



# Veterans' Rowing and Kayaking

## 2014 Annual Report for Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc.

Greetings to all our sponsors, donors, volunteers, staff and the many individuals who are nameless and contributed anonymously,

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.

2014 was truly a great achievement on the part of all of us pulling together, collectively to achieve incredible results with very limited resources.

Let's look back 1-year ago and see where we started from: Ken Christiansen, our Treasurer and I organized a small group of local church members to commit to sponsoring our very first group of disabled Veterans from the West Haven, Connecticut VA Hospital in a pilot program called Veterans' Rowing Program. We managed to raise about \$3,500.00 with Ken & me both donating much of that amount. Along with this report, there is financial accounting of how our donations were spent for this year and we will also have an audited financial statement by year end which will be available to anyone on our website [www.veteransrowing.com](http://www.veteransrowing.com)

Getting back to my story about the creation of our organization: I then met with a young lady by the name of Varsha Dubose, who was my acting supervisor at the Errera Community Care Center where I was working. We spoke about the necessity of helping many of our own in-house Veterans with a weekly recreation healing & wellness program due to their isolation and confinement to their homes on weekends. Varsha immediately recognized the potential and benefit of this idea of creating a rowing program for all our Veterans. We spoke of benefits to our Veterans such as Socialization, treating Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Severe Depression, Substance Abuse and many other health related issues.

Varsha asked me to put a proposal together for the Director of the Errera Community Care Center, Dr. Laurie Harkness who was also my chief supervisor. I met with Dr. Harkness and pitched the idea concept to her. I had told her that I had been going on Sunday's up to a place in Boston called Community Rowing, leaving each weekend at 3am and driving about 3-hours one way where I would begin training with other area Veterans in a rowing boathouse club called CRI.

I trained with 2-different coaches in two different program from 7am-11am and I would then return home that same day by 3pm. Of course she thought I was nuts and in hindsight I would agree with her. I wasn't aware at the time of other local community boathouses that I could have easily accessed.

Laurie did ask me where I got the idea for getting into rowing and I explained to her about the day I showed up for work and turned on my desk computer to find Natalie Dell, a VA Healthcare research scientist out of the Bedford, Massachusetts VA facility all over our VA website. There was a story of her winning at the 2012 Olympics in the women's 4X rowing competition in England. I was very intrigued so I began an email correspondence with Natalie and asked her how I can get into the sport so she referred me to CRI in Boston.

So this is how it all began. During weekly supervision with Laurie, I continued to update her on my progress and how we can obtain sponsorship from other community providers. We attempted to create a rowing program for our disabled Veterans with Yale's athletics department but could not get their Board to agree to sponsorship so we continued to search and wait.

Finally, near April 2013, I received an email from Holyoke Rows inviting us to come out to their boathouse in May and participate in a sponsored VA activity with the Leeds VA hospital. I immediately accepted the invitation and quickly organized a small group of Veterans that wanted to go. On a cold and breezy day, early May we showed-up in a small van with 7-participants including 2-staff member volunteers. This group of Veterans were the founding members of what was then called the Veterans' Rowing Program. They include, Mark, Henry, Bill, Barry, Lee and George with Leeds VA clinician Stephanie and me.

About 2-3 months into the program, Laurie invited a VA staff member named Dennis Wigg to her office for a meeting with us to see if he would be interested in joining forces and expanding our rowing program to include kayaking as well. Dennis had indicated that he had attempted several times over the years to set up a kayaking program for Veterans at the VA with no success so he was quite eager to attempt to try it with us. Dennis and I joined forces and we created, Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking Program along with Ken Christiansen.

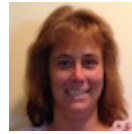
However, it wasn't until the end of our very first year season when we had realized the great success and the potential for the organization which started with 6-members and grew to over 24-Veterans during the peak season. We actually had over 27-disabled Veterans participate in 2013 collectively.

At this point, we decided to form a non-profit with the above name and registered with the Connecticut Secretary of State as a non-profit charity on December 18, 2013. We then also applied for tax exempt status as a 501c3 non-profit with the IRS on February 2, 2014. That application was granted by the IRS on November 5, 2014 with an effective date of December 18, 2013. And the rest is history....fast forward to 2014....

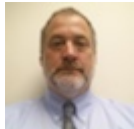
## Meet our Board of Directors:



**Kenneth A. Christiansen**  
*Organization Treasurer*



**Shannon Fry**  
*Assistant Grant Writer*  
*Veteran Support Clinician*



**Dr. John W. O'Brien**  
*Director of Amputee Clinic*  
*CTVA Healthcare System*



**Mayra I. Thomas**  
*Assistant Treasurer*  
*People's United Bank of*  
*West Haven*



**Nicholas Montini**  
*College Military Rowing Coordinator*



**Dennis Wigg**  
*Program Manager*  
*Head Kayaking Coach*



**Paul Stephen Varszegi**  
*President & Founder*

## Meet our Staff:



**Kenneth Christiansen**  
*Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking Treasurer*

Education: Long Island University, BS (1951); New York University, MBA (1958); Harvard University, PMD (1965)  
Employment: Continental Can, Inc. (Stamford, CT): Assistant Comptroller & General Manager Tax Dept. (1951 - 1982); Kings College (NY, NY): Chairman - Accounting & Economics Dept. Comptroller (1982 - 2002)

Personal Interests: Ken enjoys traveling & golfing with friends. He is a very active volunteer for several church ministries and events. He is a widower with 3-married children.

