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Vietnam vet inspires Calif. town to help the wounded

(CBS News) LOS ANGELES - A Vietnam veteran has literally been on the march to help severely injured vets from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while this former marine has embraced those wounded warriors.

The tiny town of Murphys, Calif., has embraced him.



Ric Ryan on his walking trail in Murphys, Calif./ CBS News

For Ric Ryan, it began with a quest: Walking every day, hoping to escape the demons of Vietnam.

"I'm the walking man of Murphys," he said.

In Murphys, people began to notice. Their attention first surprised, and then inspired.

"What's going on?" one neighbor asked.

"Same old thing," Ryan replied. "Walking for the vets"

Each time someone waved, Ryan would wave back and donate 25 cents to a UCLA program called "Operation Mend" for soldiers disfigured by war.

"It's something that's helping him mentally and physically and emotionally," said Ryan's wife, Joanne.

"This is our man, this is our hero," a neighbor remarked.

Soon residents offered more than moral support. They opened their wallets.

"I just thought it was really cool, what he's doing," said auto shop owner Jeff German. "A simple act of kindness."



A woman shakes hands with Ric Ryan after donating money to UCLA's Operation Mend. / CBS News

"Then you come to find out what it's doing for him -- it just meant a lot to me," he said.

Here's how much it meant to him: a \$5,000 donation.

"This is unbelievable," Ryan responded. "I don't know what to say. The veterans thank you!"

The trickle of donations has become a flood. He said he has raised about \$30,000.

"It means my walking is doing some good. It means we've got a good community here, 'cause all this money, all of it, comes from this town. So that's pretty cool," Ryan said.

This month, UCLA's Operation Mend honored Ryan. So did some of the patients, including Army Spc. Joey Paulk.

"From one veteran to another, UCLA Operation Mend proudly salutes Ric Ryan, United States Marine Corps, a true American hero who gives new meaning to boots on the ground."

Ryan says seeing all the veterans he helps brings everything to a full circle.

Back in Murphys, Ryan continues to walk - and sing.

"America, can't youuuuuuuu see..."

Somewhat off key, but always on point.

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