, and to all of the people and organizations out there who continue to come up with innovative and effective ways to give back to our vets.



Our 1st Blind Veteran National VA Rowing Crew made up of: Mark, Camille, Doug, Vicki, Bob, Fred and Brian Wendry who lead the team to their first crew on-water rowing experience at our facility club, Riverfront Recapture Boathouse in Hartford, CT.



So you might be asking yourself...wait, wasn't the 1st National VA Blind Rowing Program created in Providence, Rhode Island and not in New Haven, Connecticut?

The answer is YES, the 1st National VA Blind Veterans' Rowing Program was indeed created by the wonderful team in Rhode Island but the 2nd Blind Veterans' Rowing Program which is based in New Haven, Connecticut, was actually the 1st in the nation to go out on open water!

The only reason that the Rhode Island team failed to be the first was because they did not have a rowing barge available to take them out.

The beauty of this story is that both RI and CT teams made history in their own way! In the process, 2-very special clinicians, Amber Vallencourt and Sarah Bowman deserve a lot of credit for taking the risk and trying something that no other person in the VA Healthcare System would even consider attempting. Congratulations to both of them in this wonderful historical achievement.

Can we keep the momentum going? The short answer is yes, why not?! What will it take? Here it is in a nutshell:

- Willingness by the VA Healthcare System to recognize that this program does serve a purpose and is very beneficial to not only blind/vision impaired Veterans, but also for other physically and mentally disabled Veterans.
- A need to educate the public about more effective and innovative programs that can greatly reduce healthcare costs via recreational rehabilitation/adaptive sports therapy programing.
- Funding these programs with public, private, corporate and charitable foundation support.
- Creating more collaboration with like-minded individuals and organizations who share our commitment to healthcare excellence.

As we continue our search within our own organization for outside resources, we are still continuing our demanding process of adding exceptionally qualified candidates to our new Advisory Board. Why are we doing this? It has been my personal desire and goal throughout my life to be the best at whatever I set my mind to. It is an illness I've had at reaching for perfection. There is no point in building mediocrity because it will never be sustainable for the long term. Others will come along and put you out of business and years of hard work goes down the drain and your organization will be a short memory, and you a footnote in some obscure journal.

So why not try to create an organization that has multitalented, hardworking and exceptionally gifted individuals? Let us create the foundation building blocks of our young organization with a super Advisory Board of Directors who are not afraid of being creative and innovative in our common mission. What is our mission? To facilitate growth and recovery for all our severely disabled Veterans through recreational rehabilitation rowing & kayaking adaptive sports programing.

Let us thank the second group of sponsors for the creation of our 2nd National Blind Veterans' Rowing Program in New Haven at Long Wharf Pier:

Connecticut Nautilus Row
Water Rower
City of New Haven
Connecticut VA Healthcare System
Joseph S. Stackpole Charitable Trust, Bank of America, N.A. Trustee
Walmart Foundation
Canal Dock Boathouse, Inc.
Great River Rowing
McDonald's
Subway

Veterans of Foreign Wars
Kelly's Four Plus Granola
Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc.

Another nice letter written by one of our program Veterans:

Sept. 15, 2015

Dear Paul,

When the VA offered the rowing program, I signed up immediately, feeling that it would be something I would enjoy doing. Being visually impaired, there are few activities that I could participate in. In addition, this type of exercise was just what I needed to get off some unwanted pounds. The program also offered the opportunity to associate socially with other vets in my situation. I have never missed a meeting, and I always look forward to whatever else I can learn about this sport.

The meet on August 28, 2015 in Hartford was extremely enjoyable. It was great to finally try to apply what I was learning. Being on the water was different than rowing on the trainers, but the basics were the same.

I would like to thank the U.S. Rowing Association for helping us to obtain the equipment we need. I would also like to thank the

Veterans Rowing + Kayaking Inc.
for their participation in helping
blind or visually impaired
veterans with this innovative
program. Lastly, I would like to
thank you dedication and oversight
of this program.

