

Salute to Our Veterans to benefit K9s for Warriors

By Allison Brophy Champion abrophy@starexponent.com (540) 825-0771 ext. 101 | Posted: Tuesday, August 12, 2014 12:00 am

A local, longtime Army pilot is helping the Culpeper County Republican Committee help wounded service members through a very special Salute to Our Veterans function this weekend benefiting K9s for Warriors.

Event organizer, retired Chief Warrant Officer William R. "Hal" Halevy, of Jeffersononton, served more than 40 years in U.S. Army Aviation, including flying a helicopter during the Vietnam War and as a civilian, a helicopter ambulance.

The New Jersey native completed his most recent tour in Iraq in 2010 before retiring two years ago from his decorated career in aviation safety. Halevy knows full well about sacrifice, and wants to help pass on the appreciation, thus Saturday's Salute to Our Veterans at Pepper's Grille at the Best Western on Bus. 29.

"It is not about me," he said, "but our returning veterans and those who have given all without a question of why?"

All proceeds from Saturday's event will benefit K9s for Warriors, a Florida-based group that provides service dogs to veterans nationwide living with post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury as a result of post-9/11 military service.

Medically retired U.S. Marine Capt. Jason Haag, of Fredericksburg, will be the featured speaker at Saturday's benefit. He will share his story about coming home broken, suffering from PTSD and a brain injury, following three tours of duty in the Middle East, and how a very special dog named Axel saved his life.



K9s for Warriors

Medically retired U.S. Marine Capt. Jason Haag, of Fredericksburg, struggled with PTSD and a traumatic brain injury upon returning home from the Middle East following three tours of duty. He found help and solace in recovery through his service dog, Axel, provided through Florida-based K9s for Warriors. Haag speaks Saturday night in Culpeper at a special benefit for the K9 organization.

"If I didn't have him...if I didn't have him, I wouldn't be standing here today," Haag told WTOP in an interview last year. "It's just nice to know I've got a battle buddy with me again. He watches my back, he protects me. He's changed my life and the lives of my entire family."

K9s for Warriors provided Haag with the service canine following a three-week stay at the organization's headquarters in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

"Our warriors come here, meet and train with their new dog. K9s for Warriors focuses on the recovery of the warrior," said Tonya Dvorak with the nonprofit organization founded in 2011 by military mom Shari Duval.

K9s for Warriors offers monthly classes that can accommodate up to five veterans, Dvorak said. The program is provided free of charge to wounded vets and includes provision of a service canine, training, certification, equipment, seminars, vet care, meals and housing.

"We believe that by including the warrior in the training and giving them the tools necessary the warrior is also becoming part of their own recovery," Dvorak said. "We are seeing amazing results. Our goal is to give a new leash on life to rescue dogs and military heroes, empowering warriors to return to civilian life with dignity and independence."

Halevy, while not having a service dog, can nonetheless relate to the solace canines bring.

"When I was a boy, about 10-years-old, my family split up, but I had a German Shepherd. I had him obedience trained and that dog was my comfort so I know how dogs can help a soldier that's having any sort of emotional problems. That's why I got involved with the dogs, it's something very dear to my heart," he said.

Saturday's Salute to Our Veterans in Culpeper is open to the public, featuring live music by the Country Troubadours, a cash bar starting at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m, additional remarks by retired USMC Col. James O'Kelley, Jr. and an auction. The cost is \$30 per person or \$55 per couple. To make reservations, contact Halevy at (703) 867-2366.

Following decades in the military, Halevy said it's been quite the transition back to civilian life, but that he is still enjoying staying active.

"I feel it's my duty to be involved and teach, coach and train people," he said. "I have four grandchildren I need to look after now."

As for K9s for Warriors, its mission is providing a new leash on life for rescue dogs and their military counterparts.