

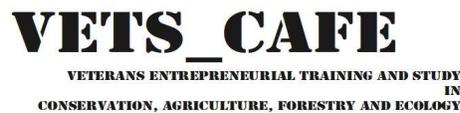
# South Sound Veterans Partnership

First Edition

# 2015



The South Sound Veterans Partnership is a group of veteran advocates and programs that strive to engage veterans in environmentally based activities in the South Puget Sound. This includes farming, restoration/conservation, agri-preneurships, and non-traditional therapy activities. Through collaboration, it is our hope to bolster veterans' transition.



# South Sound Veterans Partners

	<p>GRuB VICTORY FARMERS- The Victory Farmers offer opportunities for veterans to transform their mission from one that requires the taking of life, to one that cultivates life, while nourishing our families, our peers, and those in need. We empower veterans, active duty service members and their families to establish strong roots in community through continued service, peer-to-peer support, and a deeper connection with the natural world.</p> <p><b>Point of Contact:</b> Mark Oravsky, Victory Farmers Program Coordinator, mark@goodgrub.org</p>
	<p>The Veterans Conservation Corps is a program within the Washington Department of Veteran Affairs that aims to help veterans transition from military service to civilian culture through the use of eco-therapy and mentorship. We encourage a self-guided connection to the natural world because “in healing nature you heal yourself”.</p> <p><b>Point of Contact:</b> Jason Alves, VCC Program Manager, JasonA@DVA.WA.GOV.</p>
	<p>Eastside Urban Farm and Garden is a different type of business. We are a mission driven business that takes environmental stewardship seriously, while also recognizing the real-life economic realities that many families face. We believe that restoring local organic food production is key to keeping our community and families healthy for the future. We also believe the goal of urban and small farming should be to make raising our own food affordable and healthier, with minimal impact on the environment. Our mission is to increase local food resiliency, and thereby foster community stability.</p> <p><b>Point of Contact:</b> Brighida deVargas, Co-Owner, brighida@eastsideurbanfarmandgarden.com</p>
	<p>VETS_CAFE empowers veterans with skills that launch or refine careers in Conservation, Agriculture, Forestry and Ecological Entrepreneurship, Creates Employment and Provides Long Term Networking Opportunities for the Advancement of Veteran's Mutual Aid, Regional Food Security and Natural Resource Conservation.</p> <p><b>Point of Contact:</b> Deston Denniston, Director, vetscafeolywa@gmail.com</p>
	<p>Our mission is to ensure that people with limited-incomes in the South Sound region have access to credit, technical assistance, training and support for small business development. These services are provided with the belief that people can and do transform their lives as they bring their strengths, initiative and dreams to their entrepreneurial efforts.</p> <p><b>Point of Contact:</b> Lisa Smith, Executive Director, lisa@enterpriseforequity.org</p>



Growing Veterans combines veteran reintegration with sustainable agriculture. With suicide prevention being our underlying priority, our mission is to empower military veterans to grow food, communities, and each other. Using our farm sites as the catalyst, we provide opportunities for veteran peer-support and broader community engagement. In 2016 we will be hosting veterans and volunteers at our new dedicated space in Auburn on Seattle Tilth's Red Barn Ranch ([FarmWorks](#)). We hope to see folks out there! People can get signed up at [growingveterans.org/login](http://growingveterans.org/login). If you'd like to support our 3rd Annual November Pledge Drive, please visit our Facebook page to learn more: [facebook.com/growingveterans](https://facebook.com/growingveterans).

**Point of Contact:** John Knox, Seattle Regional Coordinator,  
[knox@growingveterans.org](mailto:knox@growingveterans.org).



Rainier Therapeutic Riding uses horses to facilitate physical and emotional healing for our military heroes and their families while promoting the growth of our program throughout the world.

