

# After Iraq, a new way to serve

*Damon Faust applies skills he developed in the military to first response in Haiti, and he helps other veterans do the same*

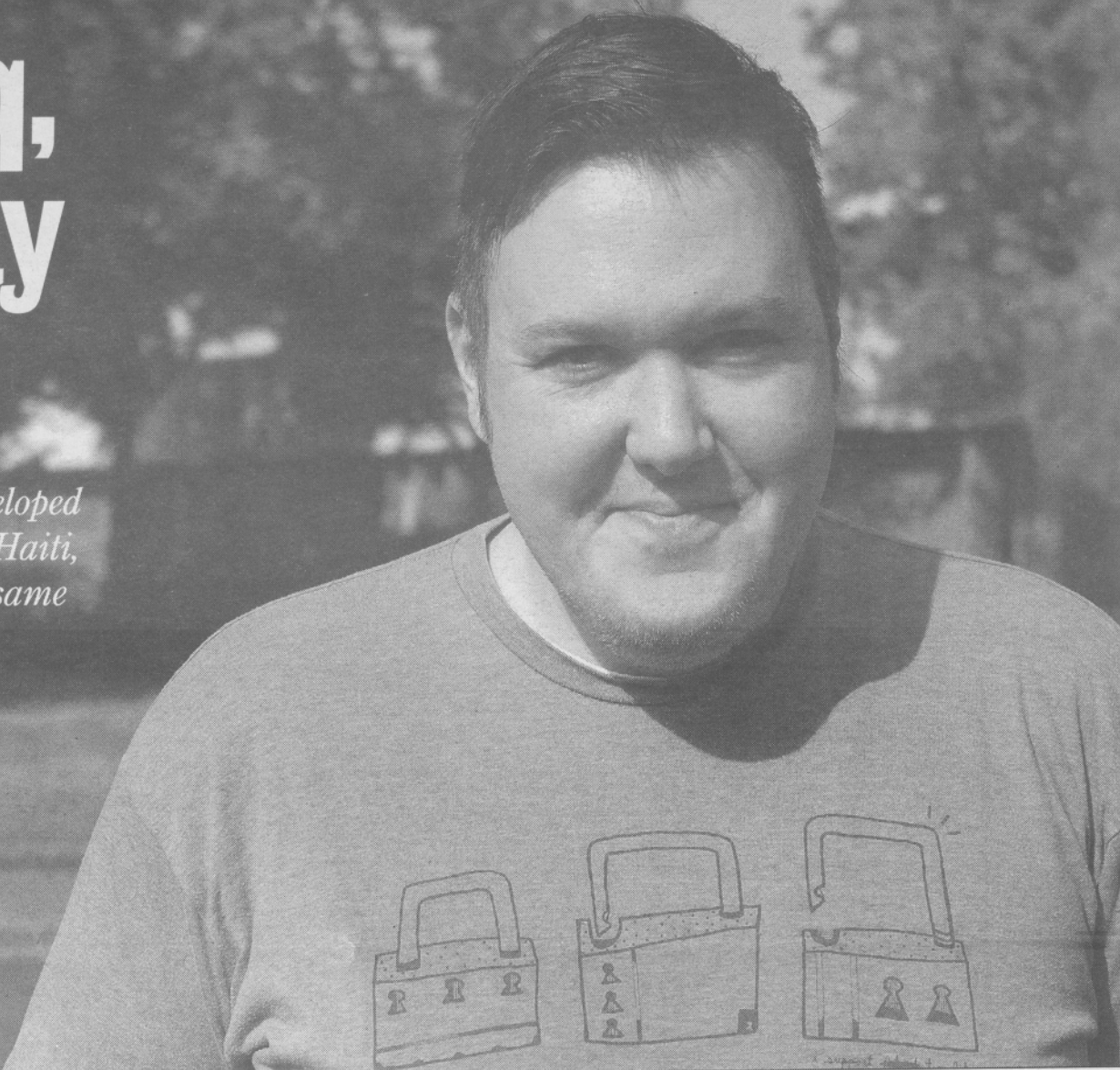


PHOTO BY SUZANNE ZALOKAR

Damon Faust is a co-founder of the nonprofit Remote Emergency Training Solutions. Faust, a combat veteran, spent 2005 in Iraq.