### **Nicholas Montini**

#### ***College Military Rowing Coordinator for VR&K***



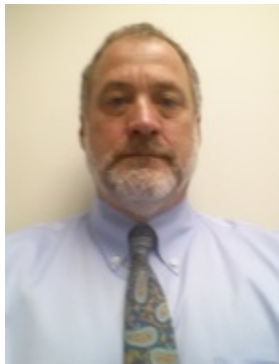
Nicholas Montini is an active duty U.S. Air Force Veteran of the Persian Gulf War where he served with the Air Combat Command as an M-60 machine gunner with a Security Police Air Base Ground Defense Squadron. He holds The National Defense Service Medal, The Southwest Asia Service Medal with two Bronze Service Stars and Kuwaiti Liberation Medals awarded from both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and The Government of Kuwait.

He is an American Bar certified Paralegal, an Alumnus of AmeriCorps VISTA National Service and works at VA Connecticut as a Veterans Advocate. He is a member of the VA Connecticut Mental Health Community Advisory Board and is

a supporting member of ongoing Veteran service endeavors such as The Connecticut Heroes Project, The Veterans Recovery Project of CT and the Governor's Nonprofit Liaison Employment Data Workgroup. Nick resides in East Derby with his wife Kristina and their children Mary Louise 9 and Pete

### **Dr. John W. O'Brien**

#### ***Director of Amputee Clinic CTVA Healthcare System***

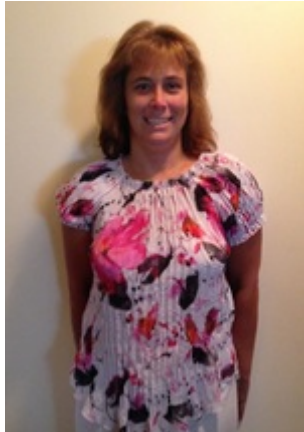


Dr. O'Brien is Board certified at American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation since May 1987 and Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine at Yale University School of Medicine since 1996. Currently, director of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at VA Connecticut.

Received training at Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, Bellevue Hospital Center, Goldwater Memorial Hospital, and Veterans Administration Medical Center. Distinguished Alumni Service Award, St. George's University School of Medicine. Was a chair member of Allied Health Committee, Connecticut State Medical Society and current member of Legislative Committee, Workers Compensation, Allied Health Committee, Connecticut State Medical Society, Certified Independent Medical Examiner, Fellow American Academy of Disability Evaluation Physicians, Carrier Advisory Committee, and United Healthcare Medicare. Also, Chief Resident at Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Bellevue Hospital Center, and Rusk Institute Rehabilitation Medicine.

**Shannon Fry, L.C.S.W.**

***Veteran Support Foundation Program Supervisor***



Shannon Fry manages a non-profit foundation serving homeless Veterans. This organization has a primary purpose in Connecticut to provide transitional and permanent housing for homeless and disabled Veterans. She is a trained grant writer in order to support the needs of the foundation.

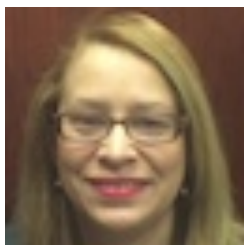
She received her MSW from Fordham University and subsequently earned her LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) certificate. She has a 19-year career in the Social Work field focusing on mental health, homelessness, addictions and disability.

In addition to her clinical work, Shannon is an adjunct professor at Goodwin College where she teaches in the Human Services curriculum.

She resides with her husband, four teenagers and one Golden Retriever. She is an enthusiastic runner, having competed in distances up to a half marathon, and participated in a Spartan Race. She is an avid Boston Red Socks, New York Giants and Kansas City Chiefs fan.

**Mayra I. Thomas, Assistant Treasurer**

***People's United Bank of West Haven***



Mayra Thomas is Assistant Vice President, Customer Service Manager (CSM) of the West Haven S&S Office at 460 Elm St located in West Haven, Connecticut. She grew up in New Haven, CT. She is responsible for managing the People's United Bank office, providing retail and business banking, residential and consumer lending, as well as, providing exceptional customer service.

Mayra Thomas, joined Peoples United Bank in 1984, as a part-time teller and this was the beginning of her banking career at People's United Bank of 30 years. In 1988 she was promoted to Customer Banking Representative. She was accepted into the management training program in 2000 in the New Haven County. As AVP CSM, she is Consumer Lending Certified, Mortgage Lending Certified, Business Lending Certified, Life Insurance Licensed, Investment 6/63 licensed. Bilingual and American Signed Language proficient. She has also achieved the President's Council Vantis Life Insurance Award.

She has served in the community she lives in on the Literacy Volunteers teaching English as a 2nd language, was on the United Way committee, she is a member of the Promise Land Church

of God. She holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Albertus Magnus College and a Master's in Business Administration with Human Resource Concentration from the University of New Haven. She is married for 28 years to her loving husband Devon and has four adult children, and two grandchildren.

**Paul Stephen Varszegi**

***President and Founder of Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking, Inc.***



Paul, Honored Member of the National Association of Distinguished Professionals, first entered the business world while still in college, owned his first income property at the age of 18, created Varson Corporation, a carpentry/construction business that same year, and worked for Prudential Insurance Company as a part-time special agent for three years before returning back to his roots to serve as Varson Corporation's CEO, which turned into a multimillion dollar real estate organization that owned, managed, and constructed both residential and commercial properties in two states. "I have always had the absolutely best, hand-picked team of staff and professionals that were better educated, better skilled, and as motivated as I am at achieving excellence in all that we do," Mr. Varszegi said. "I am always seeking out multitalented, hardworking individuals."

