

KeizerCommunity

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Keizer vet found new battlefield at home

By LAUREN MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

During the recession in 2008, 18-year-old RJ Navarro found himself short on hours, cash and options. He found relief in the National Guard.

After scoring high on his Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and his physical he went into the military to become a mechanic.

"I worked on Humvees [and] anything with wheels pretty much," Navarro said.

Navarro said basic training was the most intense experience he had at the time.

"They break you down mentally," Navarro said, though he added that they take more precautions during training now.

After basic training, Navarro came home but still couldn't find a job. The mechanic training he received in the military wasn't recognized by the civilian work force.

"Local laws have changed since then, that make it easier to get a job," Navarro said.

Once again, Navarro found himself running out of time and options to make ends meet. When the National Guard sent troops to Iraq, he volunteered to go. He was one of the 2,500 National Guard members in the 41st brigade that was deployed in 2009.

Before deploying Navarro got married. Because of security concerns, there were a lot of "off-limits" topics that Navarro and his wife could not talk about.

"I think that was a real stressor on our relationship to the point that it kind of started to fall apart and we, unfortunately, became a statistic," Navarro said.

At the time of his deployment 50 percent of troops were expected to come back divorced.

During Navarro's deployment, he doubled as a mechanic and a gunner. Though the military prepared him thoroughly for going over seas, they did not prepare him for coming home.

At home, Navarro entered three new battles with drugs, alcohol and homelessness. He got arrested for having a half ounce of marijuana, which was illegal at the time, and was in prison for two years.

For him, transitioning from the military to prison was easier than transitioning to civilian life.

"It wasn't really that hard of a transition



Navarro

because in the military they tell you when to sleep and when to wake up," Navarro said.

Navarro spent time in and out of prison for petty crime before finding a housing program for students, Student Opportunity for Achieving Results (SOAR).

Navarro went to college for business management and was hired on as a veterans representative at Chemeketa Community College where he organized the Chemeketa Veterans Youth Challenge.

"A bunch of Chemeketa veterans got together and we taught the youth the benefits of pursuing a higher education," he said.

After leaving Chemeketa, he continued the program under the name Oregon Veterans Youth Challenge.

"There's a lot of people that have this stigma about criminal history," Navarro said. He said being addicted to drugs at one point in your life does not make you a bad person forever.

"I think most people want to recover, just give them the opportunity," he said.

Navarro is currently working for a non-profit in Salem that trains veterans to be peer support specialists.

"That's kind of where my story is, or at least where it's paused," he said.

Navarro hopes to continue the next chapter of his story as the representative of Oregon House District 25. His goal is to advocate for veterans within the Legislature.



Ibuprofen use is safe during crisis

Rumors that use of ibuprofen might actually worsen the symptoms of COVID-19 are unsubstantiated.

The World Health Organization is advising that, based on current information, there are no "reports of any negative effects of ibuprofen" when used to alleviate COVID-19 symptoms.

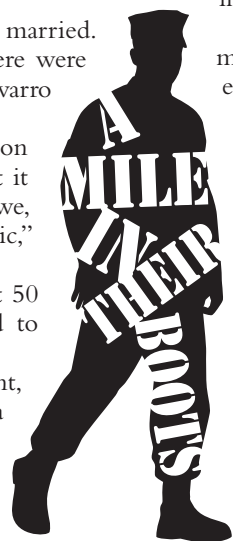
Those susceptible to previously known side effects should use caution. Health officials recommend using acetaminophen to treat fevers because it acts on the area of the brain that controls body temperature.

He said veterans in Oregon utilize food stamps at a higher rate than in other states. Oregon also has the highest rate of veterans who die by suicide.

The one thing that Navarro

wishes civilians would understand is that everyone deals with trauma differently. In the past, he dealt with his trauma by using drugs. Now, he spends time in nature by hiking or gardening.

"We have six to eight months until the 41st Brigade comes back ... and I think that we need to address these issues beforehand so they don't fall through the cracks," Navarro said.



A Mile in their Boots is a Keizertimes series focusing on the lives of veterans and active duty military personnel.

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