Sincerely yours,

Jim Hartz

Written by: Rose Chidester for Fred Chidester

What a wonderful opportunity for all our sponsors, supporters and contributors to come together and be part of such a special and innovative recreational rehabilitation adaptive sports program. Here are some more photos from our New Haven, Connecticut location:







Special thanks go out to my very dear friend Bob Johnson from the VFW who gave countless long volunteer hours to drive remotely to the upper state of Connecticut to pick-up two blind/vision impaired Veterans so that they could participate in the above program. God bless you Bob! Bob Johnson is the gentleman sitting on the far left next to the wall.

Another special thanks goes out to the team of Director of Rowing, John Leonard of Great River Rowing of Shelton, CT., who was instrumental in taking over the management of our College Military Rowing Program and our Blind Veterans' Rowing program in New Haven, CT.

John, we are very grateful for the fine work that you and your staff did on behalf of both program Veterans.

Sponsors

Let us also thank all our 50 plus sponsors who helped to make all of this work possible.

City of New Haven
Concept 2
Fast Signs
Make a Home Foundation
Maritime Rowing Club
People's United Bank
Canal Dock Boathouse, Inc.
Calvary Church
CT AMC Whitewater Committee
Appalachian Mountain Club
Alloy Engineering
The Given Limb Foundation
DAV
The Hummingbird Foundation
Light Sources, Inc.
Norwalk Community College
Ocean State Job Lot
Riverfront Recapture
Subway Sandwiches
East Bay Rowing
Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation
Lions Club of Rhode Island
426 Fitness
Water Rower
Kelly's Four Plus Granola
McDonald's
VFW
CT Nautilus Row
Providence Rows Cats
Walmart
Great River Rowing
Quinnipiac River Marina
Ascenda Law Group
Disabled Sports USA
Mount Sinai Rehabilitation Hospital
Creating Ability
Collinsville Canoe and Kayak
Freedom Rows
Waucoma Yacht Club
Plummer Financial Services

Joseph S. Stackpole Charitable Trust
Providence VA Blind Rehabilitation
Varson Racing
IAVA
WinTech
Easter Seals
Beacon Point Marine

There are approximately another 150 unlisted sponsors and supporters of our organization. We choose not to list them because we want to retain our competitive position as the national leader in recreational rehabilitation/adaptive sports programming with rowing and kayaking for disabled Veterans.

The nice thing about our quantum growth is that we can be very selective with who we do business with. We choose our partners/sponsors very carefully so as to avoid conflict of interest.

Additionally, we like to avoid drama and manipulation which we had to endure earlier in the year. Thankfully, we have added quite a bit more sponsors to our network of supporters who share our commitment to put the Veterans first.

Another major two changes: We will be accepting outside referrals from any clinically licensed agency. Membership opportunity for all registered Veterans referred into our program or existing program Veterans who refer other Veterans. This is how we choose to give back control of our Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking organization to our program Veterans; by making them in-charge of their healthcare.

If you are reading this annual report with interest in either becoming a volunteer or sponsor of our organization, please know the following before you contact us:

- We are not a political organization.
- We only serve disabled and able Veterans or ROTC students.
- We only want to collaborate with you if you share our desire for excellence in healthcare delivery.
- We are seeking to do business with individuals and organizations who are passionate about their work.
- We only want to do business with you if you have no hidden agenda.
- We want to do business with you if you are creative, hardworking, brave and not afraid to make a mistake.

A Year of Growth

Let's move on to our overall achievements this year.

In 2015, we registered over 110 Veterans in various programs in 6-States where we are building programs. This represents a growth of over 66% from the previous year or more than 307% in 3-years since we began in 2013.