Inspired greatly by God, Mr. Varszegi is now actively working on several other goals. One of them includes making his newest company, Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking Inc. into a national organization. Dedicated to military veterans, the organization offers some of the most unique and exciting rowing and kayaking programs in the country. The non-profit, volunteer organization is located in Connecticut and supports veterans that suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, military amputees and other health related issues. Their healing and wellness programs are designed especially to help veterans with various health issues. Relying completely on funding of donations, Mr. Varszegi is proud to have built an organization that was not built in an effort to build a legacy for himself, but instead for the betterment of others.

Mr. Varszegi is a member of USRowing. He is a certified pilot, peer sports specialist, and paralegal. Some of his most noteworthy achievements have included developing the largest condominium in Greenwich, Connecticut in 1986, being ranked 58th worldwide in 1983 during his time with Prudential Insurance Company, 11th in 1984, and 1st for new business written in 1985 and breaking Prudential's historical record for selling the largest premium life insurance policy with an annual premium of \$1.3 million. He has created over a dozen companies in two states by the age of 33 and has served as the Director of all of them.

Paul is a former Marine and is a life member of (DAV) Disabled American Veterans and (Am Vets) American Veterans, which organizations he supports. He was a former marathon



swimmer in his youth and a competitive trap shooter in the 80's and traveled extensively to compete in tournaments.

**Dennis Wigg**

***Manager and Head Coach for the Kayaking Program for VR&K***



I started with whitewater rafting in Maine around 1994 doing class IV and V rapids for a few years, then I saw an ad for sea kayaking and took a class and enjoyed it so much I bought a sea kayak which I still own to this day. I do enjoy doing recreational kayaking as well as sea kayaking, so I joined a sea kayak group here in CT called CONNYAK.

Around 1998, I went to the Madawaska Kanu Center (MKC) in Barry's Bay Canada. I took a whitewater class and became addicted to whitewater kayaking. I went yearly to MKC and also after a friend recommend that I check out the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). I looked into the AMC and found out that they have a CT Chapter and I went on a trip with them and later was asked to become a trip leader, and later I became a Co-Chair for the CT AMC Whitewater Committee. As Co-Chair I go to the CT Chapter executive committee meetings and to a broader meeting with the Paddlers Committee which combines all the AMC chapters from other states. The AMC is a non-profit organization and the Committee is run by volunteers. As co-chair I am involved with setting up programs and participating in some of our program such as pool session where we teach rolling and strokes, and also in lake sessions. We also do and encourage our members to get whitewater rescue training and wilderness first aid which I have taken both many times. I have also been a volunteer as a kayak instructor for Wounded Warrior Sports Project.

My paddling trips have ranged from recreational, sea kayaking, and whitewater. I have also led trips for our members of the AMC to MKC and the Ottawa Kayak School (OKS). Presently I am still co-chair for the CT AMC Whitewater Committee and I also volunteer for the Veterans Rowing and Kayaking Program.



**Matt Conley**

***Assistant Rowing Coach, College Military Program at MRC***

Matt learned to row on the Norwalk River in 2011 and is currently a varsity rower at the Salisbury School where he focuses on 8s and 4s. Matt has competed at numerous regattas and championships including Mercer Sprints, Kent Invitational Regatta, and the New England Rowing Championships. Matt is entering his junior year at Salisbury and aspires to row at the collegiate level.

## **Collaborative Partnerships:**

In 2014 we ran a successful pilot program with Riverfront Recapture and the Mt Sinai Rehabilitation Hospital's Adaptive Rowing Program. In 2015 we will continue our partnership with Riverfront and Mt Sinai to host our bi-weekly Veterans Adaptive Rowing and Kayaking program in Hartford.

Listed below are Riverfront's Director and Deputy Director of Rowing Programs. Photos and bios of Mount Sinai's Paige McCullough-Casciano and Joan Karpuk were not available as we went to press but both Paige and Joan have extensive experience with Adaptive sports, including golf and swimming.

Brian Wendry  
Director of Rowing Programs  
Riverfront Recapture, Hartford CT  
Boathouse: 20 Leibert Road

Riverfront Recapture's Community Rowing Program serves more than 550 people annually and is one of the largest community rowing programs in New England. Recreational and competitive classes, including the opportunity to compete on nationally recognized racing teams, are offered to everyone from pre-teens to retirees. Riverfront's rowing program is over 20 years old, and since 2002 has operated from the Boathouse in Hartford's historic Riverside Park. Each year since 1998 we host the Head of the Riverfront Regatta in early October.

## **Meet our Community Partners of Staff & Coaches:**

**Brian Wendry**  
*Rowing Program Director at Riverside Recapture, Inc.*



Brian has worked for Riverfront Recapture since 1998 and has been Director of Rowing Programs since 2005. After rowing lightweight at Ithaca College, he was the Assistant Men's Coach for Wesleyan University. He then coached under Seattle boat-builder and former Olympic rowing coach, Stan Pocock, as the Assistant Coach of the Seattle Yacht Club Rowing Program, where he later became Head Coach.

After earning an MA in English and an MS in Industrial Relations at Iowa State University,



he returned to the east coast and coached at Middletown High School and the Ethel Walker School for Girls. Brian's wife, Jennifer, is the Head Coach of the University of Connecticut's Women's Rowing Team and they live in Coventry with their three children.

