

Veterans fundraiser put on by students

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A fundraiser intended to raise money for, and awareness of, veterans suicide took place May 25 at the Elks Lodge in Oregon City. Although the event was ostensibly ordinary, its origins were not: from a raffle to a state representative as keynote speaker, the entire thing was planned by six Clackamas Community College students.

The students met in a business technology class taught by instructor Cole Chatterton, where they were assigned — during week one — a final project of doing something that would impact a social issue locally. While students brainstormed ideas in the class, Jerad Schweitzer was the first to mention veteran suicide as a potential issue. The students each chose one of the ideas that interested them and formed five groups, one of which coalesced around Schweitzer's idea, which he said came from his desire to join the military from a young age. A desire inspired by his admiration for his great grandpa, a World War II Navy veteran.

"I had this glorified vision of being a war hero and being proud of serving my country," Schweitzer wrote in an email. "But as I grew older, I watched a close family friend who was like a brother to me go and join the Army where I saw the terrible effects of what it can do to the ones that I hold close. There are a million more stories like this, and many end with a sad and painful ending. So I thought, why would I just stop at helping one veteran? What if instead of serving the country by joining the military, why don't I serve my country by standing behind those who do? By supporting and providing help to those who did, I feel like I found a different calling that I can provide do."

The other five students who signed onto his idea all had their own reasons — for some it was more personal than others — but each was equally dedicated to the cause. "When I heard we could do a class project on giving back to an organization of choice, I jumped on the opportunity to help the veteran community. I didn't know which one or how I could do it, but I knew that I would have the support of classmates to help the spark I had turn into a flame," Schweitzer said.

Figuring it out would require relying on one another, for better or worse. As team member Jasjon Galvan recalls, it took some growth.

"Over time, we were each challenged personally and as a group. The value of direct communication [became] the thread of growth as a team. I think some of us learned to trust others to follow through, and others of us happily stepped up to be leaned on. We all learned to come through and believe the biggest potential for this team to accomplish," Galvan said. "Not just saying you think we can go for a goal but putting actions behind that belief to propel us toward it."

Though the group may have been challenged, once they decided on a raffle things developed rapidly, or as one team member Janile Yost put it, "The wheels started rolling and it caught speed quickly." According to Yost, "Many businesses and people from the community came together to donate or volunteer to help us."

One of the businesses that helped out was Mission 22, a non-profit focused on battling the ever-rising veteran suicide rate whose name is derived from a startling statistic:



Rep. Mark Meek takes a question from an attendee during his speech.

that an average of 22 veterans take their own lives each day in the U.S.

When the team was searching for the right charity to donate the proceeds of their fundraiser to, Mission 22 stood out both for their goal of impacting veteran suicide rates and the fact that they're headquartered in West Linn. Other donations came from Bald Guy Limousine, Sig Sauer and the CCC Foundation, to name a few. To top off all of the community support, the team was able to secure a venue for their fundraiser at no cost. Galvan knew this would be essential to her role from the beginning.

"Everyone knew I am an Oregon City Elks officer and could try to get a dining room donated," Galvan said. "Instantly, I became the venue."

The six students weren't just able to secure

donors and a venue though, they were also able to convince a politician to keynote the fundraiser. U.S. Rep. Mark Meek — who represents the 40th district of Oregon — agreed to attend and deliver a speech. Meek is a vet himself, having served eight years in the Air Force. In addition to Meek's presence, Clackamas County Commissioners Ken Humberston, Martha Schrader and Paul Savas each agreed to attend.

When Saturday night rolled around — the details all sorted out — there was nothing left to do but execute on a plan that had been several weeks in the making. The group set their sights on raising \$6,000, which is the cost of putting a single veteran through one of Mission 22's mental health programs.

The notable figures showed up, the raffle was held and speeches were given, but above all else the group succeeded in their goal — even if they didn't quite raise the amount they had hoped. The fundraiser pulled in an estimated \$3,400, but where it may have fallen short in a monetary sense, it seemed to have exceeded the expectations of those involved. Six CCC students took an idea to raise money and awareness for a pressing and often overlooked issue and made it reality. In the process, they proved the power of community.

"It's really awesome that a group of six students from all walks of life who met a mere eight weeks ago can put this together with the help of this community," Yost said. "It's clear that there is a lot of support for this cause because we would not have been able to do it without everyone's help. It's been pretty amazing."



From left, students Jasjon Galvan, Jasmine Hartwig, Austin Clinkscales, Janile Yost, Alex Noe and Jerad Schweitzer.