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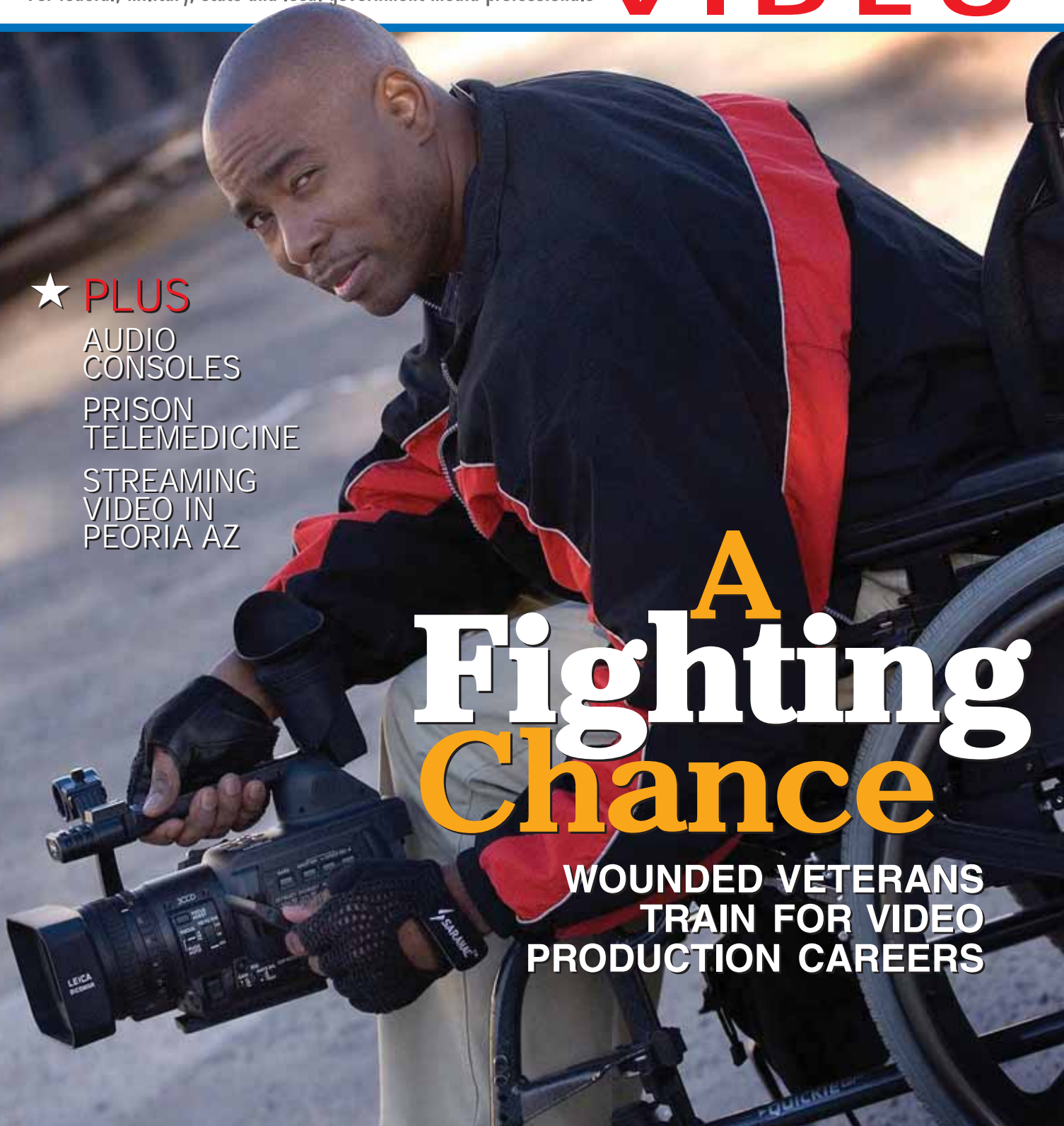
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A Fighting Chance

WOUNDED VETERANS
TRAIN FOR VIDEO
PRODUCTION CAREERS



July 7, 2008

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Foundation offers wounded veterans training for video production careers

by Laura DiBenedetto Kenyon

In military hospitals throughout the United States, service people are recuperating from injuries sustained while fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. While some make full recoveries, many others do not. These men and women are left to deal with both the physical and psychological effects of war and don't always receive the support they deserve in readjusting to civilian life.

Readjusting includes finding a post-war career. Prior to being injured, a number of service people planned to stay in the military or pursue a career in law enforcement. Once wounded, however, they may not be able to do so -- and are then stranded without alternative career options.

This is where the Wounded Marine Careers Foundation comes in. Aiming to serve the people who serve the country, the WMCF provides a number of Marine and Navy Corpsmen, with the goal of including other military branches in the near future, training in video production and photojournalism.

Not Forgotten

The foundation was developed by married filmmaking partners Kev Lombard and Judith Paixao in response to a request by friends of the family in September 2006. "An admiral and his wife asked us if we'd be interested in doing a documentary about the wounded at the Balboa Naval Hospital [Naval Medical Center San Diego]," Lombard recalled. "Judith and I knocked around a couple of ideas but felt that this wasn't our story to tell.

