



# Turn A Disability To An Ability

*Veterans learn to fly fish through partnership program*

BY JIM LINDENMAYER

## DID YOU KNOW?

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers adaptive sports grants. To see if your parks and recreation department is eligible, visit <https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/grant-program/>.

**H**ave you ever thought of helping veterans with disabilities get out of the house and do something they may have done as kids or pre-military? Something that teaches patience and that helps them re-connect with their families in a lifelong recreation program?

Veterans make these requests every day to local Veterans Affairs (VA) groups, parks and recreation agencies, and other organizations, but most times the answer is, “Sorry, we can’t help.”

In Georgia, a group of organizations has partnered to create a program that goes right to the heart of this need.

The Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program, (CCHVP) and the Cohutta Chapter of Trout Unlimited have implemented a free fly-fishing program for disabled and elderly county veterans.

### LEARNING THE SPORT

According to Don Thomson, the Cohutta Chapter president, the four-week program, led by chapter instructors, provides the following classroom instructions:





- Intro to fly fishing
- Using fly-fishing equipment properly
- Lines, leaders, and knots
- Water conservation and insect life
- Places to fish
- Fly tying
- Fly casting.

The program also includes a fishing day at a private club in the North Georgia Mountains, where the rate of \$500 per person is waived.

While the program is open to veterans of all skill levels, it focuses on getting disabled veterans out of the house into adaptive sports so they can again be part of the community.

### SO FAR, SO GOOD

The VA has placed a lot of focus on developing and conducting adaptive-sports programs for veterans at a number of VA medical centers around the country, but Cherokee County is not near any of these facilities, so there is a great need for communities to develop programs locally.

In addition to adaptive sports, there are mental-health and quality-of-life benefits for the veterans and their families. The veterans in the pilot program include individuals from three war eras; some are combat-injured, and both males and females are participating.

A 10-year Army veteran and therapist are assigned to look at all aspects of the veterans' lives. Having a therapist with a military background is important so participants feel comfortable talking to someone who can relate to their military service.

Even though this is a pilot program, early feedback suggests participants want to see more programs like this. Although the program has been submitted for grant-funding consideration through the VA in the hope of expansion, the partnership will continue to create local programs for veterans. After all, they have sacrificed so much of their lives through service to the country that it is time we took care of them. **PRB**

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