We went from having 4-club affiliations in two States to adding another 4 facilities, and counting. We are also developing programs in 4-more States. Here are the new clubs that we added this year:

Beacon Point Marine, Shelton, CT.
426 Fitness, Warren, RI.
Long Wharf Pier Indoor Rowing Studio, New Haven, CT.
Quinnipiac River Marina, New Haven, CT.

We were excited to see our supporters, sponsors and partners grow by more than 100% We also made the national GuideStar organization non-profit rating system in our 1st year of accreditation as a Gold Star Member.

Financial Growth

Our funding has grown from approximately \$3,500 in our 1st year of operation in 2013 to \$54,000 in our 2nd year in 2014 and over \$114,000 in 2015 not including approximately \$100,000 in donated volunteer hours. Quite an achievement.

A VA Adaptive Sports Grant for our Massachusetts location in Holyoke was awarded which proportionate share to our organization was \$21,250. This program will be relocated to another location in MA in 2016 where we can significantly cut the cost for program services.

Another major contributor was Water Rower based in Rhode Island and London, England with a \$16,300 equipment grant for our newest Connecticut location at Long Wharf Pier.

Our friends at the Given Limb Foundation again helped us out with an equipment grant of \$8,500 to help upgrade our adaptive kayaks for Veterans with missing limbs. Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation gave us 2-grants totaling \$10,000 Private donations of over \$10,000 was also given. We received \$9,000 worth of rowing & kayaking equipment donations and from the community and another \$48,000 in donated assets.

We received 3-small grants from the Walmart Foundation totaling \$2,000. Joseph S. Stackpole Charitable Trust, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee also gave us \$1,500.

In-kind donations amounted to over \$8,000 with cash contributions of over \$26,000. An independent CPA compilation report will also be available and will be posted on our website and GuideStar, along with this report.

Board of Directors and Advisory Board

As the organization continued to grow this year, we focused on revamping our Board of Directors and also created an Advisory Board. As a first step, we eliminated any potential conflict of interest with existing VR&K Board of Directors serving as employees of the VA Healthcare System by removing them from our Board. This also included yours truly, who resigned from his position as a VA Healthcare Employee to work 100% for the Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking organization.

I'm especially grateful to the Board of Directors for their dedication and leadership as we continue to grow and develop the organization.

Nicholas Montini, Chairman of the Board
Mayra Thomas, Treasurer
Helen McKee, Assistant Treasurer
Daren Knapp, Secretary

A very special thanks to Ken Christianson who was the founding Treasurer of Veterans Rowing & Kayaking. Ken's turned the reins over to Mayra and Helen who will do an excellent job of maintaining our high standards of financial stewardship.

We added a valuable top notch professional Advisory Board member who was vetted carefully to make sure that their commitment to volunteering their time would achieve meaningful success, and be rewarding work for them, and our program Veterans. Mission alignment was the topic of our vetting process.

Our new Advisor Board is made up of the following new member:

Dr. Roslyn Burton-Roberson, who just recently joined our Advisory Board to help us align our mission to help disabled Veterans with her organization, Easter Seals. As we do this, she will help open doors to other Easter Seals chapters in our region, including NY, CT, RI, ME, VT and NH.

Program Development: TeleRowing

2015 saw the beginning work on a new indoor rowing program for Veterans in partnership with our sponsor, Water Rower.

We were given a challenge earlier in the year by VA Healthcare clinicians in Vermont and Maine. They said that they had blind/vision impaired Veterans living in very remote and isolated parts of the State and who could not access fitness and wellness clubs.

We said that we would take up the challenge and create a program where they wouldn't have to leave their homes due to bad weather or their community isolation. Introducing TeleRowing, the world's 1st interactive rowing program which links program Veterans to our partnering fitness clubs on scheduled work out sessions.

Not only can individuals connect with one another from home to home but rowing studios to other rowing studios anywhere in the world!

Want to race some club in Great Britain from the USA, barring 6-hours' time zone, you can do it.