**Point of Contact:** Erin McMicheal, Program Manager, 253-370-1709,  
[rtrprogrammanager@gmail.com](mailto:rtrprogrammanager@gmail.com)

If you or your organization is interested in joining the South Sound Veterans Partnership please contact Matthew West, VCC Internship Coordinator, [matthewwe@dva.wa.gov](mailto:matthewwe@dva.wa.gov), 509-380-6269

# Veterans Conservation Corps Summer Round Up

The 2015 Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) Veteran Conservation Corps Program (VCC) with the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) concluded summer internships in September, we can't help but smile about the everything we achieved this year. We reached our two main goals of restoring sensitive habitat and supporting the veterans by developing their professional skills, fostering team building, providing guidance to enroll in veteran support programs, and giving them the opportunity to engage in eco-therapy and altruistic work. Eleven veterans joined this year's VCC with CNLM Program and 10 of them fully completed their internship with the other ending early because he was employed as a Wildland Firefighter.



The 2015 cohort of veterans was very diverse, representing the wide variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, and distinct personalities that form our military. Our participant's ages ranged from 20 years old to well beyond their 60's. All participants served in either the Army or the Navy, but their responsibilities were very different. For example, we had a truck driver, a ship's Petty Officer, a Calvary Scout, a Squad Leader of a Hazardous Response Platoon, and even a cold war electronic spy. Two veterans were women, representing the actual percentage (16%) of female veterans that serve our country. The participants might have come from different backgrounds, but they were united in their desire to spend more time in nature and explore a career in conservation.

CNLM staff taught the veterans a good deal about how to restore prairies, oak woodlands, and riparian areas. Veterans were trained in native seed collection and plant propagation, invasive weed control (both mechanical and chemical), use of prescribed fire, and on how to build habitat structures for wildlife. The program benefited both the veterans and our local landscapes: the veterans gained skills that make them more employable in the environmental field while restoring hundreds of acres.

The benefits of restoring our local landscapes extended past just helping our native flora and fauna. The veterans reported a sense of satisfaction derived from doing altruistic work and from spending time in nature. Veterans also reported feeling they belonged to a community that was working together to achieve a common goal. *"Working in something that is cause-driven every day has proven to be very therapeutic for me in many ways"* -said

*I'm a 28 year old combat Veteran. I served the Army as a Calvary Scout... Once out of the Army I had few skillsets that translated to the civilian world... We're solid individuals. Most of us just want to work, pay our bills, and try to get our lives back in order. Violet Prairie with the VCC and CNLM is a truly special place and eco-therapy truly works... I have far fewer sleepless nights. I hope any Vets that would like to go through this internship will be able to."*

*-Danny Miller, VCC Native Plant Propagation Intern, US Army Veteran*



one of the veterans that exited the program. The veterans also enjoyed seeing the fruits of their labor bloom *"I enjoyed seeing how the seeds I planted grow up to be giant plants"* -said another veteran. In addition, they reported feeling a sense of calm and serenity derived from working in nature. Indeed, eco-therapy was one of the important goals of our program. There is evidence that spending time in nature can have many physical and mental health

benefits including reducing stress and improving mood. *"Doing field work allow me to get out of my head; the experience reinforced my love for the outdoors"* voiced a Navy Veteran.

In addition to training the veterans in habitat restoration, we supported the veterans by showing them how to sign up for a wide array of services. These services include programs on counseling and mental health, housing, financial assistance, injury rehabilitation and physical health, family support, education and training opportunities, and programs designed for veterans dealing with incarceration or drug related issues.

Several veterans that were homeless were able to get into housing programs and have a roof over their head. Similarly, several veterans participating in our program

received free counseling and support in dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Our program was designed to foster a sense of belonging to a community and provide a safe place for veterans to talk about any difficulties they might have been experiencing. During exit interviews participants reported enjoying each other's company and support and even forming new friendships. "Teamwork was great, when the weather or the work conditions were difficult my teammates always kept a positive attitude so it was hard to be unhappy" commented one veteran.

After the completion of the internship, many veterans continued to develop their skills in restoration and conservation by pursuing academic degrees, volunteer opportunities and employment in the environmental field. We look forward to continuing the VCC with CNLM Program next year and witnessing more success stories!