## **Chris Hayes**

### ***Experienced, Intermediate and Beginner Coach***

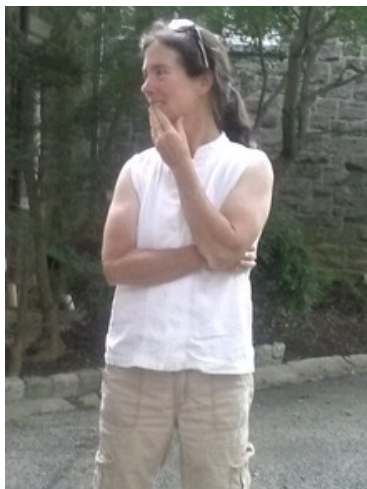


The Assistant Director of Rowing Programs since 2009, and an integral member of the rowing staff since 2006, Chris earned the Deputy Director distinction in 2014; he continues with all of his previous rowing duties, but has taken on facility management responsibilities and is involved with organizational decision making at the Director's level. After learning to row at Riverfront, he rowed at the University of Connecticut, served on UConn's Executive Committee for Club Sports and UConn's Board of Funding for Student Programs, and later coached the UConn Men's program. He is the Director of the Head of the Riverfront Regatta, an event that attracts 2,500 participants and 10,000 spectators annually and is staffed by more than 100 volunteers. In 2009, his Varsity Boy's 4+ took 1st at the 38th Annual Head of the Schuylkill Regatta in Philadelphia, PA,

and in 2012 they earned one of only 36 invitations nationwide to compete at US Rowing's Youth National Championships in Oak Ridge, TN.

## **Stephanie Moore**

### ***Director of Holyoke Rows, Inc.***



Stephanie Moore, director of Holyoke Rows, started rowing at her alma mater the University of Virginia. She then spent 13 years coaching at the University of Virginia, Florida Institute of Technology, UMass and Trinity College.

Her crews won two Southern, a New England and a Dad Vail Championship. In 2000, Stephanie formed Holyoke Rows, a non-profit community rowing and kayaking organization. The goal was and is still to make rowing accessible to all by eliminating financial, physical and cultural barriers to participation.

Holyoke Rows has grown and now operates a beautiful three bay municipal boathouse and runs a variety of youth, adult, adaptive and veterans' programs.

## **Yan Vengerovskiy**

### ***Head Coach & Director of Programs at MRC***



Yan, is a former member of the Ukrainian National Rowing Team, and a graduate from the top sports institute there. From 1973-1991, he coached the Soviet Union Junior Women's National Team. In 1991, Yan and his family immigrated to the United States. He has coached at the Norwalk River Rowing Club, Fairfield University, and the Saugatuck Rowing Association. In 1996, Yan and his wife Olga founded the Water Sports Center and the Maritime Rowing Club, both of Norwalk, CT. Yan coaches all levels at the boathouse and is most recognized for his work with the high competitive teams and their numerous achievements on the junior national level. In December 2011, US Rowing recognized Yan and Olga with the John J. Carlin Service award. Chosen by the USRowing Board of Directors, the award honors an individual, or individuals, who has made significant and outstanding commitments in support of rowing.

## **Matt McNeill**

### ***Military Rowing Coach at MRC***



Matt began rowing in the fall of 2009 as a walk-on to the Fairfield University men's varsity squad. Matt quickly developed a passion for the sport of rowing, becoming a two time captain and breaking the school 2,000m record, setting the bar at 6:19. While attending Fairfield University as an undergrad and masters candidate he coached for Fairfield College Preparatory School. Coaching the freshman squad for three years. He is extremely passionate about teaching the sport of rowing to both beginners and experienced rowers. Matt currently coaches at Maritime Rowing Club (MRC) in Norwalk.

Matt aspires to represent the United States as an Olympic oarsman, and is currently training with MRC in pursuit of this goal. The dual role of coach and athlete offers Matt a great opportunity to synthesize his knowledge of the sport, to promote his personal growth as an oarsman, as well as to develop others as rowers. He is deeply passionate about rowing and believes that the character traits that rowing encourages are characteristics that are lifelong and valuable in all aspects of one's life.

Matt also holds a Bachelor of Art in History and a Master of Art in Secondary Education from Fairfield University. He has a passion for education and sees rowing and coaching as a great way to express this desire to build others up into the exceptional humans they were created to be.

## **2013 Sponsors & Donors:**

In 2013, we had the following sponsors, supporters or community partners: Bansley Law Offices of New Haven which is headed by a group of Marine Corp. JAGs who agreed to give us free legal consultation related to our VR&K organization; City of New Haven who is developing the Boathouse at Canal Dock who invited us early into the planned construction of the city's only community boathouse project that is funded by them. We will eventually have our headquarters in their boathouse; Concept 2 Rowing Machines has given us an erg as a donation; Errera Community Care Center, in West Haven is where our organization was conceived and where we continue to receive clinical referrals for our program Veterans; Fast Signs of Milford has also helped out with discounted promotional products, including all our posters, T-Shirts/uniforms, appreciation plaques, post cards and printing; Holyoke Rows, Inc., continues to be a strong community partner that we have grown with successfully. They are also our 1<sup>st</sup> boathouse partner; Make a Home Foundation of Waterbury has donated funds and a Wheelchair for the use of our disabled program Veterans; SCSU was the first school that began to promote our program for their college enrolled Veterans; The VA Healthcare System in West Haven continues to provide support and referrals of disabled Veterans access into our programs through primary care physicians or clinician referrals; Boathouse at Canal Dock or Canal Dock, Inc., is a community boathouse partner which we work with in collaboration to offer local rowing & kayaking opportunities for our program Veterans; Calvary Church of Trumbull is where all our funds were raised to begin our organization in 2013. The foregoing represents a total of some 11 organizations that have supported us in our first year of operation.

