National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic

Skier Profile

James Nappier – Never Give Up!

James Nappier is returning to Snowmass Village for his third time at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. In 2006, he almost had himself talked out of participating, but thanks to encouragement from his wife, Lacey, and his physical therapist at the VA medical facility in West Palm Beach, Fla., he went to Clinic and skied for the first time. The experience got him hooked.

Nappier, 49, who lives in Loxahatchee, Fla., is a retired Marine Corps and Navy veteran. After serving in the Marines from 1975-1979, he wanted to re-enlist. " They told me I was too old," Nappier said. So he joined the Navy Seabees in 2001 as a heavy equipment operator. One of his first assignments was as a battalion water well driller. During his Navy tour, he spent some time in Spain before he was deployed to Iraq, where he served on a tactical movement team. On April 30, 2004, his team was ambushed on a highway as they traveled in their Humvee. On May 2, 2004, they were hit by a M120 (120mm) mortar. Seven soldiers were killed. Twelve soldiers were "walking" wounded, and Nappier along with 28 others, was seriously wounded.

Nappier had wounds to his right leg and right arm, nerve damage, a neck injury and he required anterior cervical disc fusion. Medical staff told him he might never walk again or be able to use his right hand. Nappier admits that he is "stubborn," and with a great team of physicians and physical therapists at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center, he is pleased with his recovery. He especially credits Doug Tuttle of the physical therapy staff for encouraging him and helping him through this recovery process.

"I had some rough times in my early days of rehabilitation," Nappier said. At one point, he remembers going hunting with some family and friends, and sitting in a tree stand with his gun. "I was having a pity party and thinking of how I was a burden to my family and friends," he said. His 45-caliber revolver was a temptation – an easy way to end it all. The thought of the impact this would have had on those family members and friends stopped him though, and he made a vow that day to work around his disabilities.

After learning basic skiing at the 2006 Winter Sports Clinic, he got interested in going off the jumps. Reluctant at first, he later decided that he just had to try it and was met with success. At the Telluride Adaptive Sports Clinic, Nappier skied the steepest and longest black diamond slopes. Because he placed among the top three in his category, he was then invited to national competition in Steamboat, Colo.

Nappier sets goals for himself and has been steadily achieving those goals with determination and commitment. He'll be back this year with his Lacey, who also recently learned to ski. Now, one of his new personal goals is to go skiing with both Lacey and their daughter, Stephanie. Another is to become an instructor so he can teach other veterans how to ski, despite any physical challenges they may have. As Nappier puts it, "It is very important that people don't give up." He is the perfect example.