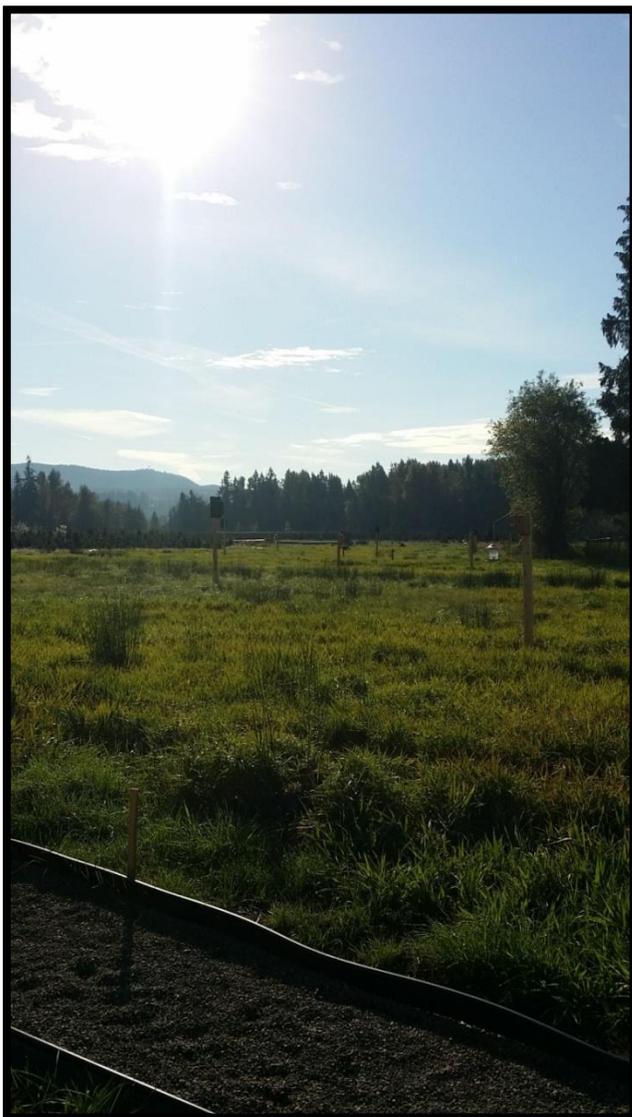
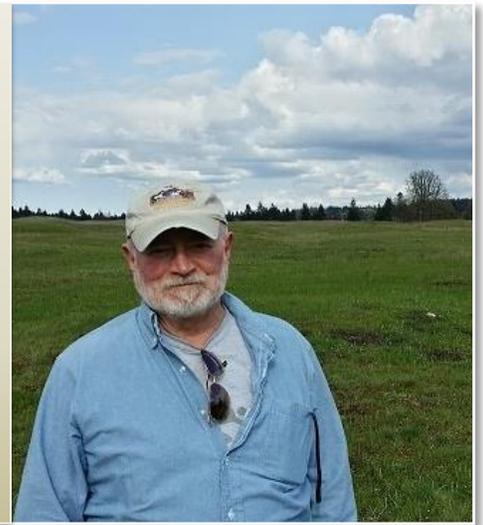
Other VCC with CNLM program successes include; 4 interns gained employment, 5 interns are either starting college or continued pursuing a degree in the natural resources field, 3 veterans gained a red card certification(wildland firefighting), 4 VCC interns received college credit for participating in the internship, 5 interns gained a herbicide applicators license, 4 interns received AmeriCorps Education award of \$1,580, 11 interns participated in 22 workshops for personal or professional building, 5 interns helped develop invasive removal protocols for the Veterans Farm at Orting and led 75 volunteers at the September 11th volunteer event.

To find out more about the VCC internships or get VCC interns working with your conservation or restoration organization. Please contact Matthew West, VCC internship Coordinator, [matthewwe@dva.wa.gov](mailto:matthewwe@dva.wa.gov).

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*Besides all the interesting, useful things taught in the classes; and the exposure to, and help with all the resources available for veteran assistance; having contact with a group of fellow Vets feels instantly accepting and supportive."*  
-Milton Swecker, VCC Intern,  
US Navy Veteran

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*Orting veterans farm, Showing 3 acre wetland and Trail*

This has been a great summer that promises big things for next year!