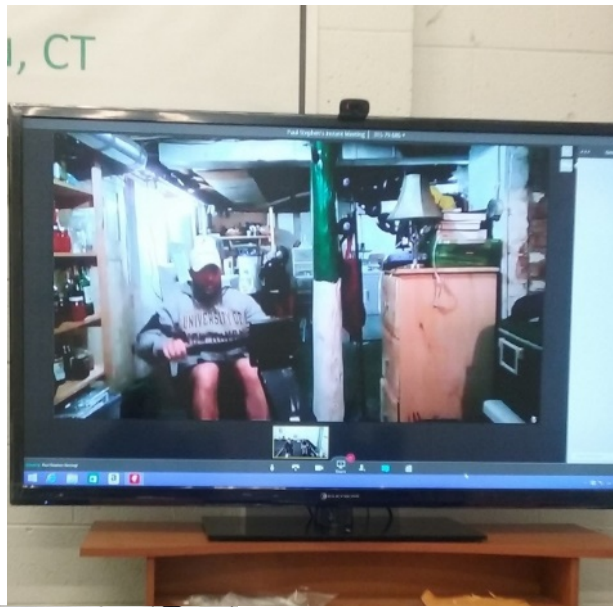
It's not as costly as you might imagine either with software and programs for under \$300.

Why we chose Water Rower to partner with? Easy answer: topnotch quality staff who have demonstrated their commitment to helping disabled Veterans with donations of time and equipment. They have agreed to donate five (5) new Water Rowers in 2016 for selected blind/vision impaired Veterans who have volunteered to test the program in our region. What differentiates Water Rower from Concept 2 rowing machines?

Although we prefer Concept 2 for aggressive athletic training, we strongly believe that for recreational rehabilitation purposes and especially for older blind/vision impaired Veterans, Water Rower is the best choice. Here is why: Seats are far more comfortable for older and heavier individuals which means they are more likely to row longer and use the equipment more often. If you are sensory deprived, as is the case for blind/vision impaired Veterans, they can now both feel and hear the water in the tube-like jug that holds the connected handle that you must pull. This may not mean anything to the uninformed reader but it makes 100% sense for the professionals who understand recreational rehabilitative and adaptive sports programming. I can tell you that our blind/vision impaired Veterans have a more meaningful experience when they can both feel and hear the water as they are rowing on dry land.

In the case of our newest indoor rowing studio at Long Wharf Pier where we can raise one of the large garage doors in the warmer training day sessions, they can not only feel and hear the water when they are rowing stationary, but they can smell the ocean making for a more pleasurable rowing experience. And isn't that what true recreational rehabilitation (recovery) is all about?

We want to gratefully acknowledge both Bobby Rousseau and Vincent Lilly, two of our most committed College Military Rowing program Veterans who have volunteered their time and effort in testing our innovative concept rowing program so others can later benefit from it. Thanks guys!!





