

NEWS RELEASE

## World's Largest Non-profit Sportfishing Tournament, War Heroes on Water, Concludes Sixth Annual Event Following Weigh-in Celebration and Awards Ceremony

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After three days at sea, 100 veterans and 48 sportfishing yachts gathered outside Avalon Harbor for patriotic flyover and weigh-in on Catalina's Green Pier

Army veteran Collin Davis took home five trophies at awards ceremony, including the coveted Ron Ashimine Award for top angler; Ramble On Rose earned Josh Miles Award, given to the boat with the highest average points per angler

2023 event built on WHOW's five-year history of serving our nation's heroes, having now:

- Raised more than \$6 million for 501c3 partner Freedom Alliance
- Directly served 425 veterans on the water
- Supported thousands more veterans and their families through therapeutic services provided by Freedom Alliance
- Boarded more than 92 yachts with crews donated by the SoCal sportfishing community

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- The sixth annual War Heroes on Water (WHOW) sportfishing tournament came to a close with a weigh-in celebration on Catalina's iconic Green Pier on Monday followed by a stirring and deeply personal awards ceremony at Newport Beach Country Club in Newport Beach, Calif. last night.

100 United States Military veterans, many of whom have received our nation's highest military decorations including the Silver Star and Bronze Star medals, and the Purple Heart, participated in this year's transformative three-day event, which included 48 of Southern California's finest sportfishing vessels.

United States Military veterans fishing off the coast of Southern California during the sixth annual War Heroes on Water (WHOW) sportfishing tournament. WHOW harnesses the healing powers of the ocean and the thrill of team-based competition to help combat-wounded veterans recover from their physical and emotional wounds. (Photo: Business Wire)

Harnessing the healing powers of the ocean and the thrill of team-based competition, the sportfishing tournament off the coast of Southern California

helps combat-wounded veterans recover from their physical and emotional wounds.

"Every year it's so special to be out on the water with our veterans, to hear the stories of our heroes," said WHOW Founder Anthony Hsieh. "Listening to their experience from overseas, what they believe in and what motivates them is so powerful. Their honor, their commitment and their sacrifice to our country is not an act, it's as authentic as anything can be. It's a truly amazing experience, and I want to share that with as many people as we can so we can give our heroes the support they have earned defending our freedom."

Monday's weigh-in at Catalina's iconic Green Pier featured a flyover of vintage WWII aircrafts filling the sky to salute our nation's heroes as the WHOW fleet paraded through Avalon Harbor. WHOW teams gathered in celebration, cheering one another on while weighing thousands of pounds of fish as Avalon locals and tourists joined in to show their appreciation for our veterans.

"We had a great tournament, the weather cooperated, and the fishing was pretty darn good allowing our veterans to catch all kinds of species," said WHOW Tournament Director Rod Halperin. "Conditions aside, we were honored to provide this opportunity to our veterans, to show our appreciation and to help them heal. We say this all the time - WHOW is Family, and that could not be any more true."

The following evening at the awards ceremony, the veterans-turned-anglers celebrated their accomplishments on the water with captains and crews as they reflected on the event's critical impact.

The evening kicked off with a speech from Tom Kilgannon, president of Freedom Alliance, WHOW's charitable partner. Kilgannon discussed the impact of the tournament beyond the reaches of the ocean saying, "We are incredibly blessed by the generosity that is shown here to our organization because it helps us to care not just for this amazing group of veterans with us here, but also for many more military families throughout the year. This event brings together an extraordinary group of people who are willing to give their talent and treasure to help an amazing group of Americans who have sacrificed so much."

Kilgannon passed the mic to Hsieh who discussed the organic origins and growth of WHOW, reflecting on his appreciation for our veterans and civilian supporters. "To see the community rally together for our vets is just heartwarming, it's hard for me to describe. We're all humans, and we're just here having a good time, sharing our love of the ocean with our heroes."

Retired Army Ranger Collin Davis took home one of the most coveted prizes of the night, the Ron Ashimine Award for the "Top Angler," which is especially poignant as it is named for a Vietnam veteran and close friend of Hsieh. Together, Anthony and Ron spent more than 800 days at sea, fishing around the world. Ron participated in the first WHOW tournament, held in 2018, but passed away in 2019.

The Josh Miles Award for "Top Boat" was presented to the vessel Ramble On Rose, which hosted Army veterans Davis, William Robinson and James Justice. In its second year, the award posthumously honors and recognizes Miles, a highly decorated Marine Corps veteran and the former Director of Military and Charitable Programs for Freedom Alliance who was known as the heartbeat of the tournament. Josh worked tirelessly to help WHOW thrive, all out of his love for his fellow servicemen and women. The award was presented with the help of Miles' widow Cyndi, a Navy veteran who participated in the tournament for her second year. In addition to presenting this very meaningful award, she also won the Dorado Species category.

Davis collected the most trophies of the night with five in total, marking a tournament first by taking home both the Ron Ashimine and Josh Miles Awards. He also walked away with the trophies for most qualifying points, along with Yellow Fin Tuna and Marlin in the species categories.