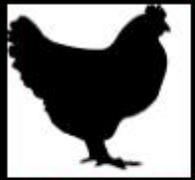


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*Septemer 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> The VCC Broke ground on the Veterans Farm at Orting and 5 acre permaculture plot with two major work-parties totaling more than 400 volunteers. The VCC also engaged other veteran partners including; The Mission Continues, Team Rubicon, Expedia, Home Depot, WestCare, VetsCafe, Military Transition Council, WDVA, Orting Soldiers Home, local veteran owned businesses, Pierce County Conservation District, and the WSU extension. The two punctuated growth periods resulted in installation of 2,540 feet of fencing for the creation of six half acre plots for veterans to farm on in the future, created 4,000 feet of trail around a restoration wet land site, built 40 bird, bee, and bat boxes, planted 50 native plants, and removed 200 lbs of invasive blackberry root balls.*

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*Eastside Urban*  
**FARM & GARDEN**




**URBANFARMOLY.COM**




**2326 4TH AVE E, OLYMPIA**  
*Feed - Homestead Supplies - Classes*  
*Garden Supplies - Plants - Hay*  
**facebook.com/EUFGC 972-2993**

Eastside Urban Farm and Garden is a mission driven business: our goal is to increase local food resiliency. We take environmental stewardship seriously. We also recognize the real-life economic realities that many families face. We believe that restoring local food production is key to keeping our community and families healthy for the future. We also believe the goal of urban and small farming should be to make raising your own food affordable and healthier.

We offer more than 50 classes per year on a wide variety of agricultural and food production topics, have a Reference Lending Library, and house the local seed bank, Oly Seed Exchange. We also have experts on staff with many years' experience who are happy to help with just about any question! As a local organic Ag supply center, Eastside Urban Farm and Garden offers a wide range of tried and tested products from plants to feed, seed, tools and assorted farm and household supplies, so that our customers can make

the best possible choice that fits their family's needs. Our goal is to get folks moving in the right direction, toward sensible, sustainable, food production, animal husbandry and resource management. We aim to get rid of any mystery around growing one's own food and raising small livestock. We offer the most comprehensive resource available in the county for people interested in Urban Farming, Edible landscaping, and hyper local food production. Period. We work with many different agencies and agricultural groups to help provide people with the best possible resources, and help these local mission driven organizations accomplish their goals. We offer a large meeting hall and can host gatherings of over 100 people.

We have entered the South Sound Veteran Partnership because we believe that veterans are a crucial component of the community, and represent the future of small farming and food security for our community, and our nation. Besides offering veteran discounts and scholarships, we also strive to help veterans get the educational resources they need to start farming by providing many low-cost classes and offering consulting to veteran organizations on agricultural related topics. We also supported the creation of two veteran urban garden projects. Additionally, Eastside Urban Farm and Garden

understands that a healthy community engages the entire community. Empowering veterans strengthens our entire community.

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*Veteran Deston Denniston and Veteran Forest Edelman working at the Community Edible Hedge at the Eastside Urban farm and Garden Center.*

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## Farm-To-Table

## Community

## Feast: Sunday

Nov. 22, 6-10pm

**Local Farms, Local Food, Local Chefs, Local Music!**

Our 2nd annual Benefit Celebration of South Sound's year-round bounty! Benefits from this year's dinner will go to both the Oly Seed Exchange, and getting a local Veteran farmer onto some land to start farming! Eastside Urban will help the veteran secure a lease on land and assist with business planning as well as providing a guaranteed purchase of products produced on the farm. Are you a veteran that's ready to farm, or do you know a veteran who is looking for land to farm? We want to help!! Nominations and applications are already coming in, so please get in contact with us asap!

Join us for this special ticketed event!! Our Multi-course dinner will be prepared entirely from locally grown

ingredients by local chef (and veteran!) Joe Francis of Our Table Restaurant! Live music during dinner, info from local ag groups, and a barn-dance starting at 8:30!

*Local farmers! Local foods! Benefit!*

2nd Annual Eastside Urban Farm and Garden's

# HARVEST DINNER

Sunday, Nov. 22nd 6pm - 10pm

*Proceeds will be used to get a local Veteran Farmer on land and farming, and for our local seed bank Oly Seed Exchange.*



Tickets \$55 <http://urbanfarmolydinner.bpt.me>

*Chef Joe Francis of Our Table Olympia*

preparing: Turkey, Lamb, Duck, Winter Veggies & more!  
Plus Dessert, Local Wine, Beer, & Cider

*Live Music & Barn Dance!*

with local Bluegrass legends

and longtime Celtic favorites

**OLY MOUNTAIN BOYS**

**The Burren Band**

more info: [urbanfarmoly.com](http://urbanfarmoly.com) [facebook.com/EUFGC](https://www.facebook.com/EUFGC)

