



Photograph by Michael Temchine



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Matt Proffitt explains the value of sports in rebuilding lives during the "Honor Our Heroes" ceremony at the 11th Annual Rochester River Challenge Outrigger Canoe Sprint Races, a Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Project event.

TAKE A **bow**

Retired Navy officer brings home Hawaiian outrigger hobby and shares paddling duty with wounded vets

By Susan Brohman

Glancing out of his new U.S. Navy office window overlooking Pearl Harbor, Terry Wilton witnessed the captivating sight of a Hawaiian outrigger canoe gliding across the water.

"It reminded me of the opening scene in that old TV show, *Hawaii Five-O*," recalls Wilton, who, in 1992, had just arrived at the Oahu port for a two-year tour of duty.

Wilton had adopted a practice of learning a new activity native to the area where he was stationed. Keeping that tradition alive, he began paddling with a local outrigger club and discovered the joys of Hawaii's state sport.

After retiring from the Navy and leaving Hawaii in 1994, Wilton couldn't imagine abandoning his outrigger paddles.

"I really missed the sport," says Wilton, a 2006 Saturn ION-3 owner from Waldorf, Md., who works on contract for Naval Intelligence. "I kept wishing I could be out in my canoe paddling."

In 1997, Wilton helped an outrigger friend from Hawaii, John Fulton, found the Kent Island Outrigger Canoe Club

(KIOCC) based in Chesapeake Bay. The 35-member club practices and competes in outrigger races from early April through late October, often celebrating successes with traditional luaus.

STROKE OF KINDNESS

But beyond spreading Hawaii's cultural spirit, the outrigger canoeing group also established a meaningful relationship with some more recent veterans. A few years ago, the KIOCC partnered with the Wounded Warrior Project to welcome wounded military troops recovering at nearby Walter Reed Army Medical Center to an outrigger canoe expedition.

The Wounded Warrior Project aids in the recovery of injured service people by offering opportunities to get involved in sports such as canoeing, water skiing, golf, cycling and even rock climbing.

The KIOCC and their guests shared a day of canoeing and raising money for the Wounded Warrior Project as well as Disabled Sports USA.

"When they paddled with us, I think it was more meaningful to me than I



**WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT**

The parallel hull on an outrigger canoe enhances stability and boat speed.



Photograph © David Hills

"... if you have five other people in the boat counting on you to paddle, you can't take a break."

thought it would be as I saw how much they enjoyed the experience," Wilton says. "A few individuals [from the program] paddled with us last year, and we hope to see more this year."

RIPPLE EFFECT

One of those soldiers, Matt Profitt, joined KIOCC members in a 36-mile race and still competes in the sport.

"Outrigger canoeing is a sport that anyone can do, whether you're able-bodied or have a disability," he says. "You can adapt an outrigger canoe to what you

need. It's one of the few sports that's a natural fit for the adaptive community."

Profitt, who now lives in Utah, plans to travel to Sacramento, Calif., this summer for the world sprint championship. "For 500 meters you put it all out there."

Wilton, who has also served as secretary for the East Coast Outrigger Racing Association, says the sport promotes itself through competition. He prefers racing a 6-person outrigger.

"I like team sports more than individual ones," explains Wilton. "When you paddle out into the water the only way to

get back home is to paddle back. If I was alone, I could stop and take a break. But if you have five other people in the boat counting on you to paddle, you can't take a break."

Wilton adds that efficient paddling technique, not sheer muscle, makes the difference in a race. **o**

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In Hawaii, the outrigger is simply called a wa'a.