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### Empowering all abilities

**Telluride Adaptive Sports Program hosts biggest fundraiser of the year Friday**

**By Mary Slosson Associate Editor**

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Just a few days into this week's Telluride Adaptive Sports Program ski adventure week for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars injured during their service, the trauma of combat and re-entry into civilian life was fading from the demeanor of participants' faces and was replaced with smiles and days full of skiing until the lifts close, according to Program Director Tim McGough.

The importance of that shift is monumental.

"It's important for us to be that avenue toward a happier life or a happier week. If it's the best week in their lives, that's obviously really, really important," McGough said. "If we didn't offer that, they might not have that outlet and who knows what might happen to that individual."

Official statistics indicate that, on average, between 18 and 22 military veterans commit suicide each day, according to a 2012 report published by the Department of Veterans Affairs. And many more struggle with PTSD and other traumatic injuries — physical and emotional — after returning home from war.

McGough cites those statistics as a reason why the work of TASP is so invaluable.

"Programs like TASP and other adaptive programs that have these outlets for veterans or civilians to get out



of their everyday routines and get on the mountain and be in a place like Telluride and skiing — that is off the charts," he said.

Indeed, TASP has been working to expand programs that support veterans, bringing more than 100 of them to Telluride every year through its Stars, Stripes and Summits program. TASP has also brought on board a veteran's liaison — himself a veteran of the Iraq war — to work more closely with servicemen and women who were injured while deployed.

And it's not just the veterans' community that TASP supports. The organization also arranges programs for over 22 regional schools and assisted living centers and offers opportunities for any individual with disabilities.

"There's no reason why an individual with one leg can't ride a mountain bike or a gentleman with one arm can't fly fish," McGough said.

TASP also educates local fifth graders by letting them try out adaptive equipment to understand the lives of children with disabilities and to break down the barriers of perceived disability.

On Friday, TASP is hosting its biggest annual fundraiser to support all of the work it does throughout the year. TASP is a nonprofit organization and depends on the financial support of the community to keep its year-round programs afloat.

The event, called Rockin' at the Opera, will take place at the Sheridan Opera House and will feature exclusive wine, food from nine different local restaurants and caterers and musical entertainment by the Anders Brothers Band. Tickets cost \$65 and are available for purchase at the door.

"The community has been wonderful in supporting scholarships to veterans, Special Olympics athletes and regional school children," said TASP Executive Director Courtney Stuecheli. "It takes a village and it supports so many people. Everybody knows somebody with a disability who can benefit from what we do."

Stuecheli teased that there will be a surprise, Vegas-style act at the fundraiser, but wouldn't spill the beans on who or what that act might be.

"It's a very big surprise entertainment act that's never been to Telluride before," she said.

Curious folks will just have to attend the event to find out exactly what that means, she said.

For more information on the Telluride Adaptive Sports Program or to volunteer, visit [www.tellurideadaptivesports.org](http://www.tellurideadaptivesports.org) or call (970) 728-2443.

Telluride Adaptive Sports Program instructor Ellen Ross sharing her love of skiing with Alba. [Photo by Scott Ostrom]

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