

September 2025
EDITION

GRIT

at

Magnolia
MEADOWS

THE RESILIENCE REPORT

help. healing. hope.

FROM THE FRONTLINES TO THE KITCHEN

How One Marine Finds Purpose Serving First Responders and Military at Magnolia Meadows



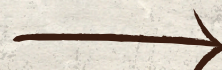
The smell of hickory-smoked pork drifts through the open kitchen at Magnolia Meadows, carrying with it the warmth of a place where healing feels tangible. Behind the counter, moving with a precision that speaks to years of discipline, is Andy—a U.S. Marine turned Executive Chef. He's not just preparing lunch; he's quietly building connections with the men and women in the dining room, many of whom share pieces of his story. Andy spent eight years in the Marine Corps, serving from 2004 to 2012. His time in uniform was marked by the intense demands of combat, the invisible scars of PTSD, the challenges of traumatic brain injury, and a battle with substance use. When the time came to transition out, he was urged to seek therapy, focus on school, and start a new chapter. He chose to study business management and culinary arts—drawn to the chaos and camaraderie of the kitchen, a place that, in his mind, wasn't so different from a combat unit. "Kitchens are called brigades for a reason," he says, wiping his hands on a towel. "There's structure, ranking, and teamwork—just like the Corps." His mentor, a perfectionist in the best sense, taught him to aim for flawless execution, knowing perfection itself is out of reach but excellence is not. That philosophy stuck. Unlike "admin chefs" who hide away in offices, Andy leads from the front—

knife in hand, shoulder-to-shoulder with his cooks. After years running high-end kitchens at exclusive country clubs, Andy realized he wanted something more than fine dining service and perfect plate presentations. The opportunity to cook for Veterans and First Responders at Magnolia Meadows felt like a calling. "Here, I get to connect with people who've been where I've been," he says. "Whether it's on the smoke deck or over a plate of food, I can meet them on common ground."

His kitchen is the heartbeat of the facility—a place where clients don't just eat, they participate. They weigh in on menu ideas, join experiential cooking groups, and learn new skills they can carry home. Andy is deliberate about keeping the kitchen alcohol-free, teaching clients to prepare flavorful meals without ingredients that could trigger old habits. Sometimes the simplest dishes—like his sous chef Jesse's now-famous potato salad—become the highlight of someone's day. "You can see it in their faces," Andy says.

"That one little thing can make a difference."

(Chef Andy continued on page 2)



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Your service matters, and so does your health. TRICARE members can now receive in-network care at Magnolia Meadows. We're honored to walk alongside active duty and retired Military on their journey to wellness. Call (855) 644-7500 for more information or to verify coverage.



www.magnoliameadows.com

Chef Andy Continued...

For Andy, food is more than sustenance.

It's a tool for rebuilding trust, confidence, and connection. A client learning to cook a favorite meal for their spouse, a small victory in the form of a perfectly seared steak—these are moments that matter.

"Cooking can build confidence," he explains. "For some of these guys it's a way to reconnect with their

families." His hopes grow alongside Magnolia Meadows, envisioning a future where the kitchen and staff expand to meet the needs of a larger facility—while still preserving the hands-on, client-centered atmosphere that makes it special today. "Don't be the admin chef," he says with a grin. "Get in the trenches. Work with your team. Never forget where you came from." He wants to pass on the work ethic and leadership style he learned in the Marines and refined in the kitchen—so that the next generation of chefs leads from the front, not from behind a desk.



Kali's Korner

Meet Bug the Crisis Response K9!

Bug is a registered AKC Golden Retriever and a certified therapy/crisis response K9. His handler Dean Moreno is certified in PEER Support with certifications from Nova University, IAFF, UCF Restores, and CISM. Dean is also a professional Firefighter/Paramedic and founded the non-profit 501(C)(3) First Responders Pack Foundation. Together we can make a difference one paw at a time!

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September Awareness and Appreciation

National Suicide Prevention Month:

September is National Suicide Prevention Month – a moment that serves as a powerful reminder that there are steps we all must take in looking out for loved ones, friends, co-workers, the people in our community, and those who have been impacted by this tragic loss of life. Together we can change the conversation.

National Firefighter Appreciation Month:

A time to honor the bravery, sacrifice, and unwavering dedication of the men and women who run toward danger to keep us safe. Join us in thanking Firefighters everywhere for their service and commitment to protecting us, and our communities.

National Recovery Month:

Established in 1989 by SAMHSA to promote evidence-based treatment and recovery practices, celebrate the nation's vibrant recovery community, and honor all those who help make recovery possible. It's a time to celebrate hope that people can and do recover from Substance Use challenges.

Wellness
RESOURCES

Books: *First Responder Resilience* by Tania Glenn

Podcasts: *The Fire Engineering Podcast Network*

Websites: www.nextrung.org

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Gaining Resilience in Trauma



Residential Treatment Program for
active or retired First Responders
and Military Service Members



Need Help? Call us at (855) 644-7500
www.magnoliameadows.com

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