UPSTAIRS AT EASTSIDE URBAN FARM & GARDEN

2326 4th Ave E, Olympia 360-972-2993

**Year-Round Gardening Series: Classes every month February – October! We will show you how to make the most of your growing for maximum, organic production.**

**Community EDIBLE HEDGE Workparty! Coming early February 2016**



**This project involves creating a 300' long by 6ft wide hedge filled with edible berry shrubs, fruit/nut trees, herbs, and beneficial insect attracting perennials/flowers. The hedge will provide an area where community members are free to walk along and harvest any available edibles year-round, and will provide a haven for birds, bees, and other wildlife. Additionally, the project will include the installation of a living willow woven fence along Chambers Street (this will be in January/Feb), creating a further haven for beneficial insects, and a beautiful addition to the neighborhood. This project is in partnership with the Eastside Urban Farm & Garden (EUFG), Upper Eastside Neighborhood Ass'n, and the WA State Dept of Veteran Affairs (WDVA) through the Veteran Conservation Corps (VCC).**

**If you'd like to get involved, come on the day or call Eastside Urban Farm and Garden Center @ 360-972-2993. We need your help!!!**

**UPDATE: A big thank you to all that participated in this project, check out this article!  
<http://www.thurstontalk.com/2015/10/09/edible-hedge-olympia/>**

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*Community Edible Hedge at the Eastside Urban farm and Garden Center.*

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# VETS\_CAFE

**VETERANS ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING AND STUDY  
IN  
CONSERVATION, AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND ECOLOGY**

## November 1st Orting Farm Planning Begins

Veterans and Allies gathered at O'Connor Hall, located at the Orting Soldier's Home, on October 23, to begin pre-development scoping and discuss opportunities for veteran's therapeutic and training programs at the Home. Focusing on conservation, agriculture, forestry, and ecological design opportunities, eleven participants walked the property during the dew wet hours. We discussed site resources and potential for infrastructure and programming that will support veterans in transition. The walk-and-talk was led by Jim Freed, WSU Extension Professor working in the non-timber forest products, small farms, tribal forestry, farm entrepreneurship and regional agriculture industries. During the walk we identified 24+ opportunities which meet the therapy and training needs of veterans while being broadly integrated as a diversified agro-forestry operation financially driven by an "on site, production based, revenue model".

Participants included WSVA contractors and interns, a Professional Arborist and VA Crisis Line Operator, a NWCG Certified Wildlands Fire Fighter Trainer, a National Oceanic and Aeronautics Administration Recruiter, a Center for Natural Lands Management Conservation Programmer, and an Americorps Intern Coordinator. Led by Jim, we identified more than two dozen opportunities to meet the combined missions of the WDVA and VETS\_CAFE. Most proposed uses include professional certification by Forestry Stewardship Council, Salmon Safe, Organic or other relevant professional verification of ecological integrity. These following proposed uses are included in our scoping for further development of the VETS\_CAFE proposal for a Permaculture Farm at the Orting Soldier's Home.



## Permaculture Possibilities at Orting Veterans Farm

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wildcrafting of Mushrooms &amp; Berries</li> <li>2. Coppices of Ash, Willow and other Natives for Fodder, Biomass, Biochar</li> <li>3. Multi-functional Hedgerow Conservation Plantings for Food, Fiber, Medicinals, Habitat and Erosion Control</li> <li>4. DOT/ CNLM Native Seed Nursery at East end of Agriculture Lots (see #5)</li> <li>5. Six 1/2 acre Agriculture Lots for Veteran Production</li> <li>6. Wildcraft Seed Nursery on Back 5 Acres</li> <li>7. Production for Soldier's Home Kitchen from Agriculture Land</li> <li>8. Salvage Demolition of House on Back 5 acres and of Garfield Barracks with Team Rubicon, etc.</li> <li>9. Rearing Livestock in Pasture and Forested Edges for Blackberry, White Oak, Scotch Broom Control</li> <li>10. Value Added Deciduous Tree Milling .</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Biochar Production</li> <li>12. Swale and Hugel Building as Erosion Control and Drought Mitigation</li> <li>13. Use of Scotch Broom and Other Aggressive Plants as Biomass/Volatile Oil Crop Production</li> <li>14. Animal Feed Production, Including Aggressives and Conservation Crops: Ash, Grains, Oak, Duckweed, Dock, Etc.</li> <li>15. Trail Building and Plant Salvage</li> <li>16. Mushroom &amp; Berry Cultivation</li> <li>17. Arboriculture &amp; Silviculture Training</li> <li>18. Challenge Ropes Course</li> <li>19. Aquaculture Program at Fish Pond</li> <li>20. Compost Facility</li> <li>21. WSU Puyallup Campus Connection</li> <li>22. Tree Seed and Nut Cropping</li> <li>23. Draft/Therapy Horse Logging and Field Management</li> <li>24. Green Building Program to Build Needed Facilities for Program.</li> </ol> |
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### Our next course date is November 6, 2015!

