

VETERAN NEWS & NOTES

Helping Blinded Vets Scale The Obstacles They Face

(NAPSA)—Many are surprised to find what a full life a veteran with a disability can lead.

For example, Steve Baskis is a 27-year-old veteran who is pursuing a college degree, has taken up mountain climbing—and is blind.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that there are over 155,000 blind veterans living in the U.S. today.

Baskis was on duty in Iraq in 2008 and lost his sight when a roadside bomb exploded. Later, while recovering at Walter Reed Medical Center, he met Tom Zampieri, the Blinded Veterans Association's (BVA) Director of Government Relations.

Zampieri invited Baskis to a BVA convention, where he met Jerry Schutter, chief of blind rehabilitation services at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital. Schutter later invited Baskis to participate in orientation to be able to participate fully in an active life.

Said Baskis, "BVA has provided me with resources and information I would never have found on my own."

Recently, Baskis participated in the U.S. Paralympic National Championships in cycling and won a bronze medal. Also, on behalf of BVA and other blinded veterans, he visited with members of Congress to request additional funding for combat-related eye trauma research.

This past May, Baskis took



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part in Project Gemini, a joint initiative of BVA and Blind Veterans UK. The project seeks to unite blinded veterans who recently lost their sight in operations in Iraq or Afghanistan.

His story is just one example of a blinded veteran who is living his life to the fullest thanks to the training, information and services he received from the VA, with the support of organizations such as BVA.

Chartered in 1958 through an Act of Congress, the organization provides free services to help blinded veterans such as Baskis get back on their feet and receive the services and training they need.

Membership is open to all legally blinded veterans who have served in the military. However, membership is not required for veterans to receive assistance.

To learn more, call BVA at 800-669-7079 or visit www.bva.org.