



JANUARY 2024

IN-FOCUS NEWSLETTER



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A LOOK BACK AT 2023

FOCUS Marines Foundation had a great year in 2023! We were fortunate to successfully host four-weeklong FOCUS Programs for our Nation's Heroes. In total, 82 veterans put their faith in us and came to Augusta, MO, for an entire week to receive some much-needed support, guidance, and healing.

Each of the four FOCUS weeks began with a group of individuals who, although ready for growth, also arrived nervous about being there and with defenses up. Some even considered not getting on the plane at the last minute. However, in the end, 82 individuals did just that. During each FOCUS week, our participants faced head-on the most significant issues they had been struggling with. They opened their hearts and minds, receiving tools and doing the hard work of working through what has been weighing them down and keeping them from their successes. When the week was over, each time, we ended with a new group of individuals who felt more like family than strangers, a group of brothers and sisters ready to support and lift each other up and hold each other accountable.

This year, our Graduate Mentoring Program has continued to grow by leaps and bounds. We hosted twelve monthly online Re-FOCUS classes where topics from the FOCUS Sessions are revisited. We also hosted twelve monthly Buddy Checks for open discussions and check-ins with program graduates. These live online meetings are not only well attended, but they are continuously growing with a current average of about 31 graduates per meeting.

It takes a village of volunteers and an immense amount of coordination to seamlessly host these four much-needed sessions. Each session requires months of planning and more than 125 volunteers working throughout the week. This year, we were happy to continue to grow our volunteer base and support team by adding new Graduate Mentors, Team Leaders, and Volunteers to our team. Early on in 2023, we hit the milestone of seeing our 1,000th participant graduate the FOCUS Program. Another proud moment for us was the realization that our primary source for referrals to our program is now FOCUS Graduates themselves. This speaks volumes to us as validation that our program is having the positive impact on veteran's lives that was intended.

As we make preparations for the new year ahead, we look forward to continuing to grow our program, reaching more veterans, and having long lasting positive influences in the lives of the those we are honored to serve.



Volunteer Spotlight



Walt Suhre - Chairman Emeritus



HE AIN'T CLOWNING AROUND

FOCUS Marines Foundation is truly blessed to have so many dedicated volunteers who give their time, energy, and commitment to help our veterans turn their lives around. Every one of them is worthy of being highlighted, but there is one in particular you might want to get to know better.

In November of 2009, FOCUS began at a meeting of Marine Veterans. One Marine telephoned another Marine for support. That Marine knew a few more and they knew even more. Thus, the meeting came to order to develop a program to help our veterans come out of their dark room and get back to living. Among those in attendance was Walt Suhre. Walt has a long history of giving back ... in fact, his motto of *Learnin', Earnin' and Returnin'* were boots he walked in his entire life. At this point, he was in the "Returnin'" phase of his life.

During the "Learnin'" part of his life, Walt graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in 1956. He then served in the United States Marine Corps from 1956 to 1959. Subsequently, he was in the reserves for another three years. Walt went back to school and graduated with a Bachelor of Laws, with honors, from the University of Cincinnati in 1962. This brought about a 30-year stint of the "Earnin'" phase of his life.

The last ten years of his career were spent as the Vice President and General Counsel for Anheuser-Busch, Inc., working directly for August Busch, Sr. One of his most memorable experiences was negotiating the purchase of a whale from another country. After all, AB owned SeaWorld, too! During his legal career, he was featured over 30 times in Who's Who in Finance and Business, Who's Who in Finance and Industry, Who's Who in America, and Who's Who in American Law.

Soon after retiring in 1993 from "Earnin'", Walt attended Clown School. He spent years volunteering at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital and St. Louis Children's Hospital making children laugh. He also learned to play the Mandolin, which is no easy feat. Having an interest in the culinary arts, Walt went to Chef School in New York ... twice. Have you ever had sousvide? Walt can make it!

