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Doc's Healing Hives

A Veteran Helping Vets Heal

Article by Rhonda Shannon / Photos by Rhonda Shannon and Lisa Evans

For most civilians, it can be hard to imagine life in active-duty military. The disciplined training, fitness requirements and mental aptitude are aspects that are commonly obvious as prerequisites for deployment. What probably is not so obvious is the transitional challenges faced by those returning home from completing a combat tour. "It's like getting sent home unexpectedly from a job that you love and having to leave your brothers and sisters in arms behind as well as the mission you love. You have a huge void and have difficulty relating with others and difficulty finding a purpose" That's how army reservist veteran and High School Assistant Principal Tim Doherty describes returning stateside from his last tour in Afghanistan.

Tim served as Deputy Surgeon for NATO Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan (NSOCC-A), as a medical operations officer. His initial duties in addition to being the Deputy Surgeon for NSOCC-A were to advise the Afghan Special Mission Wing Medical evacuation team and help refine the existing medical evacuation and support for all US Forces in Afghanistan. His role slowly expanded to advising the Surgeon General of Afghanistan in order to ensure the Afghan Special Mission Wing Medical team had the personnel, equipment and training they needed to support the Afghan Special Forces. Tim said, "I was working at the Command level, my job was to advise all the Afghan medical military supporting the Afghan Special Forces at the same time making sure that our Special Forces had all the support they needed as well. "When I first started my tour, there was one SMW Afghan Flight Surgeon, one nurse and two flight medics. That Afghan medical team could only run one clinic and support a single medevac," explained Tim. "We had begun to transfer the medical evacuation of the Afghan Special Forces to the SMW medical team and they simply did not have the ability to do it. The role of Special

Forces is very important for any military; you can change the fight of the battlefield. A soldier's will to fight is directly tied to knowing they will be medically evacuated if they are injured." Tim worked quickly to establish the medical evacuation capability



The first hive to be moved to the land.

within the Afghan SMW, and in less than 6 months, there were three Afghan SMW clinics, 21 flight medics, 9 flight doctors and 2 nurses all fully trained, equipped and performing medical evacuation for the Afghan Special Mission Wing.

An injury Tim received while evacuating soldiers in Afghanistan persisted and when Tim's tour was completed, he was sent to Fort Hood. There he was evaluated and diagnosed with a bicep injury and torn rotator cuff and was sent to a warrior transition unit at Fort Stewart. "When I came home and was waiting for approval for surgery, all I had to do was go to medical appointments and 3 formations a day. I had a whole year to decompress and went from [a routine of] every day engaging in a different Afghan medical element of support and guidance to just sitting around. As I waited for my surgery to be approved and scheduled, I began to experience symptoms of Transition Disorder and PTSD," explained the Fulton County school system Assistant



Tim inspects some of the bees from inside the boxed hive.



The tools and equipment Tim uses when working with the hives.

"You train for your deployment, on deployment, you've got that purpose and you're operating at the highest level you're trained for. Then you come home, go back to your civilian job and you're not involved in that duty and you're not around the people you'd spent every day with, 24/7. You get addicted to the adrenaline. You don't have that purpose when you come home and you don't have that adrenaline rush. I'd found a new purpose, something to look forward to.

Keeping bees."

— Tim Doherty



Tim, in the center of the land, points out his sketch of plans for the layout of the land and for the learning center that will be underway soon. Photo by Lisa Evans.

Principal. He continued, "During this time, I had an opportunity to visit with my sister in Michigan and I began to watch her as she cared for her honey bees at Redoubt Farm. The excitement of tending to her bees was contagious," said Tim. This experience would not only lead him to a new profession as a beekeeper and honey producer but it would have a resounding impact on his recovery as well, helping him convert from the extremely fast-paced and on-your-guard mentality to a more relaxed pace within a somewhat secure environment. "You train for your deployment," Tim explained. "On deployment, you've got that purpose and you're operating at the highest level you're trained for. Then you come home, go back to your civilian job and you're not involved in that duty and you're not around the people you'd spent every day with, 24/7. You get addicted to the adrenaline. You don't have that purpose when you come home and you don't have that adrenaline rush. I'd found a new purpose, something to look forward to. Keeping bees," he said.

