

Sandy Trombetta

VA National Winter Sports Clinic Originator and Director

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic began as one man's desire to help just one disabled veteran learn to ski. Today, Sandy Trombetta has made his dream a reality – the Clinic now welcomes more than 300 disabled veteran participants each year. In recent years, the list of participants has included our nation's newest veterans, the young men and women injured during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Nearly two decades ago, Trombetta, a recreation therapist at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Grand Junction, Colo., got the idea to take one of his patients skiing at a disabled ski program. "It was clear to me from the beginning that his experience wasn't about skiing, it was about him

accomplishing something and wanting to challenge himself," Trombetta explained.

He began to visualize a clinic for disabled veterans. Using his own home video, he began speaking to organizations, collecting donations — some as small as \$2.50 — all to make his dream come true. At the first Clinic in 1987, nearly 90 disabled veterans participated. "The most amazing thing about the first Clinic is there was a small group of people, some still with us today, who didn't care about the how-to's and the why's," Trombetta recalls. "They just thought it was something to try."

Today, the Clinic reaches out to more individuals than most would imagine. "I've always loved sports and I knew the veterans would love it, but I never knew how it would affect everyone else," Trombetta said. "Tourists at ski areas are astounded. It doesn't make a difference who you are – once you see this event you are affected by it. At the outset, we were the teachers but now we are the students. These vets have taught us so much about living."

In an article in *Skiing* magazine, John Bowermaster wrote, "While everyone here is a hero in their own right, most here will tell you that Trombetta deserves that label the most." His dedication and compassion are always evident as he shares a smile, a warm hello, or a hug with the veterans at the Clinic. Nearly every participant knows him by name and can attest to how he has individually affected their lives.

Sandy Trombetta has been awarded many honors over the years for his unwavering commitment to the Clinic. Every month, Trombetta makes it a point to speak to a variety of organizations about the Winter Sports Clinic, adaptive sports, and their tremendous impact on personal health and success. Since late 2003, he has personally visited newly injured soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and has personally recruited them to the Winter Sports Clinic – even when they thought there was no way they could ever think of skiing.

What began as one man's dream has evolved into an aspiration now shared by thousands of America's disabled veterans, injured both in war and in peace. As they challenge themselves at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic each year, the Clinic's motto, "Miracles on a Mountainside," is made evident.

