



art • music • drama • dance • creative writing

Performer Profile

Ernest Caballero and Rodolfo Camacho – Special Recognition Award Winners in Dance

With two “good” legs and two prostheses between them, Ernie Caballero and Rudy Camacho set out to demonstrate to their fellow military veterans, as well as victims of Hurricane Katrina, their determination to persevere and overcome.

Both veterans were single leg amputees who met while receiving care at the VA medical facility in Martinez, Calif. When a local recreation therapist first informed them about the National Veterans Creative Arts competition, they expressed an interest in doing what they could to serve as an inspiration to fellow veterans who were facing similar physical challenges.

As part of their therapy, the two veterans would dance. Caballero, a 57-year-old Army veteran, began dancing many years ago. Since he now had a prosthetic leg and foot, he was able to return to dancing after a one-year period recuperating from his amputation. As for Camacho, 45, a veteran of the Army, his dancing career began in the recreation department of the local VA medical facility.

With the assistance of rehabilitation therapists, the duo prepared, rehearsed their dance routine and entered it into the National Veterans Creative Arts competition. “We were dancing to the song ‘*Walkin’ to New Orleans*’ in honor of others who met their own challenges from the Katrina storm,” said Camacho. “After my amputation, I felt hopeless and angry. I felt limited. I hope that through my participation in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, other people will be inspired to overcome their own obstacles.”

Sadly, Ernie Caballero passed away at the end of September, just a month before the big event. Here’s what he said about attending, “Participating in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival has enhanced my life by giving me more self-confidence,” he told Festival organizers. “I entered to make other people aware of the fact that an amputee can still dance.”

The duo chose the song *Walkin’ to New Orleans* as a dedication to their brothers and sisters surviving Hurricane Katrina, and their message was intended to keep their spirit of determination strong. The entry took first place in the special recognition category of the dance division, and very clearly demonstrates the concept of ability winning over adversity. At the event in St. Louis in October, Camacho still plans to perform their dance solo. Caballero will surely be looking on.