

Allison Depenbrock and Ben Brown Team River Runner

Team River Runner is a 501c3 non-profit organization that was started 6 years ago by a group of kayakers in the Washington, DC area. These individuals, chaired by the now executive director, Joe Mornini started to notice the influx of injured soldiers coming to Walter Reed Army Medical Center for treatment and rehabilitation of a variety of injuries suffered while serving our country. Joe and his colleagues began to think. From their years of boating experience they realized that one does not necessarily have to have the use of their legs to operate a kayak. Nor do they necessarily have to have both arms or the ability to see. It is with this "vision", determination, and the ability to modify kayaks and paddles to meet the needs of different types of disabilities that Team River Runner has the capability to put any individual on the water and to be able to enjoy the experiences of recreational boating. Over the past 6 years, Team River Runner has grown from a single entity operating out of the rehabilitation pool at Walter Reed Army Medical Center to more than 25 satellite chapters across the United States. This organization has touched the lives of thousands of disabled veterans and their families and continues to grow every week.

Ben Brown: As a disabled veteran, who is paralyzed from the waist down, I have benefited greatly from my participation with Team River Runner in Lexington, KY. Over the past 2 years, Team River Runner has taught me how to overcome the obstacles of my disability and to be able to regain the joys and benefits of outdoor recreation that I once believed was lost when I became disabled. Team River Runner's slogan is "Health, Healing, and Re-integration Through Whitewater Boating". This organization does exactly what it says. I have not only witnessed this in myself but also in the lives of my fellow veterans who have not only suffered from a life altering physical disability but also those that have suffered the psychological and social setbacks from their experiences of war. These are the "hidden wounds" that plague thousands of both combat and non-combat veterans that often times cause battles of depression and self destructive tendencies. Team River Runner provides veterans an opportunity to live again and regain the joys of life both physically and socially.

Allison Depenbrock: Canoe Kentucky, a Franklin County business, has been operating on the Elkhorn Creek for 29 years. Allison Depenbrock grew up in the family business and returned after graduating from Western Kentucky University 15 years ago. She and her husband, Nathan Depenbrock, are co-managers of the daily operations. Nathan and a customer Linda Tribble decided to start the Lexington Chapter of Team River Runner three years ago. This decision has forever changed their lives and the business model of Canoe Kentucky. Taking Veterans out paddling is the most rewarding part of their week. When men and women veterans get to forget their problems and enjoy a couple hours out on the water, how could it not be life changing!