

Serve & Savour will benefit PTSD programs for local first responders



By Brock Weir

Nobody wants to over-promise and under-deliver and, in the case of Scott Maxwell, that was never even an option.

Mr. Maxwell, the CEO of Wounded Warriors Canada, was presented with this challenge in 2015.

Wounded Warriors Canada was born in 2006 following a bicycle bombing in Afghanistan and was dedicated to supporting injured and wounded service personnel and their families.

By the time Canada's mission in Afghanistan formally ended just over five years later, the organization saw a dilemma on the horizon: an increased number of ill and injured members of the Canadian Armed Forces seeking them out for help with mental health injuries ? a facet they weren't quite equipped to handle.

But, they rose to the challenge and now Wounded Warriors not only provides mental health supports for members of the forces and their families, but now also to First Responders nation-wide.

Area residents will be able to help Wounded Warriors Canada, an organization which receives no Federal dollars, to continue their mission this month at To Serve & Savour, a culinary evening on Friday, September 7, which promises to be the biggest-ever fundraiser for Wounded Warriors Canada.

An evening of great food courtesy of internally renowned chefs who will be cooking on-site in an interactive Kitchen Stadium-style experience, live music and dancing, in Aurora under the big top of the Magna Hoedown tent, all proceeds will benefit Wounded Warriors Canada's efforts to assist those who need help.

Wounded Warriors Canada has an annual operating budget of \$4 million, 100 per cent of which comes from fundraising.

?That's a double-edged sword for us,? Mr. Maxwell told sponsors of To Serve and Savour on Thursday night, at the event's formal launch at the York Regional Police training facility in East Gwillimbury. ?The double-edged sword of it is, of course, that we're able to be reflexive and adaptive of changing needs because we are responding to our members and our families as opposed to any body of government or a contract. The downside of that, of course, is you have to re-raise that money and the consistency factor is obviously a challenge. I can't stress enough how important this is for Wounded Warriors Canada.?

Through 2015, Wounded Warriors had identified a gap in care, that there wasn't a lens to frontline care at home. In response, they started to grow their programs from the ground up, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder service dogs, equine therapy, couples-based care, and trauma resiliency programs.

By 2016, Mr. Maxwell said First Responders began reaching out asking if there would ever be an opportunity for them to participate in these programs.

?That was really the turning point for us,? said Mr. Maxwell. ?At the time, we couldn't say yes, because we were at capacity. You never want to overpromise and underdeliver anything in life, but most especially overpromise and underdeliver to someone who has worn a uniform, who is serving Canada, or has served Canada at home or abroad. That is just not going to happen for us, but we needed to raise a lot of money to invest in scope and capacity and we have done that.

?The problem we are now facing going forward as we officially expand the scope and mission of Wounded Warriors Canadas to

include First Responders and their families is we need to have partnerships. We need to ensure what is happening now in Canada with awareness, education and good, independent programs?it is, again, a double-edged sword. Now we are fortunate that people feel more and more comfortable to come forward and access our services. The downside is we don't want to have people waiting for too long to get the help they deserve, when they get the will up to ask for help. That is probably the biggest challenge of our organization, making sure that when our members come to us they get access to the support they deserve.?

All proceeds for next month's To Serve and Savour will go directly back to these programs right here in the community, in partnership with York Regional Police, which was the first organization to partner with Wounded Warriors Canada on their mission to support first responders.

?I can't express the value that partnership means,? Mr. Maxwell concluded to community sponsors and members of the York Regional Police. ?[After September 7], the event might be over but the work just begins.?

For more on To Serve and Savour, including how to purchase tickets, visit yrp.ca/en/community/To-Serve-and-Savour.asp.