

# The Free Lance-Star

## River dip will raise money for wounded

*New foundation helps those injured in the dangerous line of work of disposing of explosives*

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By CATHY DYSON

A new organization wants to help those who get hurt doing one of the most dangerous jobs in the military.

The Wounded EOD Warrior Foundation is based in the Fredericksburg area and is the only national group to aid Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians injured in the line of duty.

EOD workers represent every branch of the military. They're the people who run toward bombs and risk life and limb to diffuse them.

"EOD technicians aren't the only ones affected by roadside bombs and IEDs [improvised explosive devices], but they're definitely at the forefront of danger," said Sherri Beck, president of the foundation.

Beck lives in Spotsylvania County and got involved with the foundation for the same reason other board members did. She's connected to someone who likes to blow stuff up.

Her husband, Leon, is a retired EOD technician who looked for underwater mines for 18 of his 26 years in the Navy.

They're friends with Ken Falke, also a retired naval EOD technician. Falke, who lives in Stafford County, was involved with another foundation to help wounded service members.

When it dissolved, Falke wanted to continue the effort. He helped create the nonprofit Wounded EOD Warriors Foundation in September 2007.

The foundation gives grants, up to \$2,500 each, to EOD technicians injured by blasts. The money often covers travel expenses for loved ones, but it's also used to pay bills while service members recover.

The foundation has helped the families of eight technicians so far.

One wife in Arizona wrote a thank-you note to Beck and said the money meant she could spend months, not days, with her husband as he recovered.

A Kentucky mother took off 12 weeks from her job, without pay, to be with her son. She didn't know how she would pay her bills until she contacted the foundation.

"This is a resource that has a value much more than a dollar amount," she wrote in an e-mail to Beck.  
"The peace of mind it has given me is more than I can share."

The Department of Defense initially does a good job of getting family members to the bedside of an injured service member, Falke said. But if a soldier faces long-term hospitalization--which often is required after these kinds of injuries--then "every subsequent visit has to be paid for out of the soldier's pocket," Falke said.

"I think, what a lot of people don't understand, is that the injured guy's families are left on their own," he said.

The foundation wants to fill the void by raising grant money through donations and four annual fundraisers. The first, a plunge into the Rappahannock River, is planned on Feb. 16. (See box.)

As chairman of the foundation board, Falke won't just stand on the sidelines, cheering for others.

"I hope to be the first one to jump," he said.

Cathy Dyson: 540/374-5425

Email: [cdyson@freelancestar.com](mailto:cdyson@freelancestar.com)

WHAT: The Wounded EOD Warrior Foundations plans its first polar bear plunge, "Freezin' for a Reason."  
WHEN: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Feb. 16 WHERE: Fredericksburg City Dock HOW MUCH: \$25 per person before Jan. 31; \$40 after. Others can sponsor "plungers" for any amount. WHY: To raise money for Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians injured in the line of duty. WHAT ELSE: Must be 18 to jump. All plungers will get goody bags. MORE INFO: Contact Sherri Beck at 540/429-5234 or the Wounded EOD Warrior Foundation, 11905 Bowman Drive, Suite 510, Fredericksburg, Va. 22408. ON THE NET: [woundedeodwarrior.org](http://woundedeodwarrior.org)

There are about 3,500 technicians throughout the military who specialize in Explosive Ordnance Disposal, or EOD. All volunteer for the job.

It's a small, tight-knit group of people, said Ken Falke, a Stafford County resident and former naval EOD technician.

Officers and enlisted men take the same classes and train together. Because of the danger involved, "there's an element of trust when you know a guy has your back while you're diffusing a bomb," he said.

More than 40 EOD technicians have been killed since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, according to a story last spring in the Navy Times.