**BY SUZANNE ZALOKAR**  
STAFF WRITER

**D**amon Faust and business partner Ross Fielder have a vision: putting veterans' skill sets to work in Haiti. It's an experience Faust knows about this firsthand.

Faust, co-founder of the nonprofit Remote Emergency Training Solutions, put his skills as a combat veteran to use as a wildland firefighter. He

has also worked with Team Rubicon, which gives veterans an opportunity to apply their military experience to disaster response, and Hero Client Rescue, which provides emergency medical services throughout Haiti.

The best version of himself, he will tell you, is when he is serving his community.

Veterans and victims of huge natural catastrophes have something in common: trauma.

Helping others, Faust said, is a way to process the grief and confusion and guilt and pain that one may have experienced as an agent of war or otherwise.

Faust was born in Portland, then raised in a suburb of Sacramento. He joined the military, like many young people, to get out of where he was and to make his mom proud. He landed in combat arms and quickly realized he wanted to get out. He learned that if he did a National Guard stint, he might be able to get out of active duty. He did, and he went back to Sacramento for a year of service.

**"I'm good in a crisis. I know a lot of veterans who will tell you the same thing. We function better in those stressful situations where there is trauma or danger or threats around us. The USA did a really good job of training us to do that."**

**DAMON FAUST**

After he left, Faust's unit received orders to go to Iraq. Faust felt an obligation to some of the younger guys still there. He had taught some of them to drive a stick shift and had built a solid bond in the year they trained together. He re-enlisted in active duty and spent all of 2005 in Iraq with the Army.

**Suzanne Zalokar:** *Tell me what impression your time in Iraq left on you?*

**Damon Faust:** While in Iraq, I lost a good friend, and lots of my friends were injured pretty bad. Somewhere there, I realized that I wanted more. My military service kind of fucks me to this day. On the other hand, if I hadn't gone to Iraq, I wouldn't have found the motivation to want to do something different. It was love-hate and a catalyst for change in my life.

One of the lingering things that always sticks with me: Underneath all of that chaos and violence and ugly and hatred, I saw benevolence and compassion – and not just between guys in my unit, but between guys in my unit and Iraqi civilians and between others. It was very interesting to me that in all of that chaos, there was still love.

**S.Z.:** *Where are you now, with RETS?*

**D.F.:** I have a friend who is the CEO of Hero Client Rescue, (a service that works to build a strong emergency response capacity in underserved communities worldwide). She's been in Haiti since the earthquake (in 2010).

I told her I wanted to put my skills to use, and that evolved into me coming down there and helping her do some really cool training with the Haitian

Coast Guard. None of them had any sort of first-aid training. It was really great to give them some of those skills. One of the things I kept reiterating was whether or not you use this in your day-to-day helping your community, these are skills that you can use for your family and your friends.

**S.Z.:** *You have this freedom to go to Haiti in part because of the compensation you receive from the military, meaning you don't have to get time off from work to go. Some people might think you are living the dream. What is that like?*

**D.F.:** I am dependent on the system, and that terrifies me.

My girls have changed my perspective. I have a 5- and a 3-year-old. That is one of the reasons that I do a lot of volunteer work. I have a deep fear that they will describe their dad as an isolated, shut-in vet who drinks too much in the garage. I haven't done that in a long time. I was working through some things in my head. I still struggle with depression and things like that, but I'm finding other ways to use my time, ways to use those hours.

You know that compensation from the VA? It can make you feel that your power has been stripped. My ex-wife participated in the caregiver program, which the VA created for modern war fighters. For us, a spouse could become a caregiver, and they would get compensation too. That changed our whole family dynamic.

One of the things it did was strip my role in the household, or I felt it did. I no longer felt like a partner. I felt like someone who was in need of care. And my ex-wife no longer felt like my partner either.