



A CHANCE TO SAY THANKS

A PROPER SALUTE
One of the many moments of
honor—a Color Guard ceremony

White Columns Country Club's annual **Birdies For The Brave** event offers a meaningful connection between the men and women who serve our country and the rest of us whom they protect.

By Kate Meyers

There are several Navy SEALs who routinely bunk at Doug and Marketia Patterson's house during the November weekend of Birdies For The Brave. The SEALs are nocturnal creatures, so they are often up a large part of the night making trips to the kitchen for more of Marketia's lasagna or grabbing a drink.

So stealth are these guys that neither the Pattersons nor their hypersensitive dog hears a thing. The joke is: "Marketia, we get paid to operate at night, we can handle your dog."

A lot of storytelling and life-sharing goes on during normal waking hours ... the usual amount of man/boy hijinks as well. And when the guys leave on Monday, all beds are made, the sheets are folded and left atop the washing machine, and not even a drop of toothpaste is left behind.

During the time in-between, the Coronado-based SEALs and about 100 other Atlanta-area service people and their spouses are treated to a weekend of golf, instruction, barbecues, beers, goodie bags, spa days and shopping for significant others not playing, and all around hoopla as well as a Sunday tournament in which each military participant joins a foursome comprised of club members and friends.

Last year's Birdies For The Brave tournament (there are events nationwide) included 36 foursomes, with many more in attendance to cheer, volunteer and just join in the club-wide welcome. The White Columns tournament, which will celebrate its sixth year this November, has donated in excess of \$100,000 to Birdies For The Brave.



FAIRWAY FRIENDS

Bottom, L to R: SEAL Master Chief Brian B., Michael Patterson and White Columns members Jay D'Meza and Ted Budz

Yes, Birdies For The Brave is a charity golf event. And yes, the organization, part of a military outreach initiative with the PGA Tour that was originally started by Amy and Phil Mickelson, raises money for several foundations that help our service men and women: Homes for Our Troops, Special Operations Warrior Foundation, Operation Homefront, Navy SEAL Foundation, Military Warriors Support and United Through Reading.

But really it's a bunch of folks who love golf and might not otherwise meet, spending some time together and saying thank you. Talk to anyone involved, and you'll hear that the thank-yous go both ways.

Leading the welcoming and thank-you committee is Cody Barden, White Columns' director of instruction. "My dad is a retired Air Force colonel, a decorated fighter pilot who served in Vietnam. I grew up in a military family and now I'm in the civilian world, so it's really my only way to give back," says Barden, organizer, host, instructor and major cheerleader for the event. "We have many families like the Pattersons who pledge their time and support and resources as a way to say 'thank you' for a level of service they can only respect from a distance."

Cody, colleague Mitch Cook and 10 other Atlanta-based pros spend all day Saturday giving free instruction to the club's military guests. "It's not so much who we are but what the members and Cody and Mitch do," says Franny, a 42-year-old SEAL and father of four and annual participant who spends his time training other SEALs.



PATRIOTIC PUTT
SEAL Operator Eric P.

"We're there to show our appreciation for what they do. It's the people and what they give."

And then there's Jason Morgan, last year's keynote speaker, a father of three and a one-time college golfer who lost the use of his legs while working Special Ops in South America. Jason, who spends a great deal of his time lecturing folks on adversity and talking about how to get back on your feet even when your feet aren't working, is excited to be returning this year as a participant.

"It's so great to get the support. I spent more than three years in hospitals after my injury. I had over 30 surgeries and deal with a lot of nerve pain. So when you get around people that are appreciative of what you do, you feel like what you did made a difference," he says. "I met guys last year that said they look forward to it all year. It helps you go on from day to day, knowing there are folks out there who don't take freedom for granted."

"I've always been a big supporter of the military, but I'm more vocal



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CART MEN
L to R: Daniel Patterson, USAF Special Forces, ret. Jason Morgan, PGA Pro Cody Barden

about it now," says Marketia. "Doug and I don't have a lot of contact with military personnel, but we have gotten to know these people. They not only put their lives on the line when they're deployed, they put their lives on hold—their wives, their children. A lot of things have to wait, and they miss a lot of things because they're willing to do something that most of us are unwilling to do."

The connections made that wouldn't normally happen is the glue that keeps everyone committed. The Pattersons didn't know Franny (a +1 handicap, by the way) the first time they welcomed him into their home, but they treated him like family nonetheless. "And now we are like family," says Franny, who talks or texts with Doug on an almost daily basis.

Golf offers a mutual point of commonality, as well as time for meaningful conversation. Says Doug, "It's such a great bonding experience. They all love golf, and you're out there five to six hours so you get to know them and talk to them.



MANY OF OUR
MEMBERS
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You go to a dinner, you wouldn't have that kind of time. The members love it because we get so much out of meeting these people and getting to know them. Not in a million years would I have said, 'Yes I know Navy SEALs,' but because of Birdies For The Brave, I do and I've had the opportunity to listen to them talk and hear some of the things they've done and experience how gracious and low-key and humble they are. It's just been such a great way to say 'thank you' and have a lot of fun."

Doug also talks a lot about sons Daniel and Michael and how the impressions made and the friendships formed have lasted well beyond the annual weekend. Likewise, Cody talks about the experience of 14-year-old golfer Andrew Lafferty who volunteered to help all weekend at last year's event.

"Many of our members enter a team so that their children can participate and learn what real heroes are," says Cody. "You should have seen Andrew. He was at our beck and call the whole time. And he was also the last one to leave. As he was getting into his dad's car he said, 'Thanks, Cody, for letting me volunteer and meet these men and women.'"

And each time the Birdies weekend comes to a close, the Pattersons' house returns to civilian mode. Marketia stares at the seemingly untouched bedrooms left behind and smiles.

She echoes the overwhelming feeling that surrounds the event when she explains how she leaves it with her stealthy crew: "I tell them that as long as we live here, they're welcome. Bring whoever."