## **2014 Sponsors & Donors:**

**Where we are today:** Not only did we keep all of our previous year's sponsors and donors, but we added the following:

Please join me in welcoming our added new sponsors: Maritime Rowing Club in Norwalk, Ct became our 2<sup>nd</sup> community boathouse partner and helped us create the College Military Rowing Program with 18-student military Veterans from 4-area colleges. They also introduced us to our grant sponsor who funded the 80% first year cost of this very unique rowing program; People's United Bank of West Haven became a sponsor with a cash donation and they also manage our account with them; CT AMC Whitewater Committee became a cash sponsor with a donation; Appalachian Mountain Club became a cash sponsor with a donation; Alloy Engineering of Bridgeport, CT became our first corporate sponsor with a cash donation; The Given Limb Foundation gave us our largest grant to date to create an amputee/adaptive rowing & kayaking program. Without their support we would not have achieved the level of success this year that we have; Disabled American Veterans (DAV) became a strong sponsor/donor by providing all our transportation to and from all weekend events. The Hummingbird Foundation gave us 80% of the funding to create the first College Military Rowing Program in the State, regionally and possibly in the country; Light Sources, Inc., based in Orange, CT became our 2<sup>nd</sup> corporate sponsor; Knights of Columbus of Connecticut became our largest community faith based sponsor with financial donations; Norwalk Community College became a

sponsor/supporter of our College Military Rowing Program with student referrals; Albertus Magnus College became a sponsor/supporter by referring students into our College Military Rowing Program; Ocean State Job Lot became a corporate donor by providing in-kind donations of kayaking & other equipment so that we could launch our 3<sup>rd</sup> community boathouse partnership for 1015; Riverside Recapture of Hartford, who sponsor's the largest regatta in the State of Connecticut, became our 3<sup>rd</sup> community boathouse location where we anticipate creating many of the same programs that we currently offer at Holyoke but will also offer a College Military Rowing Program as well; American Legion Post #25 Holyoke, MA is cash sponsor; Walter Reed Military Medical Center is our latest supporter and collaborator to assist us with the latest developments in Adaptive Sports clinical research and recreational support; University of New Haven is our latest sponsor for the College Military Rowing Program which helped create our current program with Maritime Rowing Club by sending a delegation of 12-students to start the program, along with other area schools. They are also the first college to enroll ROTC students into this program. Presently, at the time of writing this report, we are in discussions with Take a Vet Fishing, which is a very popular program. They are a faith based organization that grew out of North Branford Congregational Church in Connecticut. They have grown considerably and are actually competing against us for the same time slot for our Sunday weekly events. However, we have reached out to them to show them our support with a commitment to not compete against them during their once monthly fishing events where they draw as many as 80-90 disabled Veterans from around the state. All the above represent a total of 18 **new** sponsors/donors. Take a Vet Fishing is not yet among them but we're working on that...

Bansley Law Offices of New Haven



City of New Haven



Concept 2 Rowing Machines



Errera Community Care Center



Fastsigns of Milford



Holyoke Rows



Make A Home Foundation



Maritime Rowing Club



People's United Bank



SCSU Veteran's Affairs



VA Healthcare System



Boathouse at Canal Dock



Calvary Church of Trumbull Members



CT AMC Whitewater Committee



Appalachian Mountain Club



Alloy Engineering of Bridgeport



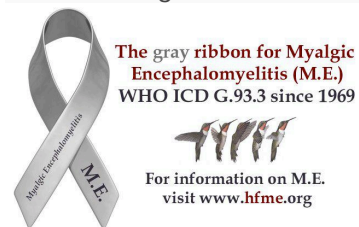
The Given Limb Foundation



Disabled American Veterans (DAV)



The Hummingbird Foundation





Light Sources Inc.



Knights of Columbus of Connecticut



Albertus Magnus College



Housatonic Community College



Norwalk Community College



University of New Haven



Ocean State Job Lot



Riverfront Recapture Boathouse



Walter Reed Military Medical Center



American Legion, Post #25 Holyoke, MA



## Funds that you helped raise:

During this second year of operation, we started the year of with approximately \$1000 in our checking account but quickly grew that account to over \$28,000.00 thanks to all of the above sponsors and donors. We were able to curtail our ambitious budget of \$72,000.00 and still manage to produce exceptional results like these:

\*Created the [Adaptive/Wounded Veterans Program](#) (taken from our website)

If you are seeking a new and exciting form of healthy physical activity which is both healing and therapeutic, this is the program for you!

### **Goal:**

To improve the quality of life for disabled Veterans by engaging them in a physical wellness/fitness activity while creating a sense of unity and network using teamwork to reach a desired goal. Benefits:

- One-on-one personal coaching
- Individual attention to the Veteran

### **Target Population:**

General or Honorably discharged Veterans suffering from a variety of mental health and physical impairment issues. Consultation with their primary mental health clinician will be assessed and a basic water safety course completion exam will be required. A referral must be made by the Veteran's primary care physician/clinician for suitability in this program.

### **What:**

This rowing program is designed for Veterans who are currently suffering from mental health issues including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, substance abuse, and other unspecified mental health issues, as well as any physical impairments.

**Where:**

Paralympic Sport Pioneer Valley fitness center of Holyoke Rows and Riverside Recapture, Hartford.

**Team:**

A joint collaboration between the VA CT Healthcare System and Errera Community Care Center. A Committee with representatives from all parties will be developed to assist in the planning and implementation process.

**Why:**

Our goal is to serve the Veteran community with a new and exciting innovative outreach program to aid and facilitate their growth and recovery.

