

VETERAN TAKES CARE OF WOUNDED BRETHERN WITH WELCOME RETREATS

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MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: **John McDaniel**, 43

After spending 26 years in the military, **John McDaniel** isn't quite ready to let go of that important part of his life.

That's why the Delray Beach resident recently started a nonprofit called Wounded Warriors in Action, which provides injured veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom with a three- to four-day wilderness retreat, where they can participate in outdoor activities such as archery and hunting. "It's a way to help welcome them home and begin the emotional healing process," said **McDaniel**, 43. He and his wife own property in Phillips, Wis., where they are building a lodge for the veterans to stay. They hope to have the lodge ready by summer and begin the trips this fall.

In the meantime, **McDaniel** often takes local veterans on saltwater fishing trips in Key West. And he recently took veterans from the Veterans Administration Hospital in Tampa to a Van Halen concert.

McDaniel grew up in Oshkosh, Wis.

He remembers his mother being thankful for his flat feet because she said then the Army would never take him. So it's ironic that in high school, **McDaniel** met a 1st Airborne ranger who inspired him to pursue a military career.

"I said, 'That's what I want to be,'" he said. "My mother just gasped."

He and a friend enlisted in the Army in 1982, and at the time, **McDaniel** thought it would just be for a few years, as a way to pay for college. After basic training, he joined the ROTC at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he received his bachelor's degree in economics in 1986.

From there, he wasn't sure what to do with his life, so he went on active duty in the Army.

"I was an unguided missile," he said.

But everything changed when he fought in Panama for six months as part of Operation Just Cause, beginning in December 1989.

"My life changed," he said. "I realized this was my calling."

After that, he joined the 75th Ranger regiment, the premier light-infantry unit in the U.S. Army in 1990, where he stayed for three years. He even spent some time as a ranger instructor, commanding two units in Alaska.

"It was the best job I ever had," **McDaniel** said. "I spent the rest of my career trying to achieve that level of greatness."

The last three years of his career were split between business ideas and fighting the Global War on Terrorism in the United States Special Operations Command in Tampa.

Being in the military, **McDaniel** spent most of his adult life moving every two years or so, making it difficult for him to settle down.

"I never wanted to drag a family through that," he said.

But 3 1/2 years ago, he met his wife Kellie in the Florida Keys. Together, they raise Kellie's son Justin, 12. Although **McDaniel** is retired from the military, he's still hard at work. Today he is CEO of Northstar Group in Boca Raton, and his wife is president.

Northstar Group is the umbrella company for Northstar Aviation, a full-sale private aircraft brokerage, and Shining Star, an aircraft detailing company.

"Kellie and I think a lot alike," he said. "She and I feed off each other. We're very driven people." Becoming a leader in the business world was nothing new for **McDaniel**.

"In college, I was captain of all my sports teams," he said. "But it was the military that provided me with an opportunity to take my leadership skills and hone them."

He received his MBA in 2002 from Baker University in Kansas.

Right now, **McDaniel** and his wife are paying for Wounded Warriors in Action with their own money, and they are looking to the community for support.

McDaniel's ultimate goal is to turn the lodge into a year-round "healing center."

For information on Wounded Warriors in Action, call **McDaniel** at (813) 579-8151.

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ELIZA GUTIERREZ/Staff Photographer

John McDaniel, shown here with arrow drawn, is retired from the military after serving more than 20 years. "I'm not done serving," he says when speaking about his hunting and fishing retreat in Wisconsin for wounded veterans. "We can't do enough for these guys," he says.

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