9 AM: Introduction to Permaculture: Ecology, Ethics, Principles and Patterns in Nature. Role of Homo Sapiens in the Ecosystem. Elements, Functions and Design. Plant of the Day Exercise.

1 PM: Ecopsychology with Jeremy Grisham (WDVA): Ecopsychology studies the relationship between human beings and the natural world through ecological and psychological principles. The field seeks to develop and understand ways of expanding the emotional connection between individuals and the natural world, thereby assisting individuals with developing sustainable lifestyles and remedying alienation from nature.

### UPCOMING 2015 TRAINING AND FELLOWSHIP DATES

November 1: (Olympia) Mushroom Hunt with Matthew West

November 6: (Orting) Introduction To Permaculture With Deston Denniston (AM)  
Ecopsychology with Jeremy Grisham, WDVA (PM) (see calendar)

November 7: (Olympia) Terraced Food Forest Design and Workparty (contact us)

November 20: (Orting) Soil from the Ground Up: How to Make Good Soil (see calendar)

November 21: (Olympia) Terraced Food Forest Workparty Chainsaw Day (contact us)

December 4: (Orting) TBI Workshop with Scott Bloom, WDVA (AM)

Hands-On Composting Workshop with Deston Denniston (PM) (see calendar)

**For registration contact VETS\_CAFE [vetscafeolywa@gmail.com](mailto:vetscafeolywa@gmail.com)**





We began our work with veterans just over a year



ago, catalyzed by a veteran with a fellowship from The Mission Continues. We've grown rapidly and achieved some incredible feats, including: the launch and cultivation of the half acre

veteran-led Victory Farm and donation of more than 2,000 pounds of produce to Crazy Faith Outreach. We've engaged more than 100 veterans, active duty and family members, inspiring 71 to become volunteers. These volunteers have contributed more than 2,700 hours, and helped build more than 150 backyard vegetable gardens with low-income families and community organizations.

-6 October 2014 thru 21 August 2015-

GRuB Victory Farm has; Total veterans engaged: 118, Total volunteers engaged: 71, 40 Vets - 19 family members Veteran/Active Duty and 12 members of community, Total volunteer hours: 2679.25, Average of: 37.73 hours per volunteer, National standard rate of \$23.07 per hour of volunteer service = **\$61,810.29** of volunteer service,