Walt went on to buy a Trike motorcycle and used it to attend and support the Patriot Guard Riders Missouri Chapter. At his current age of 90, Walt continues to use his motorcycle to get around town. In addition, Walt served on the Board of Directors for the St. Louis Zoo for many years.

Notably, Walt was honored with the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020. And rightly so. FOCUS Marines Foundation has been so fortunate to have Walt and all of his years of knowledge, passion and experience to put our program together, help raise funds, and fine tune our program because he is dedicated to serving our veterans. Besides being a founder of FOCUS, he served as the Chairman for the first 13 years of the Foundation. Walt currently serves as Chairman Emeritus. And FOCUS is thankful everyday he ain't clowning around!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

We want to give a special shout out and Thank You to all of our in-kind donors. In-kind donations have a big impact on our FOCUS program throughout the year. These donations often include hygiene supplies, food and treats for service dogs, meals during sessions, cold weather clothes, cooking supplies, various silent auction items, and services rendered. These items and services are essential in running FOCUS, and many of them help us give our program participants a welcome and comforting experience throughout the week. Here are a couple examples of in-kind donations that end up making FOCUS feel like a home away from home for our participants:

Comfort Food

Everyone eats good at FOCUS! We jokingly say that no one that comes to FOCUS ever leaves hungry, or thinner. But it's true! Our Food Services team takes pride in making sure everyone's stomachs are full and happy, often making accommodations for dietary restrictions. Most of the meals we serve during the week are donated by either restaurants or home-made by groups of individuals that are passionate about supporting our veteran community. Throughout every FOCUS week, our kitchen provides over 1,000 meals as well as an unlimited supply of snacks and beverages for our participants, volunteers, and staff.



Stitched With Love

Quilts of Valor of Eastern MO is a quilting group that is dedicated to making special quilts solely for the purpose of offering love and support to our veterans. Each quilt is a masterpiece as they pour both their hearts and sewing skills into their creations. At the end of a FOCUS week, we are lucky to have a few quilters from the organization come and present one of these treasures to each participant. They have stitched a heart somewhere on each quilt and they say to our participants, "These are stitched with love from our heart to yours." There is no better way to end a week of hard work, learning, and healing, than to be wrapped in one of these very special quilts!



Know of a business or group interested in making a meal donation? Email charles@scottlitho.com for details.

Save the Date!

MESS NIGHT 2024

APRIL 13, 2024

SUNSET COUNTRY CLUB



Marine Corps definition of Mess Night:

Mess night is a ceremonial occasion where Marines gather to share the Corps customs & courtesies, plus build camaraderie and Esprit de Corps.

FOCUS definition of Mess Night:

Let's have some fun! Join us on April 13th for the FOCUS annual fundraiser. Enjoy dinner, drinks, a silent auction & some Marine Corps traditions.

We are currently accepting any donations of silent auction items and sponsorships. Ticket sales start 2/1/24.

For more information go to events at focusmarines.org

How to Attend FOCUS

Do you know a veteran who may be interested in attending a FOCUS program?

The first step is filling out a short online application. It takes less than 5 minutes to complete! Go to www.focusmarines.org and click APPLY NOW. You will receive a phone call from our Executive Director, Jennifer Jefferson, once the application is complete.

Upcoming Events

January 2024

4 - Buddy Check
16 - Re-FOCUS
20 - SCCAD Poker Tourn.

February 2024

1 - Buddy Check
4 - LiUNA Cornhole Tourn.
20 - Re-FOCUS
TBD - John G's Thawfest

March 2024

2 - FOCUS Course Begins
14 - Buddy Check
19 - Re-FOCUS

April 2024

4 - Buddy Check
13 - Mess Night
16 - Re-FOCUS

May 2024

2 - Buddy Check
4 - FOCUS Course Begins
21 - Re-FOCUS

June 2024

6 - Buddy Check
18 - Re-FOCUS

STAY IN TOUCH WITH US!

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