

WVFFV gives lobster boat to fisherman vet

WESTPORT, MA – A young Iraq War vet, who also has seen tragedy on the home front this year, got a helping hand on the day after Thanksgiving when he took delivery of a 39' lobster boat donated through the Connecticut-based nonprofit Work Vessels for Vets (WVFFV).

Chris Pinto, 23, is a US Army E-4 specialist who has served two tours of duty in Iraq and may be redeployed to Afghanistan in the spring through the National Guard.

Married, Pinto has a 10-month-old daughter and another baby due in February. He

also comes from an extended fishing family and always expected he would be a fisherman himself some day.

But that future became uncertain when his father, Paul Pinto of Plymouth, was killed in a June 11 deck accident on board

his scalloper Distant Cries. Losing his dad was hard enough, but, for financial reasons, the family was unable to keep the boat, casting doubt on Pinto's fishing future.

Over the summer, 25-year-old lobsterman Tim Field of Westport was having some troubles of his own. He had bought a newer boat just before Christmas 2008, a 42' OEM out of Mackerel Cove on Bailey's Island, ME, but had had no luck selling his starter vessel.

Recalling a story he read in *Commercial Fisheries News*, Field got in touch with WVFFV and offered to donate the 39' Revolution to the cause.

"I know how hard it was when I started off. I fished with my dad and then fished offshore to get the money together to buy my first boat," he said. "This guy (Pinto) spent those years defending our country. How is he going to get started?"

Field was upfront about the practical side of his decision, which included a tax write-off and getting free of having to maintain a boat he wasn't using, but he also was glad to be able to help out.

"You know, things are so backwards. If you go off to college you can get scholarships from everywhere," he said. "But no one will give you \$2,000, let alone \$50,000 or \$60,000, to start a business. And we need more young people in the fishing industry."

Carrying the torch

This is the third workboat donation for WVFFV, which was started two years ago when John Niekrash, a lobsterman from Connecticut, donated his boat, Krasher III, to Rhode Island veteran and fisherman Richard Giguere.

Tim Field *Continued from previous page*

"We build our own, too," said Brad Field. "I build around 200 or so every winter."

Revolution works outside state waters, fishing one- or two-day trips depending on the weather and the season. Father and son fish together with longtime deckhand John Chace. The Fields fish for lobster and also pot conch and scup.



From left, vessel donor Tim Field of Revolution Lobster; recipient Chris Pinto; WVFFV founder John Niekrash; and Myron Horzesky of Ketcham Traps in New Bedford, which donated 12 traps to Pinto.

Iraq War vet Chris Pinto is the new owner of the 39' lobster boat Revolution, pictured here in 2006.

This is just the kind of thing we envisioned ... that others would carry the torch and recognize the need that these young soldiers face upon their return.

—John Niekrash

"I was thrilled when Tim contacted us," said Niekrash. "This is just

the kind of thing we envisioned when we started this whole effort, that others would carry the torch and recognize the need that these young soldiers face upon their return."

Dan and Kathleen Burns, managers of Noank Shipyard, joined Niekrash and his wife, Debbie, in getting the organization started back in 2008, and others followed.

Today, WVFFV board members include, among others: Ted Knapp, whose Green Recycling Technology of New Jersey provides the nonprofit with computers to give to vets; and critically acclaimed musician and co-founder of the band Traffic, Dave Mason, who performs in concerts to benefit the organization.

Growing reach

WVFFV now helps vets around the country, providing them with boats, vehicles, computers, and other tools to help them restart their civilian work lives and education.

Here's a brief rundown of the organization's recent activities:

- In March, the group donated 20 laptop computers to a group of veterans organized through Connecticut's Department of Labor;
- In April, WVFFV donated a boat to the Wounded Warriors Association in Ohio that was used over the summer by veterans to help other comrades experience the joys of fishing;
- In July, as part of Groton-based Grossman's Seafood's "Operation Lobster Dinner" for veterans and their families, WVFFV donated a van to Eric Spader, a vet starting his own chimney sweeping business, and a computer to Gaylen Spicer, a vet looking to improve his

"Revolution is a good boat," said Brad Field. "We can drive right through hard weather. I've had lots of boats, and this is the best one, even though I don't own it."

The Fields wanted to say thank you to Keith Otis from Otis Enterprises Marine Corp. in Searsport, ME and Billy Oliver for their help with Revolution.

Steven Kennedy

performance at work with computer training;

- Throughout the summer, WVFFV sent laptop computers to veterans around the country as requests were received; and
- In September, WVFFV donated a vehicle to a returning vet to help him get back and forth to his job.

What's next

WVFFV will be part of another presentation in Webster, FL in January when the group will give a truck, compressors, and tools to Adam Burke, a Purple Heart recipient.

Burke will use the equipment for his Blueberry Project. After being severely wounded in a mortar attack in Iraq that destroyed the humvee he was riding in, Burke came home and started a small blueberry farm in the Pensacola area. His idea is to make it a place where veterans can go to work and exercise and transition back into civilian life at their own pace.

"We will go where veterans need us

and try to find the tools they need to succeed," said Kathleen Burns. "But we never forget our roots here with our love of the water and its commercial endeavors."

Added Niekrash, "WVFFV is continually looking for vessels, vehicles, tools, and other equipment and even money to purchase the things that could prove useful in launching the civilian careers of our returning soldiers."

For more information: visit the WVFFV web site at <www.workvesselsforvets.org>; call (203) 887-5642 or (860) 536-9651; or e-mail <admin@workvesselsforvets.org>.

Lorelei Stevens



WVFFV photo

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