



The 11th Annual Warrior Family Beach Week will take place September 3rd through the 8th, 2024, in Bethany Beach Delaware. Each year, Operation Seas the Day relies on the overwhelming support of the local and surrounding community to help make the Warrior Family Beach Week a success. The OVPC Deacons have once again selected this organization to be the July Mission for Ocean View Presbyterian Church.

### **From the Operation Seas the Day website:**

Becky Johns and Diane Pohanka's friendship goes back a long way. Their kids grew up together and their families often met up at the beach. There were many times when they'd work together as volunteers for important causes, including helping raise funds for families of victims of 9/11.

So kicking around an idea to help wounded soldiers was not unusual for the friends. The idea evolved into offering a week at the beach for a group of recovering wounded warriors and their families. Diane shared her idea with Richard Katon, a retired physician and in January 2013, the three set out developing a plan to make this event happen. They each owned homes in the Bethany Beach area, known as the Quiet Resorts, and saw the community as the perfect setting for wounded veterans and their families to relax and enjoy time together.

The goal was to recruit 25 families, selected by the Wounded Warrior Project, the USO and the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes. An integral part of the plan was to show appreciation for the services and sacrifices made by these soldiers and to treat them and their families with the honor they deserve.

To do this, it was essential to involve the local community. As their plan developed, they were assisted by Claudia Thayne at Sea Colony who helped recruit homeowners willing to donate their homes. Restaurants and local businesses came forward when they heard of the plan, now called Operation SEAs the Day (OSTD), to be launched the week of Labor Day.

Hosts were recruited to make these Very Important Families (VIFs) feel at home and to orient them to our community. T-shirts and sweatshirts were printed to commemorate the event and sold by volunteers at the Sea Colony Beach Shoppe, the Bethany Beach Farmers Market, Bethany Beach Books and other locations. The funds raised were used to provide the VIFs with expense money for their week.

During the summer leading up to the event, Rob Arlett and Bill Gay joined the initial trio. Rob handled media and event promotion and Bill, a veteran himself, worked tirelessly to ensure this event was 100% ready for our VIFs. Bill 'put the icing on the cake' so to speak. Also joining the core group was Chris Ross, who donated his home and volunteered as a host. Chris, along with fellow boat captain Brian Emery, suggested the idea of providing boat and fishing trips for all the VIFs. Under the leadership of Chris and Brian, additional boat captains

jumped on board, and the idea was a huge success – the group became affectionately known as the Bethany Beach Navy.

As word spread about Operation SEAs the Day throughout the summer, more volunteers & businesses joined to provide spa treatments, kayaking, golf outings, jet-skis rides and many other fun events.

The first Operation SEAs the Day took place September 3-8, 2013 and was hailed by many participants as an overwhelming success. It was called “magical” and “life-changing” by several veterans. The outpouring of generosity in the community was heartwarming and much appreciated by our heroes and their families.