

How Team RWB Helped

This former soldier says Team RWB helped him make the transition from service to civilian life

With most veteran service organizations, the only way to get in the door is to show your military cred — if you didn't serve, they don't serve.

And that's great for some. But for groups like **Team Red, White & Blue**, the whole point is to bring veterans and the civilian community together.

If you didn't serve, we're here to serve, they say.

And that proved a crucial difference for Mark Benson, a former Army fire direction specialist who left the military in 2004 after serving a tour during the invasion of Iraq. It was that civilian-to-military connection that attracted Benson to Team RWB, and it's a distinction that he believes helps former service members survive in the civilian world.

"Team RWB's mission is also to help folks rejoin the civilian world. If you're not engaged with civilians then how are you ever going to connect with the civilian world?" Benson said. "If you're just hanging out with a bunch of veterans, then you just kind of have your own little microcosm."

Living in the Los Angeles area is like living in a military veteran desert, he said, it's hard to find folks who get what doing a combat deployment means. But through his work as a community liaison with Team RWB, Benson found that even those who didn't serve have a lot of support to offer.

"Some of these non-veterans did experience things in their life where they had a hard time and they kind of can relate to a certain extent," Benson said. "A lot of the people that are in the leadership in the LA chapter aren't veterans, but they do have a story. And I think that's important."

Benson has been a community liaison for Team RWB for almost a year and helped run with the “stars and stripes” in this year’s **cross-country Old Glory Relay**. It was Benson’s first run and served as a poignant reminder of the service he and others gave of themselves and provided an outlet to show a new generation the meaning of patriotism and selflessness.

During a stretch of the relay, Benson and his team of runners passed by an elementary school where the kids were lined up outside reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Later in the run, the Old Glory Relay team paid their respects with the flag at a veterans memorial cemetery.

“It was kind of cool to start out with the young future leaders of the world and then go pay our respects to those who gave their lives to help those young leaders live their lives in peace,” Benson said.

With just over a year being part of Team Red, White & Blue, Benson sees his involvement deepening and the influence of his organization growing. Particularly in a non-military town like Los Angeles, it’s groups like Team RWB that bring veterans and their community together and help narrow that military-civilian divide.

“LA is probably one of those areas that has a larger civilian-military divide,” Benson said. “But it seems like in our area at least, there’s definitely a lot more understanding.”

There are many ways to get involved with Team Red, White & Blue and the Old Glory Relay, so [check out their website to get more information.](#)

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