Tim began researching beekeeping and attending educational seminars. He first participated in the fall conference of the Georgia Beekeepers Association and with information he received there, he was ready to get started. He bought his first hive at a MABA (Metro Atlanta Beekeepers Association) silent auction in September of 2016 and began with a few hives at his home. But then a challenge arose that was not really expected – where the bees were located. Being in a subdivision in Dunwoody was not a healthy environment for the bees. "I was on a ½ acre and I thought it'd be fine because there was a creek behind me and also a neighbor who had an adjoining 5 acres," Tim explained. "What wasn't fine was

less than 50 yards away was a neighborhood pool with a textured concrete deck that held water. My bees figured out they loved pool water. The bees would go drink on the deck, the kids would step on the bees and the bees would sting them," Tim explained. In addition, pesticides and herbicides are detrimental to bees because the sprays are not pest specific. "Doing things like spraying for mosquitoes is lethal to bees since the insecticide floats through the air," said Tim. His hives began collapsing and Tim knew he'd need to find a more suitable environment and soon. He decided to look for rural property nearby and situate the bees there. While at the Farmers Veteran Coalition Conference, Tim talked with a fellow veteran and AgGeorgia customer Mike Reynolds, who referred Tim to his lender, Mitch Adams in Chatsworth. Tim called Mitch from that very conference. "Mitch said all I needed was a business plan and a property," said Tim.

His search for property began. Tim found a few rural areas that were nice during his nine month search, but the properties for sale didn't fit his needs – either the price was more than he wanted to pay or there were restrictive conditions that would interfere with the present and/or future uses. He found a few acres near Blue Ridge, Georgia and it seemed to fit. With a conference center convenient for meetings and Tank Town nearby (Tank Town is a recreational area where you pay to drive tanks, shoot rounds and crush cars) coupled with the beauty and popularity of the area, the location was ideal. Tim reached out to Mitch again. "Mitch helped in getting the loan for this property and made it one of the easiest things in the world," said Tim. "I submitted a business plan, submitted

"Mitch helped in getting the loan for this property and made it one of the easiest things in the world. I submitted a business plan, submitted tax returns and proof of income and he did the rest of the work. He even went as far as coming to the closing. He was great! He's helping me help others to obtain the dream. What we're building and the return on that [this investment] will be amazing and I couldn't have done it without Mitch. Mitch made it super easy, insanely easy."

tax returns and proof of income and he did the rest of the work. He even went as far as coming to the closing. He was great! He's helping me help others to obtain the dream." Tim continued, "What we're building and the return on that [this investment] will be amazing and I couldn't have done it without Mitch. Mitch made it super easy, insanely easy." According to Mitch, Tim was great to deal with, quickly getting the information to Mitch that he needed to process the loan. "With all the different types of operations around us, large and small, a true farm is not defined on the size but what you can do on them," said Mitch. "I was glad to help Tim help others, other vets and getting them exposed to a niche operation on a smaller scale." An interesting twist to Tim and Mitch's professional connection was that Mitch consulted Tim on removing honey bees from his house. The bees were between the foundation and an exterior wall of Mitch's home and with Tim's instruction, 40,000 honey bees and 15 combs were carefully removed. Today, Mitch has his own hives that he works with his son, thanks to Tim.

Operating under Doc's Healing Hives and Honey, a non-profit foundation that was incorporated in 2017, Tim's goal is to help other veterans heal their service wounds with agriculture, namely beekeeping. The first class of its kind was in April of 2017 at Tim's church, Kingswood United Methodist Church in

