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Wounded warrior opens family ranch: free to all vets

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OLYMPIA, Wash. – Disabled combat veteran Bill Campbell and his wife, Domenica, opened their 14-acre farm in December, free to all military service veterans and their families. Nestled into the thick, green Capitol Forest, about 30 miles south of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, is the peaceful respite known to many as Wounded Warrior Ranch.

Bill said the ranch is a place where veterans and their families can simply drop in for a time of peace and solitude — a place where regimentation and schedules are checked at the door.

“Our mission is to honor and serve our nation’s veterans and their families with gratitude and appreciation through personal experience,” Domenica said. “We want people to rest and to relax and to feel as though they are at home when they’re here.”

There is plenty to do — or not to do — at the WWR. Veterans and their families can choose from things like hiking, boating, horseback riding, and horseshoes. Those looking for a little less activity can relax in the newly constructed day room, watch television, or read a book. Some choose to work in the garden or have a picnic on the shore of the oxbow pond.

For those who choose to take advantage of the miles of riding trails, Domenica has many years of equestrian experience from which to draw on and share knowledge. There are also several arenas and paddocks in which guests may ride one of the Campbells’s four horses and ponies.

“We want to remain open to whatever our guests come up with,” Domenica said. “The whole point is for them to find peace and to let go of stress.”

Bill, a former National Guardsman and a disabled veteran, suffers from post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury and seizures, all sustained from his 2004 deployment to Iraq with the 1st Cavalry Division. Having “been there and done that,” Bill said it’s easier for him to understand the process of mental and emotional healing from the scars of war.

As a homemaker, wife of a wounded warrior and mother of two (to include a son who serves as a British Royal Marine Commando), Domenica has earned her stripes by dealing with the trials and tribulations of military family life.

The WWR is a non-profit establishment. Volunteer funds, time and work are all welcomed and appreciated at the ranch. There is a ‘to do’ list as well as a ‘wish list’ at the website, www.woundedwarriorranch.org, for all who are interested.

WWR is a place where no one will feel burdened by any set expectations or stressors. “We are here to provide a place to be among peers,” Domenica said. “It’s a place where you are welcome, understood and honored.”

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