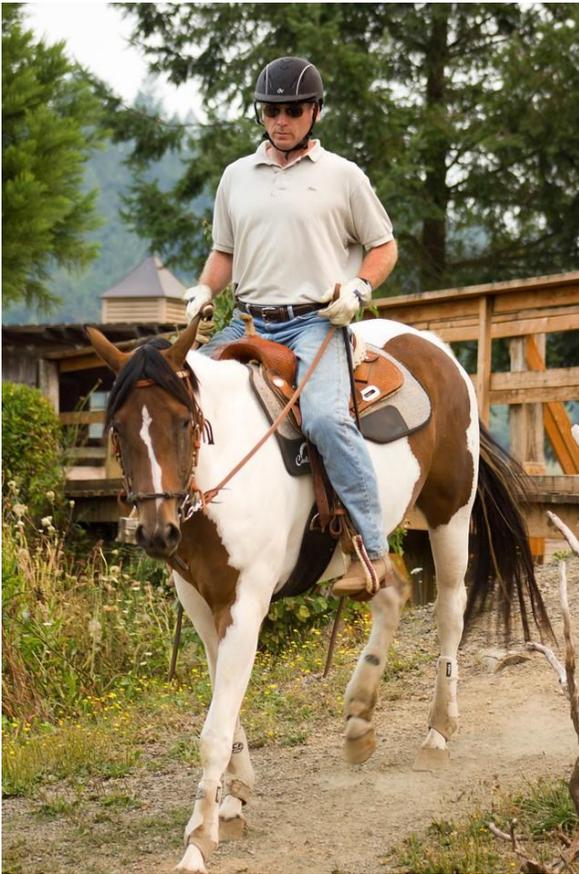
**Total number of specific events/projects hosted:** Fall Build season - October 2014 w/15 Vet/Active volunteers, 13 gardens built: Victory Farm day of service MLK- January 2015 - 55 volunteers, 48Vets, 7 family members : Ground Operations - March 2015 - 233 Attendees: Spring Build Season - 18 Vets who contributed to 75 gardens built across Thurston/Mason Counties: Day of the Bed - May 2015 - 7 of 11 Lead Builders were Veterans - 11 gardens build in one day: Victory Farm Open House - August 2015 - 166 Attendees





## Therapeutic horsemanship for America's heroes

"Rainier Therapeutic Riding uses horses to facilitate physical and emotional healing for our military heroes and their families while promoting the growth of our program throughout the world."



- Anyone who has ever served in any branch of the military qualifies to participate **at no cost.**
- Next session is January 24th—March 13th
- Introduction classes are Mondays at 10:00 and 12:00 and last 90 minutes. There will also be one weekend class (day and time TBD).



Reserve your spot for  
the session starting  
January 24th, 2016



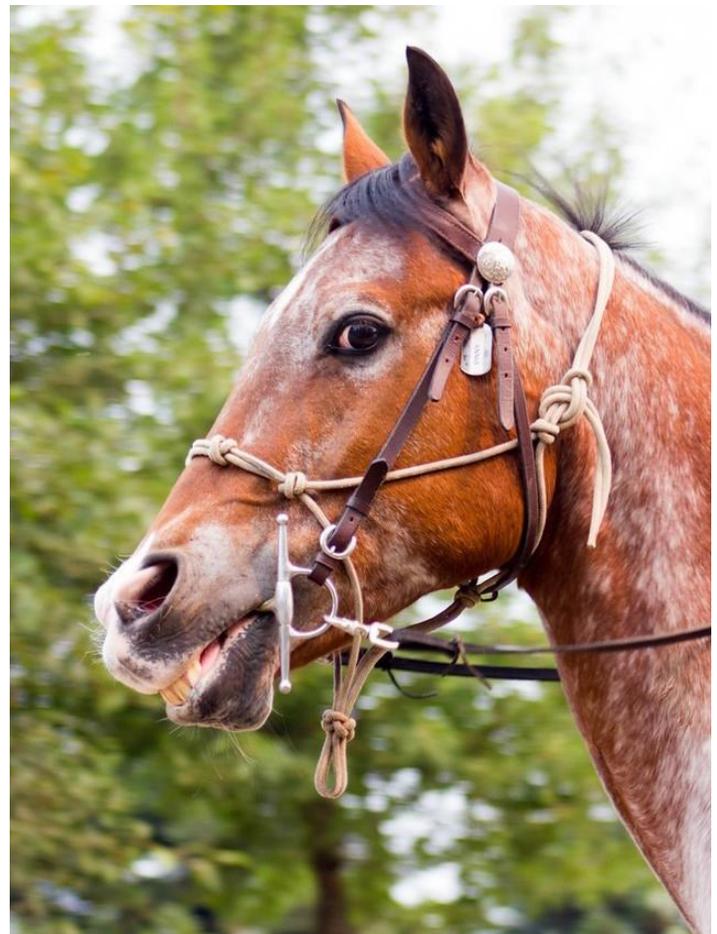


Our herd of hooved therapists and certified PATH Intl. instructors are honored to have the privilege of giving back to those who have served our country. Our program is designed to meet our riders where they are and help them progress in their horsemanship as well as their awareness of themselves. Horses have a natural majesty about them that helps heal the human body, mind and soul.

