

# EVENT OF THE YEAR

## Hope for the Warriors™ 2008 Run for the Warriors™ May 17, 2008

Where can you enjoy gorgeous weather, get healthy, bond with members of the local community AND support a great cause? Onslow County, North Carolina of course. In late May, members of the community have come to expect a great day out at the Hope for the Warriors™ Run for the Warriors™ and this year's third annual run was no exception. More than 2,200 runners ran, walked and rolled their way through the 10K, 5K and one mile courses to help raise more than \$115,000 for the Hope for the Warriors™ cause.

An all-star cast came together to make this event successful. Runners were greeted by Congressmen Walter Jones, currently serving his 7<sup>th</sup> term in Congress and a member of the Armed Services Committee. Jones spoke at an opening ceremony, then personally greeted all of the wounded warriors in a moving coin and flag ceremony. Ken Berger, the voice of the Marine Corps Marathon, served as Master of Ceremonies for the event. Ken has worked in such famed venues as the 2004 Olympics, Madison Square Garden and the Las Vegas MGM Garden Arena. His recognizable voice called out personal congratulations to many runners as they crossed the line. Tri-Athlete Scott Rigsby, the first double amputee to qualify for and race in the Hawaii Ironman, lent his support as the guest of honor and speaker at the warrior's pre-race dinner on Friday May 16. Finally, runners and participants alike were treated to a free post-race concert by Nashville Star Melissa Jones who has opened for such country greats as Keith Urban, Colin Raye and The Oak Ridge Boys. Proceeds from the sale of Jones' debut album "Red, White and Blue in Georgia" support Hope for the Warriors™.

The event unites the entire community, military and civilian alike. On the Marine side, more than 50 Marines volunteered their services while many others participated in the unit challenge which encouraged units to run in formation as a personal tribute to their own fallen and wounded. Additionally, many members of the Wounded Warrior barracks completed the race in their signature red t-shirts.

The community continued to come out full force to support the event with many runners from around the state as well as local sponsorship, including: Stevenson Automotive Group, Marine Federal Credit Union, Furniture Fair, Extreme Outfitters, Tire Country, Northrop Grumman Technical Services, Pack Rat, Onslow Memorial Hospital and two local dentists, Thomas Bell, Jr., and Edward

G. Covert.

Although it was a day marked by community, it was the personal stories of victory, courage and hard work that inspired all attendees. Sgt. Eric Edmundson walked across the finish line just 2 ½ years after his injury in an IED blast. At the time, Eric's family was told he would never walk again. Eric's wife Stephanie pushed him through the 5K course then stopped just before the finish line to let Eric prove his doctors wrong. As bystanders looked on, Eric stood and walked across the finish line to thunderous applause. Later the pair danced to the songs of Melissa Jones at the post-race concert.

Local teacher Carly Batzel encouraged her Wolf Team from Brewster Middle School to train for and support the event. Many of her students turned out for race day and one of her students won the fundraising challenge offered by Team Hope for the Warriors™. By raising \$1,670 for the cause, 6<sup>th</sup> grader Danee Masur won travel to the Marine Corps Marathon to support the Hope for the Warriors Team™.

The event was “more successful emotionally and financially than we ever hoped for,” said Toni Aurilio, race director for Hope for the Warriors.

All entrants received a t-shirt featuring artwork by local student winner of a t-shirt design contest. Entrants received white t-shirts, volunteers got orange versions and wounded warriors proudly sported red versions of the same shirt. Racers were timed using chip technology. Entry forms for the event were available online at [www.hopeforthewarriors.org](http://www.hopeforthewarriors.org).

Established in 2006 by co-founders and friends, Robin Kelleher and Shannon Maxwell, Hope for the Warriors™ is a non-profit organization committed to ensuring that the sacrifices of our warriors across military service branches and throughout the United States are not forgotten, nor their needs unmet. Hope for the Warriors™ funds a variety of programs including Warrior Wishes, Immediate Needs, Spouse Scholarships, Support Groups, Warrior Houses, and Hope and Morale programs. Plans are also in the works for a Warrior Hope and Care Center™, a \$20 million dollar centralized rehabilitation and recovery facility aboard Camp Lejeune.