Dunwoody. There, 25 of the 32 participants were veterans and they all walked away with a beehive, a nucleus of bees and equipment, and a one day training course that didn't cost the vets anything. High school students helped build the frames for the hives during spring break, volunteering through their respective organizations in order to experience different things. In this particular case, the students knew they were building the boxes for veterans. Through these courses, the soldiers are working toward a new career and in most cases, spouses attend too as the soldiers are also working on their relationships as well. "They [the couples] both start learning and start helping each other," added Lisa Evans, friend of Tim and supporter of Doc's Healing Hives. "It's a gradual re-introduction [to civilian life] and the bees and the honey they produce are ways for them to do that." Lisa is a social worker typically dealing with transitional situations, primarily children exposed to trauma. Although their causes can be vastly different, she's very accustomed to the remnant effects of PTSD situations of both veterans and children. Due to her training and experiences she admits she is different around those who have PTSD compared to those who do not and enjoys the opportunities to interact with the veterans and their families. "The entire course and those who presented instruction were so professional and caring and really made the veterans feel calm and at ease," Lisa said. She loves seeing the transformation of those who attend the workshops, and had taken pictures of the veteran participants standing far away from the hives at the beginning of the course and being "not quite sure" of what to expect. "Those same ones were extremely hands-on by the end of the day, very comfortable and excited about their new possibilities," she said.

Since the purchase of the land in February of 2019, Tim has begun moving forward to develop the land into an expanded honey bee farm and a teaching area for fellow vets. His vision includes 5 small cabins in the center with a learning center that's an open-air pavilion which will include a kitchen, rest rooms and a place to sleep. Until that time, Tim will continue to teach and mentor his fellow veterans with beekeeping and agriculture to promote their healing and returning to their communities. Currently, the course encompasses two days. "When we are where we want to be, it will be a week long course," said Tim. His work is to provide an opportunity to veterans who are strugg-



Tim (standing, far right) is shown with a group of participants in one of the beekeeping seminars. Photo by Lisa Evans.

gling with physical and mental challenges associated with service and deployments. "Veterans' return home has changed in the last few decades," said Tim. "Those that returned home from Viet Nam didn't get to talk about their experiences or their struggles. Now veterans can find each other and collaborate. We help each other."

It's easy to see that Lieutenant Colonel Tim Doherty is passionate about whatever his mission might be, in active duty or through the Foundation. And although he admitted he didn't want to come home from the last tour because there was more to accomplish for the country of Afghanistan, he will be "hanging it up" come September of 2019 after 33 years of military service. He has begun the process of shifting gears and focusing his attention to agriculture and its therapeutic benefits for the vets' rehabilitation. Tim sees a correlation between his experience in the military and in agriculture. "It's constant problem solving," he admits, "and education is always involved." He's applying the phrase from the soldier's creed of 'I am an expert and I am a professional' into practice with beekeeping. He's done research, and along with hands-on instruction provided by UGA's Beekeeping Institute (in conjunction with Young Harris College), he's prepared himself for this next juncture. He's also gotten very involved in the promotion and awareness of the importance of the honey bee. Currently, he is the co-chair of the legislative committee for the Georgia Beekeepers Association. On that committee, he was instrumental in developing the Georgia license plate that was released on May 28, 2019, to save the honey bee with all funding going to the Georgia Beekeepers Association. "I was paired with Gail Dean, a Fulton County BOE member

and we worked together on the project and followed the protocol of application for a year. We had to wait another year for them [DMV] to revamp their system to be able to print the plate," Tim explained. Although it was a somewhat tedious process, he didn't shy away from the challenge. "I just fixed the Afghan Special Mission Wing medical evacuation system. Yeah, we can do this," he said.

Doc's Healing Hives has made great strides since its inception in 2017 serving more than 50 veterans, but there's a lot more to be accomplished in helping veterans heal. Understanding the sacrifice that veterans and their families make during their service to our country is not easy for those that haven't served. The devotion to military service, like agriculture, is something that's hard to explain and comprehend to those outside of it. But through his own transitional and healing achievement that was in part brought about by having his own apiary, Tim has found a niche that he feels can also be beneficial to other veterans' transition and healing process. "The solution isn't going to be to talk to someone who doesn't understand what you've been through or found in a prescription. The solution is being purposeful and being around people that you can relate to. Beekeepers and vets have a ton in common. It's a can-do [mindset] to take care of our bees as we take care of each other."

Editor's Note: Tim was recently approved for a farm improvement loan and hopes to break ground on Doc's Healing Hives Learning center prior to this Veteran's Day this November.

For more information, to contact or to contribute to helping veterans, go to www.docshealinghives.org



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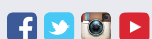
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