## Some of what you will learn:

- Horse behavior
- Herd dynamics
- Safety
- Grooming
- How to properly tack up
- Desensitizing
- How you affect horses
- Forming a partnership with your horse
- How to assert yourself as the leader

*“Something about the outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man.” ~Winston Churchill*





Growing Veterans is finishing up our 3<sup>rd</sup> year of empowering military veterans to grow food, communities, and each other. We have a lot to report for the year and are even more excited about what’s coming for next year!

**Recognitions:** *We were honored to be recognized and we are honored to recognize others.* Early in 2015, Growing Veterans made it on the [Hill Vets 100 list](#), being recognized nationally in the “Innovative Nonprofits” category and putting us on the same list as Jon Stewart, Michelle Obama, and Bob Woodruff, among others. We were happy to be recognized for our work in previous years and the work that we continue to do. We also received recognition by KING 5 News, doing a few segments to highlight [what our peer-support looks like](#), as well as how it [connects to our farm-to-market system](#) and our weekly Farmer’s Market at the VA Puget Sound Hospital on Beacon Hill.

We are also happy to recognize the work being done in Olympia with GRuB and their Victory Farmers project. It has been our honor to help develop the foundation of their work through mentorship as well as strategic and financial support. Our respective organizations have learned a lot through the piloted partnership and we’re excited to see what GRuB and their Victory Farmers create as they continue doing good work on their own in 2016.

**Research:** We were also honored this year to participate in ground-breaking research funded by the federal VA’s Office of Rural Health, which took a qualitative analysis approach to determine efficacy of Growing Veterans’ programs and our ability to foster well-being among our participants. While they continue to put together their Final Report, we have some exciting preliminary results to share:

Satisfaction Survey Data:	Non vets	Vet s
Overall satisfaction with professional development	82%	90%
Overall satisfaction with skill improvement	80%	91%
<b>Health</b>		
I get more exercise	83%	78%
My diet improved	38%	41%
I feel less depressed/ discouraged	69%	73%
I need fewer medications	25%	47%
<b>Relationships</b>		
I made new friends w/ military experience	50%	82%
I made new friends w/out military experience	64%	70%
My relationships with old friends have improved	25%	52%
My relationships with my family have improved	33%	55%
My ability to communicate with people I know improved	54%	59%
My ability to communicate with strangers has improved	54%	74%
<b>Overall Quality of Life</b>		
I am more involved in community events	69%	67%
I have learned new skills	100%	87%
I have developed new interests	75%	87%
I feel a sense of belonging	73%	87%
I feel a sense of purpose	75%	87%



In addition to this VA research, we also have an ongoing project in partnership with Seattle University to do a quantitative analysis of the psychological well-being that veterans experience while working on our farm sites. The preliminary data is exciting, but it is too soon to form concrete conclusions, so stay tuned!

**Responsibilities:** We are honored that our work has encouraged and supported other veteran agriculture projects around WA state and in other areas of the country, but our sense of responsibility to do what’s right and continue enhancing our ability to support veterans in transition



through agriculture is not yet quenched. This year 8 of our 12 staff members became certified in the ASIST model, which stands for Applied Suicide Intervention and Skills Training, and we are working on getting 100% of our staff certified. We also aim to have some of our staff become certified ASIST trainers so we can begin offering ASIST certification to the communities we reside within, as well as our friends in other veteran service organizations around WA state.

In addition to our responsibility to do our part in making sure we're equipped to fight suicide, we are also launching a 3-day Peer Support Training program to equip our veteran staff and volunteer leadership with the knowledge, skills, and awareness to be highly effective peer-supporters. Combining best practices in peer support programs around the country, our own observations from the past three years on the farm, psychology and clinical theory, and feedback from VA counselors who are also veterans and have a cumulative 80+ years working with vets; we are confident that this innovative Peer-Support Training will be a force multiplier for us to meet our mission in empowering military vets to grow food, communities, and *each other*. We are also eager to begin offering this training to our fellow veteran service providers once we have had the opportunity to field test it and ensure all of the kinks are worked out.

Please stay tuned and get involved! Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [online](#). You can **get involved** by [signing up as a Member](#) to learn of opportunities near you, [sign up for our newsletter](#), or become a supporter through our safe, secure, [online donation system](#).