**Requirements for Acceptance:**

1. Medical clearance from your primary care provider (to be given to Volunteer Services when signing up)
2. Ability to swim
3. Motivation and desire to be part of a team
4. A good and positive attitude
5. Ability and commitment to attend and train during scheduled times
6. Ability to set and maintain realistic achievable goals



**Meet Ernie, Our 3<sup>rd</sup> amputee in our Adaptive/Wounded Veteran Program.**



**Meet Charlie our 2<sup>nd</sup> amputee in our Adaptive/Wounded Veteran Program**



**Charlie in action with his adaptive Kayak!**





**Ernie looking on as he is preparing to enter the river.**

**These kayaks are especially designed for our physically disabled Veterans who would not be able to otherwise enjoy recreational therapy in our programs.**



**Ernie is getting assisted before he heads out on the beautiful tranquil Connecticut River.**



**Meet Doug, our 1<sup>st</sup> amputee into our program before we had an Adaptive/Wounded Veteran's Program. It is hard to see in this photo but he has a prosthetic plastic leg on his left side which goes up to his upper shin when he puts it on.**





Here is Doug in a group photo from our first year in 2013. He is standing on the very right side wearing his prosthetic leg.

This program is also open to Amputee Veterans and was designed especially for them through a very generous grant from the Given Limb Foundation which allowed us to purchase 10- recreational kayaks and one custom deigned adaptive kayak this year.



Here is a group photo of our 2014 Rowing & Kayaking Team made up of some really uniquely brave individuals who worked together to support each member despite their disabilities.



**Meet Kent, our 1<sup>st</sup> cancer patient referral into our Recreational Therapy Program. He says that he is very grateful to be in our program which has helped him cope with ongoing treatments of radiation and chemo therapy. He says without this program he would have been confined to the VA hospital grounds among other sick individuals which would not have been very conducive to his recovery.**





**Bald Eagle nest that Kent and Earla found on the Connecticut River.**



**Here is Kent enjoying himself in a double kayak with team member Earla.**

## Learn-To-Row Program



ALBERTUS  
MAGNUS  
COLLEGE



### **REGISTRATION IS OPEN ALL SUMMER!**

In the Learn to Row program, you will learn the basics of rowing in one of three programs:

- Mini course of 4-classes (good for past rowers returning to the sport)
- Introductory course with 8-classes
- Advanced course with 8-classes

#### **Course Description:**

The course includes rowing technique, setting and rigging a shell, how to launch and dock, water safety and navigation rules for channel rowing.

The classes are 1.5-hours each and follow a sequence to ensure you cover all the elements necessary to row and handle a racing shell. These sessions will be conducted in groups of 10-students each. The course is tailored to each individual and is important that students do not miss any of these classes which are fundamental training necessary to achieve a level of proficiency in the art of rowing.

**Dates:** Sunday, May 4th - Tuesday, November 11th, 2014

**Times:** Sundays beginning at 10am-12pm, lunch break, then resume until 2:30pm

**Location:** [Maritime Rowing Club, Norwalk, CT](#) and Holyoke Rows, Holyoke, MA.

#### **Club History:**

Maritime Rowing Club was founded in 1996 by Yan and Olga Vengerovskiy and has been the home to rowing national and international competitors including 2012 Olympic 4-Bronze medalist Charlie Cole and 2013 under 23 1x World Champion Andrew Campbell. Additionally the club sends qualified boats to compete in both US Rowing Youth and Club Nationals annually. Yan and Olga's vision and purpose for their club was to develop a world class boathouse with rowing programs to teach the technical skills of rowing while simultaneously developing a love of the sport in people of all ages. Now over 17-years old, the club has been completely remodeled with state of the art new indoor training equipment. It boasts training and hosting over 60-Masters, 100-High School rowers and another 100-Middle School rowers throughout the course of the year.

#### **Transportation:**

All students are responsible for their own transportation to and from their colleges to the

boathouse each weekend.

**Food:**

Will be provided to all student Veterans each weekend during lunch break.

**Tuition:**

Free to all Honorably Discharged Veterans, Active Duty, Reservists, ROTC student personnel enrolled in the program for the first year.

**Registration:**

Registration forms are available at each school's Athletic Director's office. Enrollment is strictly limited to the first 20-Veterans to sign-up. ***Registration is open all summer but student ID's are required for free enrollment.***

If you are interested in eliminating the same old boring routine in fitness training and are looking for something more challenging and exciting to do this summer, then this is the program for you! This invitation is open to both men and women who love water sports or water recreational activities. Each weekend we meet at our sponsor's rowing facility on the beautiful Norwalk River to enjoy the pleasure of recreational or competitive rowing.

This program was the launch for the College Military Rowing Program because most college military veterans have never learned to row. This is the program where they all started. This program was made possible by the generous donation grant of the Hummingbird Foundation.

## College Military Rowing Program



**College Military Rowing Team** - Founding members: Coach Matt, Owen, Charlie, Josh, Zola, Brian and Darrell. Missing from this photo are also: Coaches Alex and Matt Jr., Cintia, Tia and Ryan and 8-ROTC students who joined us late in the season (All from UNH) who's photos are not available at the time of this publication.

The **College Military Rowing Program** is our latest addition to our Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking organization weekly programming which is made available through the generous donation of Ken & Jill Iscol and their Hummingbird Foundation.

What makes this program so unique is that there are virtually no College Military Rowing Programs currently running on the East Coast although attempts have been made unsuccessfully by several well-known boathouses across the country.

We believe this is the first ever Connecticut College Military Rowing Program which is open to all active duty, reservists, ROTC and honorably discharged military Veterans who are enrolled in any local college or university. **It is offered completely free of costs** for enrolled student military Veterans during their first year of admission in the Learn-to-Row program (sponsored by Maritime Rowing Club based in Norwalk, Connecticut).

The program is being offered from May 1st to November 11th each Sunday beginning at 10am and concluding at 2:30pm with a 45-minute lunch break in between.

Our goal is to post videos and photos as we continue to progress our College Military Rowing Team into a competitive group of rowing athletes who will hopefully transition into our Elite Program by the end of the Learn-to-Row program.

