



NEWS RELEASE

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Prince William County Resident Receives The Electric Cooperatives' Good Samaritan Award *Founder of 'Reel American Heroes' Honored*

Glen Allen, Va. - Ron DeFreitas, a member of Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative, has received the 2016 Good Samaritan Award from the electric cooperatives of Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

DeFreitas, who lives in Woodbridge, received this award for his work in establishing the Reel American Heroes Foundation (RAHF), an organization that provides resources and equipment that allow wounded and disabled veterans to enjoy fishing.

He formed this 501c(3) organization in 2010 after volunteering at a local "Take a Vet Fishing" event, where he was inspired by a double amputee veteran's incredible outlook on life. Wishing to give back, DeFreitas began working with area military hospitals and bases to provide servicemen from all branches of our nation's armed forces the opportunity to get out on the water for both fun and competition.

The Foundation's first bass tournament benefited two dozen combat veterans, with volunteer boaters from around the area pitching in to help. The program has since grown by leaps and bounds, with last year's tournament involving more than 100 active-duty and retired veterans. Volunteer boaters from around the country and four BASS Elite series professionals, including John Crews of Virginia, provided assistance.

"At each tournament sponsored by Reel American Heroes, participants receive free gear they can take home and use to continue pursuing this sport, including tournament-quality rods, reels, tackle and fishing bait, a tackle box and even sunglasses," said Nelson Zapata, a disabled veteran who learned about RAHF in 2014.

Each veteran is paired up with an experienced angler who can help teach the skills needed to fish for fun or even competitively. Tournament participants win prizes that range from electronic fish finders to televisions, guitars and more.

Reel American Heroes events have been featured on nationally televised fishing shows, including *Timmy Horton Outdoors* and Kim Stricker's *Hook n' Look*.

(More)

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Such coverage not only helps promote more participation, but highlights work by Foundation supporters who developed and are in the process of patenting a fishing system for one-armed anglers. Increasing public awareness also has helped DeFreitas organize a Team RAHF so that local veterans can be taken out on individual fishing sessions year-round.

The Good Samaritan Award was developed to honor individuals whose body of good work has been so selfless and life-changing to others that it is held up as a “gold standard” of philanthropic community service. Larry Howdyshell, board chairman for the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives (VMDAEC), noted, “Because of efforts such as Reel American Heroes, more wounded and disabled veterans than ever are facing the future with confidence and hope.”

Richard Johnstone, VMDAEC executive vice president, added, “Ron exemplifies the seventh cooperative principle of concern for community. We are proud to recognize his inspirational leadership that has made such a difference for our nation’s servicemen and women.”

Award nominations were solicited from the members of the 15 electric cooperatives that serve Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. DeFreitas’ daughter Ashley Gardner, who currently serves as RAHF’s executive director, is a member of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and nominated her father for the award.

About VMDAEC: Founded in 1944, VMDAEC is the trade association for 15 consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric distribution cooperatives that serve Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. The Glen Allen, Va.-based Association provides its member cooperatives with safety education and training, government relations, legislative support, and communications services, including the publishing of *Cooperative Living* magazine. For more information, visit www.vmdaec.com or www.co-opliving.com.

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