



Project 22 had just arrived in Pittsburgh after riding from San Francisco on their way to New York City, and was presented with an American Flag from the Pittsburgh Police and Fire Bureaus. From left to right are: Rocky Bleier, Pittsburgh Steelers legend and combat vet; Daniel Egbert, Theo Collins, and Matt "Doc" King. In the background is the Pittsburgh Police Motorcycle Patrol Squad.

Comrades For Life

Area Resident Serves As Associate Producer For Veteran Suicide Documentary

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A Jamestown native has earned the chance to help save the lives of veterans nationwide.

Theo Collins, 25, a native of Jamestown, served as associate producer for the documentary, "Project 22." The project focused on two combat-wounded veterans who completed a 6,500-mile motorcycle journey across America to raise awareness about the high rate of suicide among veterans.

Collins, who reached the rank of sergeant in the Marine Corps infantry, served with one of the riders, Daniel Egbert. According to Collins, he was inspired by his comrade's mission, and decided to offer help by becoming a part of the project in his current city, Pittsburgh. He began to research the sources in his area, and offered to meet with the riders on their journey to share what he had found.

"That's when my involvement as an observer and side commentator on the project changed into someone who is now fully enveloped in the process," Collins said. "I oversaw the filming and production here in Pittsburgh, and after they finished their ride in New York City I became involved with the nonprofit producing the film, Medicinal Missions. It's been an overwhelmingly rewarding process."

The most emotional and moving moment of the project was when the riders arrived in Pittsburgh, Collins continued.

"It was a beautiful day out, and we were able to get the Pittsburgh Police motorcycle squad to escort the awareness riders into the city," Collins said. "Myself and some of the other supporters were waiting for them at the destination, and there was such an outpouring of support from the community for what we're trying to do. That was an overwhelming moment to see that our message we hoped people would hear was being absorbed and sharing it."

Egbert, who served for four years and extended to a third deployment in Iraq followed by a fourth deployment to Afghanistan, was joined on his mission by Matt "Doc" King. King served as a combat medic for Cavalry Scouts in Ramadi, Iraq, from 2004-05. He left service as a sergeant and worked for the Medina Police Department in Washington before resigning due to symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

While on their journey, the duo met with researchers, health care providers and veterans who had contemplated or attempted suicide. The mission of their trek was to discover the source of hope that allowed individuals on the brink to step down from a decision that would end their life and affect all those who surround them.

For more information, visit www.medicinalmissions.com/project-22 or search for "Project 22" on Facebook.

THIS HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

According to Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services Suicide Prevention Program's "Suicide Data Report, 2012," an estimated 22 veterans will have died from suicide each day in the calendar year 2010. The report also notes that the estimated number of suicides among veterans has fluctuated between 18-22 per day since 1999. The report was based on data gathered from 21 states.

Due to the high incidence of suicide among veterans, and the discovery of effective alternative therapies described by the individuals featured in "Project 22," Medicinal Missions was founded. Formed by Egbert and King, the organization's mission is to bring awareness to veteran suicides. By educating veterans on methods to overcome symptoms of post-traumatic stress and trau-

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"It's not a dead end when you develop things like post traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury — it's not the end of the chapter. There's a very spiritual and beneficial healing process that you can take after."

The main focus of the film, and the Project 22 Campaign, is to make people aware of the alternative methods to clinical medicine available. It highlights alternative therapies such as: yoga, clay art, painting, sailing and more. The methods of therapy have popped up around the country, and are driven mainly by veterans for veterans.

"They are beneficial because they are incredibly effective," Collins continued. "The mind is something that when it is injured it can also heal. It's not something that can be treated with just pills alone. Healing is a human process, and post-traumatic stress is a human construct that we've been dealing with since 3000 B.C. There is documentation of how different cultures have dealt with it. Largely the most effective ways are through interaction and positive communication with others. That's why you see successful group therapies."

The documentary, "Project 22," is intended as a means to supplement Medicinal Missions' larger Project 22 Campaign. For more information, visit www.medicinalmissions.com.

STANDING UNITED

Collins himself returned from service to find that after standing united with his comrades in a country far from home, the white picket fence American dream he had fought for, and to spread abroad, was merely a mirage. But, giving up was not an option, if the dreams he had fought for weren't provided, he would unite with his fellow servicemen and servicewomen to build the network of support that they felt was lacking.

"It's been an extraordinarily positive experience, but one at the same time is very important to all of us — we're reminded on a daily basis of the somber seriousness of the issues that we're dealing with," Collins said. "Coming home from Afghanistan I had to deal with some of the things you go through after coming back from a combat zone and having left a good friend behind over there — I had survivors-guilt and the extreme guilt that goes along. I dealt with it in my own way for a while, but seeing the way others are handling it and working with them through this in its own way has definitely been therapeutic for me as well."

Collins graduated from Jamestown High School in 2006, Jamestown Community College in 2009 and SUNY Fredonia in 2012. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from SUNY Fredonia. Collins was also involved a variety of extracurricular activities and programs, such as: intern and on-air personality for WRFA, research intern at Robert H. Jackson Center, judicial intern for the Joseph Gerace Sr., administrator of the People's Law School nonprofit, and played a gig with 10,000 Maniacs during his time with Infinity Visual and Performing Arts. He currently serves as associate director and on the board of directors for Medicinal Missions. He is also a law student at Duquesne University, while also providing legal services through Duquesne's Veterans Advocacy Clinic in Allegheny County's Veterans Court.

Collins parents, John and Cheryl, still call Jamestown home. Whenever he returns to visit the area, he makes sure to stop by Taco Hut, Southern Tier Brewing Company and Forte.

To learn more about Collins, search for "Theo Collins" on Facebook.



THEO COLLINS

matic brain injury via alternative therapies, the group stands united to reduce veteran suicide.

Collins believes every area in the United States can benefit from Project 22 and Medicinal Missions' message. One of its goals is to bring the message to every veteran and military family in the country. And, it is certainly a goal to make the end product available in places such as Jamestown.

"With a high number of veterans and military families present in Jamestown, it's key to make them aware of not only the issues, but also the solutions," Collins said.