It is our desire that you **join us in supporting our college military students by making a contribution or donation so that we can keep this program going** and by expanding it to serve more of our student military Veterans throughout this state. Please make your donation today by clicking onto our “Donate” tab where you can make a secure donation using PayPal.

On behalf of all our student military Veterans who have, and continue to serve our great country, thank you for your generosity. May God continue to bless all our men & women who proudly sacrifice so much for our great country.

For more about this program, please visit our [Learn-to-Row](#) page on this website.







All these weekly events were captured on video and placed on our website at [www.veteransrowing.com](http://www.veteransrowing.com) and also placed on our Facebook College Veteran Rowing group page where all program participants are encouraged to go and view weekly events and post comments. There are about 25-members in this closed group.

## Elite Program



Our Elite Rowing and Kayaking Program was created for those who want to compete in either [rowing or kayaking events](#) posted on our [events page](#).

The local, regional or national tournaments or regattas as they are often called are primarily designed for competitive rowers who want to take this sport to another level. They want the thrill of competition and are likely wanting to improve on gains that they have achieved throughout the training year. They also want to

test themselves just to see how they would do against other competitors or against themselves. They also want to be respected by their peers in the sport and may want to be recognized as one who knows

and appreciates this sport.

The highly motivated athletes usually are self-starters, meaning that no one needs to tell them what to do and when. They are all self-motivated and are totally focused and “results oriented” individuals. They are likely perfectionists and are never completely satisfied with where they’re at in their training; always seeking to improve and getting better and better. It never ends for them. Most of the very top athletes retire from their sport (at least the smart ones) once they have peaked to the top. The saying goes, “it’s better to get out while you’re at the top then to slowly burn-out or fail.” People remember winners but not failures.

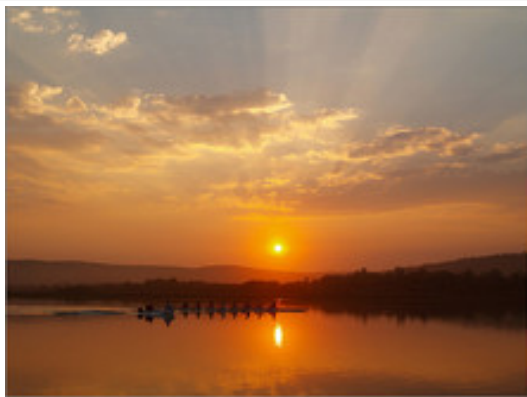
At [Maritime Rowing Club](#), we offer an Elite Program for those who are serious about the sport of competitive rowing. The candidate who decides to sign-up for this program after they have successfully graduated from the Learn to Row program offered at both Holyoke Rows of Holyoke, MA and the Maritime Rowing Club in Norwalk, CT will be matched to their desired boathouse club facility where they will be given the opportunity to train weekly several times. There is a club membership fee if you choose to enroll full-time in the Elite rowing program.

**If you think you have what it takes and are seeking to challenge yourself, then this is the program for you. Let one of your coaches know and we will work with you to get you into this highly competitive program.**

Currently we have no one in this program, although last year we had 2-from Holyoke, MA, who competed in rowing events.

Lastly, we have our very popular:

## Recreational Program



a peaceful tranquil river?

- Are you having a bad week and just want to get away from your environment that is causing you the stress?
- Would you like to take a break from work and everyone around you?
- Do you want a nice relaxing weekend with friends who enjoy your company?
- Do you want to reconnect with nature and your spiritual connection with God?
- Would you enjoy a scenic tour on the beautiful Connecticut River while slowly rowing or kayaking down

Our **recreational rowing and kayaking program may be for you** than because it is designed for Veterans who may be suffering from various health related issues such as: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury(TBI), Depression, dealing with substance abuse issues and so much more.

**Let us help you to take a mini-vacation so that you can begin healing your mind and body!**

Please do this service for yourself and become proactive in your self-care. Take a proactive approach and take responsibility for making yourself well again mentally, physically and spiritually. We would like to help you to take control of your life and give you the freedom to work at your own pace into recovery. All medical information that you wish to share with us which you think will help us to help you, will be kept confidential. If you choose not to share anything, that's okay too. You are in-charge regarding all decisions into your healthcare. We are only here to support you as needed.

Take the first step by [joining and registering for this program!](#)

These are all our programs (5) that we offer at various community boathouse locations where we have partnerships.

It is worth noting, that when we started last year, we only had 2-programs with Holyoke Rows which were the Learn to Row Program and the Recreation Rowing & Kayaking Program.

Your continued sponsorship and donations made this small program grow to include 2-other locally accessible community boathouses in our own state! We are now working with our 4<sup>th</sup> community boathouse which is under construction by the City of New Haven. The Canal Dock Boathouse is on schedule for completion by 2016. University of New Haven, who we are also working with, is seeking to transition our popular College Military Rowing Program to this new boathouse where they will also have a Marine Biology Center in another part of the boathouse.

When they are ready to transition our College Military Rowing Program to Canal Dock, we will be there to assist them in structuring and developing a good rowing program for the military population.

#### **All Program Participation for 2014:**

Learn to Row for disabled Veterans which included paddling in kayaks: 22

Veterans who knew how to row or kayak: 27

College Military Rowing for disabled Veterans: 9

College Military Rowing ROTC students: 8

Waiting list of veterans who could not be taken into programs this year due to shortage of staff, equipment or transportation: 16

**Total Program Registration for 2014: 82**

**Program growth from last year: 27 >66**

**Percentage increase: 145%**

#### **What should be our goal for 2015:**

- It is our desire to continue to work very closely with all our community boathouse sponsors and partners so that we can provide the best level of care for all our servicemen and women.
- We should continue to collaborate and listen to the needs of our disabled Veterans so that we can help them better manage their clinical symptoms. We need to also be engaged with their clinical healthcare providers too by giving them weekly updates on the progress that the Veteran is making.

