

Pair ascend America's acmes in battle against PTSD

Disorder that often plagues veterans hits home for one Clintonville climber



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Clintonville's Mike Fairman, with his team in the background, makes an attempt to climb Mount Rainier, Washington's highest point. The climb was cut short due to high winds.

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By **KEVIN PARKS**

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People climb mountains because they are there, and combat veterans must cope with post-traumatic stress disorder because it, too, is almost inevitably there.

Saddened and appalled by the number of their fellow ex-service members who commit suicide each year while struggling with PTSD, two veterans -- one from Clintonville and the other a native of Indiana now living in Tennessee -- have set themselves the task of reaching the highest elevation in all 50 states.

"We kind of saw this parallel of dealing with PTSD and climbing a mountain," Clintonville resident C. Michael Fairman said last week, fresh off an attempt at scaling 14,411-foot Mount Rainier in Washington.

Now a freelance photojournalist, Fairman and Steve Redenbaugh co-founded Summit for Soldiers as a service project of the climbing club they founded, Mountain Goats Inc., after both left active military duty -- Fairman as a Navy corpsman with the U.S. Marine Corps and Redenbaugh in the Army.

"It was always kind of our own therapy," Fairman said. "We kind of saw this parallel of dealing with PTSD and climbing a mountain.

"It's a team effort. You're not going to get up that mountain unless you decide to get up that mountain, and when you do, it's going to be done as a team."

More than 5,000 veterans take their own lives every year, Fairman said.

"We want to get the numbers out there so people understand," he said.

Summit for Soldiers began, modestly enough, with a climb of Ohio's highest elevation, 1,550-foot Campbell Hill in Bellefontaine. Since then, Redenbaugh and Fairman, accompanied by other veterans and experienced climbers, have scaled the tallest peaks in Alabama, Hawaii and Indiana.

The Aug. 23-24 effort to reach the top of Mount Rainier was turned back by extremely high winds, Fairman said.

Tennessee, where Redenbaugh now lives, or possibly New York are next on the agenda.

The co-founders want their Facebook page, Twitter feed and website, summitforsoldiers.org, to serve as resources for people, not just soldiers, coping with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"We want to put together a proactive, preventive program that can be put into the military on the front end of deployment," Fairman said. "We recognize post-traumatic stress disorder as an injury now. We've finally come along enough that way."

"You've got to treat this like any sort of medical disease," Redenbaugh told his hometown newspaper, the *Journal Review* in Crawfordsville, Ind., in June. "So our three main points of emphasis are awareness, encouragement and simplicity. That's what we do with Summit for Soldiers."

"We're self-funded," Fairman said.

Those offering donations to help offset the cost of the project are encouraged instead to send money to Department of Veterans Affairs programs that help people deal with PTSD.

Fairman and Redenbaugh are veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"It's important to us because obviously, we've suffered from this," Fairman said. "This hits close to home.

"The worst-case scenario is we're going to make a

difference. The best-case scenario is we're going to make a big difference."