Retired Army Medic Ryan Behm, a multi-year WHOW participant whose vessel Tangler placed second in the Top Boat category discussed his struggles and the support of the WHOW family sharing, "I've had the honor to serve with the Freedom Alliance team for many years, and I've had the opportunity to fish here for a few years. Everybody is always out here talking about 'WHOW is family,' and I've put that to the test over the last couple of years. I'd gotten myself in a spot where I was really struggling and in this last year, things really came to a head for me, and something was going to break.

"I started reaching out to different people that I met here, different vets that have gone through the things that I have. Mike T. sat on the phone and talked to me for hours about different things that I could do to help my situation. I also reached out to Rod [Halperin] for advice – and I called up a couple of the guys who were on the boat with me last year. We had lots of conversations about how I could fix what was going on. Everybody picked up the phone, everybody came to my aid, they rallied around me, and now I'm in a much better place, I'm doing some amazing things right now, my family is doing great, and whether you guys like it or not, you're mine."

Halperin, who has been instrumental in producing WHOW since its beginnings in 2018, received the Founder's

Award for putting his heart and soul into making the tournament a success. The award is presented by the Tournament's founding owners and captains, to individuals who embody the WHOW spirit and dedication to our nation's heroes.

While the event was epic, all of the participants echoed one sentiment: this event provides a singular opportunity for veterans from across the country to form deep and genuine connections with one another, as well as with the WHOW fleet captains and crews, creating an enduring safety net and long-term support system. Set against the calming backdrop of the Pacific Ocean, WHOW allows these veterans to forge new relationships, open up to each other and bond over similar experiences and feelings, allowing for much-needed healing to occur.

A total of 22 trophies were handed out during the celebration, including the awards for Species, Qualifying Points, Weight Points, Top Angler, Top Boat and the Founder's award.

Top Angler	Top Boat	Weight Points	Qualifier Points
1. Collin Davis, Ramble On Rose *Ron Ashimine Award	1. Ramble On Rose *Josh Miles Award	1. Freddie Cavasos, Bad Company	1. Collin Davis, Ramble On Rose
2. Freddie Cavasos, Bad Company	2. Tangler	2. Lee Bradley, Tangler	2. James Justice, Ramble On Rose *by tiebreaker
3. James Justice, Ramble On Rose	3. Bad Company	3. Ryan Wightman, Bad Company	3. William Robinson, Ramble On Rose *by tiebreaker

Species Winners	
Calico Bass:	Pablo Cadena, Sea Horse
Rockfish:	Angel Montes, Fan Tail
Halibut:	Kaleb Weakley, Bear Flag
Yellowtail:	Thomas Medbery, Joint Venture
Yellowfin Tuna:	Collin Davis, Ramble On Rose
Bluefin Tuna:	John Atkinson, Anastasia
Dorado:	Cyndi Miles, Surly Mermaid
Marlin:	Collin Davis, Ramble On Rose
White Sea Bass:	Jared Lackey, Joint Venture

With the support of 379 returning and new corporate and private donors and sponsors who care about our veterans and understand how this tournament is changing—and saving--lives, via Freedom Alliance, this year's WHOW raised well over \$1.25 million, bringing the total funds raised since the tournament's inception to more than \$6 million.

Central to the heart of WHOW are the numerous participants and volunteers, including yacht owners, captains, and crews, whose collective contributions represent invaluable financial and time investments. This extraordinary effort ensures that veterans are embraced during the three-day on-water segment of the tournament.

Money raised during WHOW benefits the tournament's charitable partner, Freedom Alliance, which touches thousands of lives of veterans and their families through its work providing therapeutic services, as well as scholarships for the children of fallen or combat-wounded servicemen and women.

## About War Heroes on Water

War Heroes on Water (WHOW) is an annual sportfishing tournament of unprecedented scale that supports combat-wounded veterans' programs. It was created in 2018 by loanDepot Founder and Chairman Anthony Hsieh, who is also the owner and leader of Team Bad Company, a world-class, record-holding competitive sportfishing fleet. Through Hsieh's deep connections with the country's sportfishing and business communities, WHOW has grown exponentially and is now the largest non-profit sportfishing tournament in the US.

Additional information, including photos and videos from past tournaments, may be found at

[www.warheroesonwater.com](http://www.warheroesonwater.com) | Instagram: **@warheroesonwater** | Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/WarHeroesonWater](http://www.facebook.com/WarHeroesonWater) | YouTube: **War Heroes on Water Fishing Tournament**

## About Freedom Alliance

Freedom Alliance is a charitable organization which provides help and support to wounded troops and military families. Freedom Alliance has awarded more than \$25 million in college scholarships to the children of military heroes killed or disabled in military service and has spent millions more helping injured veterans and military families with outdoor recreational therapy trips, Heroes Vacations, care packages for deployed troops, mortgage-free homes, all-terrain wheelchairs and much more. To learn more, visit [www.FreedomAlliance.org](http://www.FreedomAlliance.org) or [Facebook.com/FreedomAlliance](http://Facebook.com/FreedomAlliance).

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