- We need to continue to reach out to the public and educate them about our disabled Veterans and how best to help them overcome and recover from their physical, mental and emotional scarring.
- We need to not be afraid to have open dialogs with Veterans regarding their spirituality and faith because for many this could be a groundbreaker for their recovery. I know this to be true from my own experience.
- We need to continue to do “evidence based clinical evaluations” on all Veterans coming into our program voluntarily. This will help us identify the Veteran’s goals within the program which will help us understand how our healing, wellness and therapeutic recovery program can benefit them. The clinical evaluations will also assist us with data and progress reports which we can then use as documentary clinical evidence to show that our programs help Veterans with symptom improvements. This will in turn, support funding opportunities with medical foundations.
- Continue to improve on healthcare delivery which is meant to be holistic in nature.
- Finding more Corporate and Foundation sponsors that truly have a heart for helping our disable Veterans.
- Reaching out to other Veteran Service Organizations such as DAV, American Legion and Am Vets and asking them for more support. This will involve some traveling to their regional gatherings/convention events to make presentations before large audiences.
- Reaching out to other Faith based organizations that have common interest in this ministry that grew out of Calvary Church of Trumbull, CT.
- Begin planting seeds for program growth in regional VA Hospitals to join our organization.

### **Problems to overcome:**

One of the issues that keeps reoccurring over and over and is very problematic, is the issue of transportation and food. This year we were blessed to have Disabled American Veterans (DAV) come on as a sponsor/supporter with our weekly transportation needs. I wonderful organization that I am also a member of. The issue with DAV is that they provide so many services for disabled Veterans in so many local programs, that there is naturally a shortage of volunteers, drivers and vans to support all their busy activities.

It is vitally important for our Veterans to get the weekly recreational therapeutic services that they signed-up for. Many of our Veterans are completely engaged in therapeutic recovery and they look forward to being taken to a rowing or kayaking event.

For many, this is a very import part of their recovery and they are putting a lot of effort into going and participating. We don’t want to let them down and we don’t want to get blamed for any relapse that may happen if we are not there for them when they need us and when they expect us to be there for transport pick-up.

There is nothing more heart breaking then to see one of our Veterans struggling with their symptoms and yet they show-up each weekend timely for us to pick them up. It’s very gratifying to see that we make a difference in how they feel afterwards when we drop them off at the end of an event.

## **What we have achieved with your support:**

- **Created and expanded into 3-new locations programs and services (All in Connecticut)**
- **Obtained 18-new sponsors.**
- **Grew 145% with all military/Veteran membership participation.**
- **Began a clinical assessment evaluation on volunteer program participants to help gauge the recreational therapy of our programs.**
- **Strengthened community ties with sponsors, donors and supporters.**
- **Helped program Veterans live a more productive and meaningful life by helping them with socialization opportunities, physical, mental and spiritual growth.**
- **Learned more about our disabled Veterans by listening to their needs and aspirations. This will in turn help us to improve our holistic healthcare delivery for our 2015 season.**

## **Message from the President of the Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking organization**

Dear Reader,

I was seeking a new exciting form of healthy physical activity which was both healing and therapeutic and that could be enjoyed by everyone so I created the Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking program to work with the West Haven VA Healthcare population. Most of our Veterans are disabled and are receiving healthcare services from the VA Hospital. These include, but are not limited to the following: PTSD, TBI, Severe Depression, Substance Abuse, and Amputees or wounded warriors returning home from combat service.

I thought of my own personal struggles and how I overcame clinical depression by moving away from prescribed medications which were toxic to my body and replacing it with physical activities that produced natural endorphins by my body. This physical activity completely rejuvenated me with extremely positive energy and mood and I was eventually able to be weaned off of all my medications. My therapeutic healing and wellness is attributable to my desire to take control of my life and to seek out alternative methods to improve my health which also has a strong spiritual component to it.

One of our most successful and popular programs is Recreational Therapy which is "evidence-based" and clinically proven to help alleviate symptoms associated with all of the above illnesses. It all starts with referrals that we get for client Veterans by their primary care physicians or clinicians through the VA Healthcare System who conduct a screening for appropriateness of the client Veteran into our programs. We also conduct an interview and explain the program to the Veterans prior to them being invited to attend one of our activity sessions to see if they like the program and willingness to commit to

attend regularly. If they agree to attend regularly for the term of the program which runs from May 1st through November 11th every Saturday, we then request that they complete a medical assessment form with questions designed to gauge their clinical symptoms (a snapshot of where they are today before they begin our program). At the end of the program, we ask them to retake the same clinical assessment form so that we can evaluate any improvements in their medical symptoms.

Based on the demand for participation by VA client referrals and word-of-mouth from Veteran to Veteran, we have more than doubled our program participation from our first year of operation in 2013. We are now actively seeking other community boathouses in Connecticut. We want to replicate our success with our 501(c)(3) community partner, Holyoke Rows of Holyoke, MA where they have all the equipment and support staff coupled with a very beautiful boathouse to assist us each weekend.

**Our goal is to spread this program from VA facilities across the country and to partner with the VA Healthcare System and other non-profit organizations that share our commitment to improve the quality of recreation therapy delivery to client Veterans that focuses on mind, body and spirituality in the healing process of recovery. It is our desire that you join us in our mission to help all our Veterans who have served our country so proudly and honorably.**

May God continue to bless our country and all our men & women who have served or are still serving. Thank you for your anticipated support.

Very Best,

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

\*All of the foregoing names and photographs were released to us by each individual or group granting us permission to include them either in this 2014 Annual Report and/or Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking website postings.