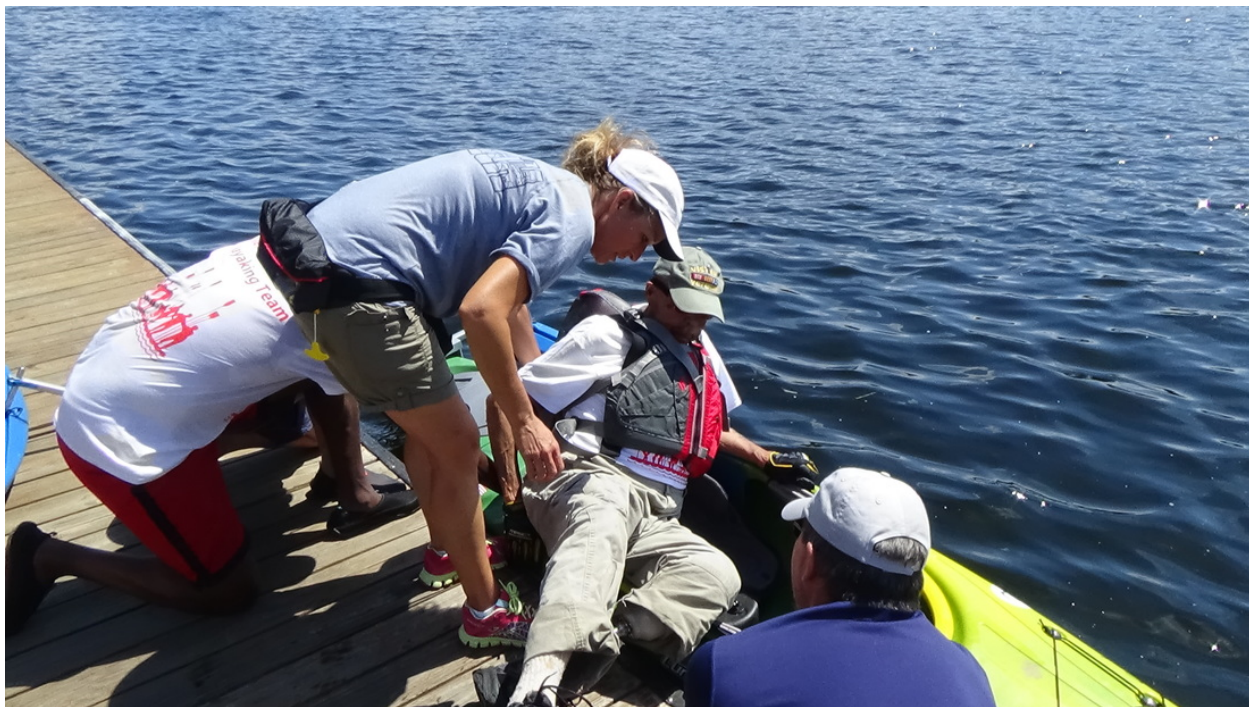
Winter indoor rowing for our College Military Rowing crew in preparation for both the Connecticut Indoor Rowing Championships and the World Indoor Rowing Championships (CRASH B's) in Boston, MA.

Photo Highlights of the 2015 Season

Our College Military Rowing Team underway at their 1st competitive regatta in Hartford.



Our spring/summer kayakers at Riverfront Recapture Boathouse. Paige and Brian helping one of our amputee Veterans into an adaptive kayak donated by The Given Limb Foundation which has supported our organization since 2013.



Another adaptive kayak made possible by a very generous grant from The Given Limb Foundation



Here is Dennis with Ron and another 2-person adaptive kayak donated by The Given Limb Foundation in support of our amputee Veterans in 2015.



Kevin and Ashlee at the world renown Head of the Charles River Regatta where we all had a lot of fun and met some future collaborative partners/sponsors.





Head of the Charles Regatta 2015.

Holiday/Christmas Party at Camp Hemlocks.





Here are Brian, Tony and Eva.

Did someone say pool party at our Christmas gathering?!



And who is this strange looking lifeguard who has his left hand in a sling?
Can he even swim?





A very wonderful ending to a very busy and hectic season of recreational rehabilitation/adaptive sports rowing & kayaking with some of our program Veterans in Connecticut.

Now you can see why we're so passionate about the work that we do at Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc. We are committed to excellence in healthcare recovery and want to take a leadership role in creating innovative recreational rehabilitation and adaptive sports rowing & kayaking programming nationally.

Thank you all for being part of it!

May our gracious and magnificent Lord continue to bless all our active/non-active duty Veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country. They have our love and support in their recovery.

Very best to all our supporters, sponsors, partners, countless volunteers and our program Veterans for a most prosperous New Year.

With deepest gratitude,

Paul Stephen Varszegi
Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc.
President/Founder

*All of the foregoing photos and news events are either public information or was authorized by volunteer and program Veterans for reprinting.