

# Veterans' spouses get pampered

By [Scott Mahoney](#) | The Chronicle-Telegram

Published on Sept. 24, 2017



Nadine Jamison, a Mary Kay consultant from Para, right, tests out a foundation on Bambi Bowser of Wadsworth, during a pampering session with facials and make-up during a free spa day for caregivers of veterans suffering from invisible wounds of war sponsored by Hearts of Patriots at the Church of the Open Door in Elyria Saturday afternoon.



Debbie Oust of Mentor-on-the-Lake, right, chats wit esthetician Emma Hoag, from Aveda Salon in Oberlin, as Hoag gives Oust a manicure during a free spa day for veteran caregivers.



Jenni Burns of North Ridgeville, left, gets her nails painted by Emily Burns of Legends Salon, right, during a free spa day.

ELYRIA — When Megan Cain’s husband, Jeremy, a sergeant with the Marines, came home from his tour in Iraq, she was ecstatic. What she didn’t know was that her life, and that of her family, would never be the same.

While serving in Iraq, Jeremy was involved in three improvised-explosion-device blasts. When he returned he had severe post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and according to his wife, he wasn’t the same as when he left.

Cain and her family spent eight years not understanding exactly what it was they were dealing with. She eventually learned she wasn’t alone.

On Saturday, Cain spent the day with women in similar situations to her own, helping them escape their lives as caregivers of veterans with PTSD, if only for a few hours. A nonprofit organization started by Cain’s mother, Denise Gula Weller, called Hearts of Patriots, put on the event at Church of the Open Door.

“To get the military guys in a place when they’re in combat to be OK with what they’re doing, think about what you have to do to that person to make them OK with that,” Megan Cain said. “When they come back to civilization, how do you undo that? You can’t undo that wiring, so they’re never really the same.”

Additionally, Jeremy lost several friends, some of them close friends, and suffered from survivor's guilt.

"I didn't know any of this," Megan Cain said. "We had a young son. We were so grateful for my husband to come back. When he wasn't the same, and he had all these issues, I was lost. It would be the middle of the night, and he'd walk the perimeter of our house with a baseball bat. He knew it wasn't rational, but he felt they would come back to retaliate for what he'd done."

The Cains lived that way for eight years without understanding what Jeremy, and the family, was going through.

"Life was really difficult, and I started to give up," Megan Cain said. "I struggled with my own sanity because I was trying to keep things normal for my son, and I felt pretty hopeless."

A few years ago, Megan Cain attended a military retreat for spouses of veterans suffering from PTSD.

"I was sitting in a room with about 20 women, and we were all supposed to tell our story," she said. "I was about the 17th to tell my story, so I was sitting there thinking, 'They're saying what my life is like. How do they know what I'm living through?' Suddenly, I had an 'a-ha' moment where I realized we weren't the only ones."

After watching what her daughter went through, Weller wanted to keep other women from feeling that sense of hopelessness.

"It's really the spouses that hold the family together," Weller said. "They're always second to the veteran. The emphasis is always on the veteran, and not to take anything away from that need, but they are living the same struggles. They are living with the consequences of war for the rest of their lives, just like the veteran does. Often they are overlooked with no one to take care of them."

The event featured professional massage therapists and nail technicians and offered makeovers and facials. Those who attended were given lunch, doughnuts, bagels and mimosas.

Everyone who attended also received gift bags, some of which contained \$100 Visa gift cards.

"The key to keeping the families together is the spouse," Cain said. "When they are worn out, tired and emotionally drained, they can't do that. It might seem insignificant to have a spa day, but it reminds these women that they must take time for themselves and find joy in little moments."

Those who attended the event were appreciative for the opportunity to get away for a few hours.

"It's a wonderful thing," said Peggy Whitcomb, of Cuyahoga Falls. "It kind of lifts responsibilities off your shoulders. You have time for yourself, which you often don't get. I think this is an amazing group."

April Petz, of Wauseon, is married to a veteran who was discharged from the military eight days before Sept. 11, 2001. The event held by Hearts of Patriots was especially important to her.

"This is awesome. There really isn't much for spouses, especially spouses of all generations," she said. "Usually, it's for post-9/11 spouses or families for a lot of the resources. It was really a cool thing that it's for caregivers, but also any generation of caregivers."

Ynez Henningsen, of Cleveland Heights, doesn't get a lot of opportunities to get out of the house and socialize. Her husband has PTSD and doesn't leave the house.

"It means meeting other people that deal with what I deal with every day," she said. "So often, being the spouse of a PTSD veteran, it's a very lonely experience. We don't often get the opportunity to meet other spouses in our situation because we're often isolated."

"For some of us, our husbands don't leave the house. We go out by ourselves, and we don't get to make as many friends as we'd like. This was a way to sit down and connect one-to-one and face-to-face with other people who understand our struggles."

Cain said there were a lot of tears shed during the event.

"Knowing there's a safe place to communicate what you go through that other people might be shocked at, there's a feeling of relief in that and the tears just start flowing," she said.

Weller said 33 women had signed up for the event, and three-quarters of them were able to attend Saturday.

"This is a population that lives in chaos and crisis," she said. "We knew when the day came there would be unexpected situations within the home that might prevent some of them attending."

While Hearts of Patriots serves spouses of veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury in Northeast Ohio, Weller said the organization plans to extend its services nationally.

For more information about Hearts of Patriots, visit [www.vetspouse.org](http://www.vetspouse.org).

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