

Veteran and dog walk to raise money for PTSD treatment

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As part of a fundraising initiative called Paws Fur Thought- Long Walk to Sanity, Capt (Ret'd) Medric Cousineau and his service dog Thai have embarked on the first steps of their 50-day journey.

The walk is to raise money for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) treatments.

Dog and man are walking from 12 Wing Shearwater to Ottawa to raise \$350,000, and pair 50 veterans who suffer from PTSD with 50 service dogs.

Destination stops include Truro, Gagetown, Quebec, Trenton and Toronto.

Over the past several years, service dogs have built a positive reputation for their role in improving PTSD symptoms.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, PTSD will affect one in 10 people, and the cases of the disorder can be more common in former or current members of the military.

Cousineau, a sufferer of PTSD for almost 27 years, is hoping to "put down the stigma."

A ceremony was held in Cousineau's honour at MacCormack's Beach in Eastern Passage on Aug. 1. Civilian and military supporters attended the event to witness Cousineau and Thai take the first steps on their journey.

"I know you don't consider yourself to be this, but you truly are a hero," said MLA Becky Kent.

MP and Official Critic for Veterans, Peter Stoffer, also spoke, saying, "Medric is one more shining example of what it takes to stand up,

be accountable and do the right thing."

Cousineau, a former Air Force Navigator, began his battle with PTSD following a rescue mission of two American fishermen.

He received the Star of Courage for his brave act; however, he sustained a serious injury and returned to ordinary life as a different person. Along with PTSD, which Cousineau describes as a "living hell," he has also experienced periods of addiction, depression, panic, anxiety and anger.

"I will continue to fight my PTSD daily for the rest of my life, but now I have something that was so desperately missing—I have hope. And that hope is spurring me on to get others help."

Last year, with the help of Branch 164 of the Royal Canadian Legion and the Canine Assistance Rehabilitation Education Services (CARES) program, Cousineau was paired with his service dog.

"The three most important things that she does is nightmare intervention, watching my back in public, and flashback dissociative recall," says Cousineau. "She's truly my best friend."

With the walk now underway, the two expect to reach their destination Sept. 19.

To donate or find updates on Cousineau's journey, visit www.pawsfurthought1.com or check out the Paws Fur Thought Facebook page.

