

Reel Recovery: helping men with cancer

The History

When Stewart Brown learned he had brain cancer in 2001, he turned to his favorite hobby - fly-fishing - as a relaxing escape. Even as his cancer progressed, he looked for ways to give back to others, and in 2003 - just months before he passed - he and two friends founded a nonprofit to do just that.

In the spirit of Stewart's passion, Reel Recovery takes male cancer patients on fly-fishing retreats with no cost to the participants. Inspired by the success of a similar organization for women with breast cancer called Casting for Recovery, Stewart and fellow fly-fisherman Jim Cloud and Coy Theobalt conducted a 2003 pilot retreat in Loveland. Despite his failing health, Stewart was able to attend the retreat in June, as was his son Tyson, who served as a volunteer. The two were able to share moments of joy, pain, fear and love as they fished together and shared their stories with the rest of the group. Although the event was a success, the men realized that they needed additional funding to host more retreats.

By September 2003, Stewart's health was steadily declining. Determined to make his dream of helping other men a reality, he decided to write a letter to world-champion cyclist Lance Armstrong, whose foundation raises funds to fight cancer. Within a few days of sending his letter, Stewart received notice that Armstrong wanted to meet him in person. Although Stewart was now in hospice, he wasn't going to miss his big opportunity. Armstrong and his foundation's director flew to Denver. After meeting with Stewart for 20 minutes, they agreed to give Reel Recovery a generous start-up grant. A week later, Stewart passed away.



Reel Recovery Today

Today, Stewart's dream is a reality. Reel Recovery has served more than 330 men with cancer, completing 28 retreats in 10 states, including nine retreats in Colorado.

"Each retreat lasts three days and includes 12 men, each of whom gets an expert volunteer fly-fisher's help and instruction" explains Stan Golub, executive director of Reel Recovery. "All lodging, food and equipment are provided. The total cost for each person is about \$700."

According to Stan, the trips are about more than just fishing. "Each trip includes six 'Courageous Conversations' where the men share their stories about their lives with can-



cer," he says. "It's an important part of their emotional health to be able to talk about their life with cancer. Women often have more opportunities to share and find support. These retreats help men open up and they build lifelong friendships in just a few days."

Funding

Reel Recovery relies solely on donations to continue providing its retreats at no cost to the participants. Although the nonprofit has been fortunate to receive tremendous financial support from individuals, organizations and businesses, there's always a need for more.

"Unfortunately, there are a lot of men battling cancer," says Stan, "so we have an ongoing list of men who want to participate in the retreats. We're always in need of funding to help make Stewart's dream live on."

If you or your organization would like to contribute to Reel Recovery, call 800-699-4490 or visit reelrecovery.org. Donations can also be mailed to: Reel Recovery, P.O. Box 3335, Centennial, CO 80161.



Testimonials

Here's what some past participants have to say about the Reel Recovery retreats:

"I am leaving here a changed man. You guys have saved my life."

"Words are not available to express my gratitude for this past weekend. I have never in my 71 years been with such a loving and giving group. This has been one of the most eye-opening and rewarding experiences that I have ever encountered."

"Thank you for helping me see there's a light at the end of this tunnel. This retreat was so much more than fishing; this was a life-changing experience. I will never forget these few days."

"This Retreat was one of the most inspiring and rewarding experiences I have had the pleasure of participating in. It was one of those life events that warms your soul and makes you stop and assess where you are on life's journey. You leave the retreat with a new spirit and appreciation of life."

"I discovered that while fly-fishing, I was in another place. In this place there was no cancer, no pain and no fear."

"The Retreat gave me more than I ever expected. I got the chance to fish again, laugh and enjoy the company of others, and feel light-hearted for the first time in a very long time. Reel Recovery helped me remember who I am, reset my compass and get back on track again. I'm ready to move forward being myself again, not just a 'cancer patient'. Thank you for this life-affirming experience."

"Reel Recovery is a gift. Being here has given me the strength and courage to move forward with my life."

"Before this retreat, I wasn't sure what to do with my life and was going through the motions. Now, I am ready to take the next step: recovery."

"Being with you guys has helped me look at my future differently... I now do everything I can to live life to the fullest."