

**Vets** from A1

landing zone, McHenry found his friend had died. In the aftermath, McHenry blamed himself. "There was the world of blame, shame, fault, guilt, burden," he said. "Nobody ever said that to me, but I came off there feeling less and that I should've died — and the guilt of me living and them dying and me not doing better so more of them could live or at least have their limbs." Military psychologists

prescribed him pills for his mental pain, but McHenry still had restless nights, random adrenaline rushes and was startled by loud noises. Then he was introduced to a personal development training program, in which McHenry found a new way to address his pain. "And I got freed up from it — but I never talked about my stuff to anybody other than the psychologist in the military," he said. Intrigued by the method's efficacy, McHenry explored neuroscience and

psychology. He spoke with professionals in the field who said there was a trend in the industry away from mainstream prescriptions which asked trauma victims face their problems directly. McHenry spent a decade as a forum leader in the Landmark Forum, a company offering personal growth courses. In his worldwide travels, he noticed that many people were resistant to reliving their traumatic events. "So, I told them, 'You don't have to,'" he said. "I never said a word about my combat. I never spoke about it, but the symptoms went away. And I actually got to the source of why they went away, and that's what the workshop's about."

With Landmark's permission, McHenry has incorporated many of the company's teachings into Operation Veteran Freedom. During the workshop, attendees are told that the source of much of their pain is derived from the narratives they have

created for themselves. "Neuroscientists will say the number one job of the brain is to survive life," McHenry said, "but their brain does not care whether they are happy or sad." In our natural inclination to ascribe reason and meaning to the world around us, McHenry said, narratives form that tend to be reinforced through pattern seeking. "The workshop is about giving people the access to really see that and then creating a new narrative in such a way that they're freed up," said McHenry. "In the course, all of a sudden they see something they haven't seen before. And then there's an extreme amount of freedom." McHenry said that part of the modern problem in dealing with people who experience trauma is that they are told they are victims and must live with that as part of their identity. The workshop provides an alternative. "They're really starting to see that reliving it is not the access," he said. "And

then there's the possibility to create something new." The key words, McHenry said, are empowerment, freedom and peace. "This is about being freed up and rewriting your script or your narrative in such a way that you're the author and you get to say how your life goes," he said. Workshop attendee Linda Diaz volunteered to discuss her pain publicly during McHenry's all-day course in Cottage Grove. Diaz had been in a rocky marriage with a veteran who suffered from PTSD, but much of Diaz's pain was traced back to her relationship with her mother, who she said had made her feel unloved since an early age. While she stood in front of the audience, McHenry asked the room to raise their hand if they thought Diaz was unlovable. "I was terrified to look," Diaz said. "I thought at least five people would raise their hand ... but nobody thought I was unlovable, which really sur-

prised me." Through the course of the day, Diaz said she found the experience transformational, learning to allow normally stress-inducing thoughts to pass through her, free of judgement. "It was just really perfect timing for me because I was going through serious trauma myself," she said. "I am erasing my old story and becoming the author of my new life. I've had wonderful, empowering dreams. ... It is like learning to ride a bicycle. Wobbling at first, but each day I feel a little bit stronger." Transformations like this are potential lifesavers for a community of veterans in which 22 per day are estimated to commit suicide in the U.S. "That's why we wanted this workshop," said McHenry. "That's why I'm committed to veterans. I want them to be free." Operation Veteran Freedom is scheduled to return to Cottage Grove on Oct. 25 and 26. More information can be found at [www.na2evs.org](http://www.na2evs.org).

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**Threat** from A9

sources will not only speed

up the process of returning water to the whole city if water pipes break, but may also prove to greatly increase the chances that the city has the water supply to fight heavy fires.

Whatever the challenges ahead for Cottage Grove, vigilance will play a central

role in overcoming them. Meyers worries about that vigilance waning. "I'm afraid of nothing happening," said Meyers. "Because if nothing happens, we get lax. And complacent. And we don't prepare. That's the most fearful thing."

Lane County officials, too, recognize the value in attentively evolving with

each disaster cycle. "We'll never be ready," said county Emergency Manager Patence Wunningham. "Every event makes us stronger as a jurisdiction. We always have lessons learned and we always identify areas of improvement and we try to improve upon them. "And those continue to make us more resilient."



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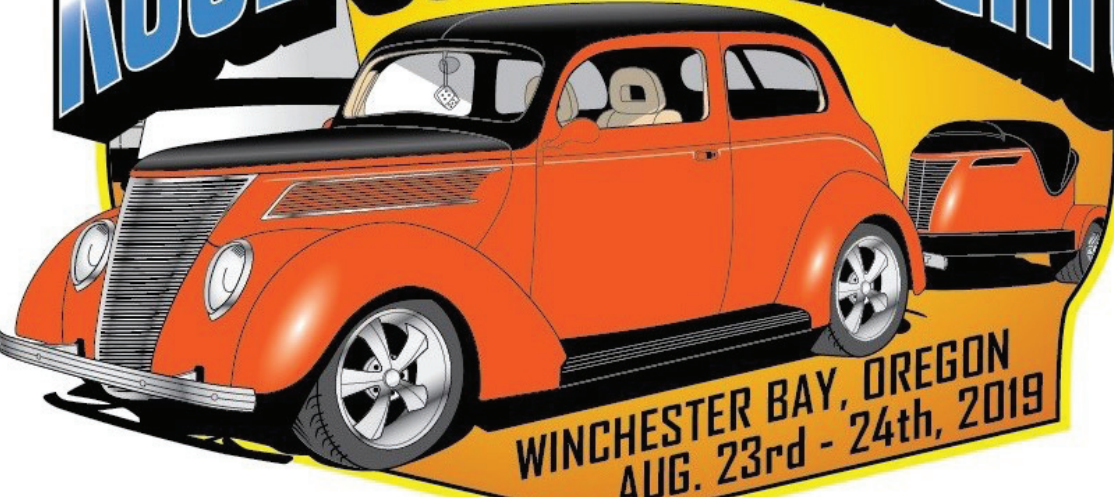
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