"The Marines were worried about being forgotten after the war and being left with these wounds, so we came back with a proposal," he continued. "Instead of us coming in with a crew, videotaping them and leaving, we would come in with instructors who were working professions to teach the Marines to use the camera."

Thus, the idea for the foundation was born. The Wounded Marine Center for Careers in Media program, administered by the nonprofit foundation, takes its students -- many of whom are undergoing medical and physical therapy at the same time -- through an intensive training course.

Housed in a 5,000-square-foot training center on the Stu Segal Productions studio lot in San Diego, CA, the center teaches writing, cinematography, video and sound editing, lighting, photojournalism, graphics design, and broadcast arts. Upon graduation, students are granted full membership into the International Alliance of Theater Stage Employees and receive job placement assistance in their new field of expertise.

It took a year of planning, fundraising, and securing permission from the military to get things off the ground, but in January 2008 the center's first class began. The 19 inaugural students were selected through numerous interviews with Lombard and

Paixao, who looked for wounded military personnel at the Naval Medical Center San Diego and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton to find those who had an interest in and commitment to the program.

The program is open to those who while on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, incurred an illness or injury, as defined by DoD 5500.7-R (JER), Paragraph 3-401. These service people must apply for admission and demonstrate an interest in pursuing a media career. Though most of the inaugural class was made up of students in their 20s, the students' ages ranged from late teens to early 40s.

The Right Tools

Students have to be committed to make it through the rigorous program. The WMCF has assembled a rotating visiting faculty comprised of award-winning filmmakers, directors of photography, writers, editors, cameramen, soundmen, photographers, graphic designers, and other industry technicians. The faculty roster also includes former combat-wounded Marines and other physically challenged professionals who currently work in the film industry so as to mentor students with similar life experiences.

The first session lasted 10 weeks, and the class graduated in March. Upcoming sessions, however, will be 14 weeks in length. "The curriculum that we're doing next time out will be quite refined," said Norman Smith, dean, Wounded Marine Center for Careers in Media. "We learned a lot the first time out."

Each enrolled student is equipped with a MacBook Pro outfitted with the software necessary to complete both the course and professional jobs following graduation, including Apple Final Cut Pro and Adobe Photoshop. One of the students' first classes is the official Apple Final Cut Pro course, where they learn how to use all the applications in the Final Cut Studio suite.

In addition to editing, students are also instructed in writing so that, by week 10, there will be a number of solid scripts that can enter into production during the final four weeks of the course.

"We believe story telling has a therapeutic aspect," Lombard said. "You wouldn't think that the Marines would take to scriptwriting, but some of them really opened up and had great stories to tell. They found talents they didn't know they had."

Students also get hands-on experience with photography and Photoshop, allowing them to learn how to best shoot digital pictures and then alter them when needed in post. This experience helps students transition into video camera work, using Panasonic AG-HVX200 P2 HD camcorders.

"For the first few weeks, the students learned all of the camera's technical aspects, going through all the menus," Lombard explained. "We felt this was important, as some of the students had never used a video camera before. Once they master the basic menus, they're prepared to handle other cameras in general."

Supported by instruction in production sound recording using Senniheiser products and lighting with equipment donated by ARRI, as the course comes to a close, students have an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of production.

Employment Opportunities

"We're not trying to train the next Steven Spielberg," Lombard said. "We're trying to train the team who supports the next Steven Spielberg: the camera operators, the film loaders, the boom operators."

"But if there is another Steven Spielberg in the group," Smith added, "he'll certainly be able to handle it. We have passionate filmmakers and communicators prepared to take on work."

The industry is lining up to hire these Marines and Navy veterans. "We've had 40 job offers," said Lombard. "They keep on coming in." Two students were hired back by the foundation, others have been courted by FOX Sports, another works for Stu Segall as a full-time editor, and advertising agency JWT is interested in creating a new in-house Final Cut Pro editing position for one of the foundation's graduates.

Not surprisingly, the combination of military training, visual storytelling skills, and personal fortitude makes the center's graduates that much more appealing as employees. "The same discipline that they use in a rifle or tank squad, they use as a production crew," said Lombard. "They support each other."

"When we first started off, these guys were very hesitant and lacked the confidence in going back into the civilian world -- it's kind of frightening for them. But at the end of the class, they've got back the confidence they had before they were wounded. The healing aspect of this has been phenomenal."

MORE INFO

Adobe adobe.com

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Panasonic panasonic.com/broadcast

Sennheiser sennheiserusa.com

Donations Welcome

Although the Wounded Marine Careers Foundation and has received funding from Veterans Affairs, the Navy League, the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund, and the Bob Woodruff Family Foundation, among others, each session costs just under \$1 million. "We are in dire need of foundations and corporations to donate," said Kev Lombard. "There are a lot of foundations that will give the guys gifts, tickets to all games, or a car. But these guys want to participate in society and go back to work."

FAST FACTS

The Wounded Marine Careers Foundation's next Careers in Media classes are scheduled for September 2008 and January 2009, and are expected to train a total of 40 wounded service people.