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Former EIU QB's Fishing4Freedom Gives Back to Wounded Soldiers

Jan-14-2010

Former Eastern Illinois University quarterback Anthony Buich '99 already had a healthy respect for the armed forces when he picked up "Lone Survivor," the true story of the only U.S. Navy Seal to survive a days-long fight with hundreds of Taliban fighters.

But by the time he finished reading the inspiring tale of determination and sacrifice, Buich knew he had to reach out and tangibly express his sincere gratitude to all who have fought for this country.



Anthony Buich

"To be cliché: The book changed my life," Buich said. "My father was an MP in the Air Force, and I've always admired what these Americans do. I've always respected somebody who would die for what they believe in. (But) reading that book and seeing what somebody is willing to do for my life, for our lives, was so humbling. I knew I had to do something for veterans with my life."

Because Buich is president of La Paz Fishing Charters in Baja California Sur Mexico, it was only natural that his thoughts turned to taking Special Operations soldiers on a once-in-a-lifetime deep-sea fishing trip.

After a chance meeting at a fishing tournament with then-stranger Greg David, former Marine and executive director of national anti-terrorist training company Desert Snow, the two learned they had similar goals. Working together with the sole purpose of honoring our nation's veterans, they created Fishing4Freedom.

Buich launched into action, making contact with veterans' organizations and starting the process of raising funds and awareness for the project.

"It gave me an opportunity to play quarterback again, to set up the show," Buich said.

Over the summer, Buich was able to host an amputee who had served with Special Operations Recon forces. He was from Oklahoma and had never fished in the ocean, so he was thrilled to reel in a 175-lb. marlin. "It was just a dream-come-true kind of thing," Buich said.

The weekend of Sept. 11, Fishing4Freedom hosted about a dozen Navy Seals and Special Operations soldiers, all veterans of the wars in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. The men and their families were treated to fishing in the Sea of Cortez from two



More about Fishing4Freedom

To learn more about Fishing4Freedom, or to find out how to make a donation, please see www.Fishing4Freedom.com. Final proceeds will go to the Special Operations Soldier's Foundation and The Wounded Warrior Project.

"Anything helps, and everything goes a long way," said organizer Anthony Buich. "I think everybody's degree of separation from somebody affected by either 9/11 or Iraq and Afghanistan is probably very small. It's a time where it doesn't matter if you believe in the war or not, you need to support those who are serving. It's the ultimate form of patriotism."

Footage from the most recent Fishing4Freedom expedition is to air on Ronnie Kovak's "Fishing Ventures" program in the next year on Fox Sports West on each significant patriotic week

luxury yachts, as well as five-star treatment at the Resort Gran Sueno, whose owner, Steve Games, is a Vietnam veteran. (Veterans Day, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Sept. 11), Buich said.

"The guys just had smiles across their faces," Buich said. "They had a blast being pampered. It was definitely 'Mission: Accomplished.'"

Buich was taken aback by how much the veterans were a team in every situation.

"They're just so close," Buich said. "These guys do put their lives on the line for each other, and it creates a lasting bond."

"As a former athlete, to me, with what these guys do and experience -- they're the epitome of the eye of the tiger," Buich said. "To hang out with professionals like that and experience their camaraderie was amazing."

Buich got all the thanks he needed in the veterans' smiles and in their respect for his efforts. Each of them at some point told Buich that the experience was the greatest respite they'd ever had, and that the event organizers were "true Americans."

"(But) I think these guys are the truest Americans," Buich said.

For Buich, the outings are "inspiring" and "motivational." He was particularly moved when one soldier who recently returned from deployment gave him a Seal Team 5 25th Anniversary "Challenge Coin." "That was really sentimental to me," Buich said.

Special Warfare Operator Chief Petty Officer Michael Moriarty said he was "extremely impressed" with Buich and David's "level of dedication, selflessness and patriotism," as well as the outstanding efforts of the owner and staff of the resort.

"Unfortunately, it is rare to find people who would not only come up with such a thoughtful idea, but follow through with all the planning from fund raising to dropping lures in the water," Moriarty said. "The Fishing4Freedom event was an event that we will always remember. In fact, we as guests of the first event are still in frequent contact with the founders to offer our support on future events for other troops who deserve this outstanding display of gratitude and recognition. We have made lifelong friends during this event. We are now 'brothers.'"

After seeing the effect the event had on the veterans, Buich is more motivated than ever to continue to make the event a success year after year.

"We all had the best time together, and that's what this is all about -- taking care of those who take care of us and protect our freedoms," Buich said.

Getting personal: Catching up with Buich

Buich at EIU



Anthony Buich '99 is one of the relatively few in this world who can say they once called Tony Romo his backup.

"It makes for interesting chat rooms in Fantasy Football. I've got a few friends and family members that don't let me live that down," Buich, a former EIU quarterback, said of his connection to the now famous Dallas Cowboys starter. "Good for him. He worked hard, paid his dues. This is an incredible opportunity for him."

Buich knows a thing or two about hard work, too, as he's powered his way to success in three different careers.

After graduating from EIU, Buich had what he called a "decent career" in the pass-heavy Arena Football League, playing for eight teams in six seasons.

"I met some great friends, had a lot of fun, and I got to travel the country, getting paid to play a game I love," Buich said.

After an elbow injury ended his career in 2005, Buich started working as a financial adviser, ending up with Merrill Lynch, before starting La Paz Fishing Charters in February 2008.

Through his fishing business, Buich has been on a couple of TV and radio shows, including Ronnie Kovak's "Fishing Ventures" on Fox Sports West, for which he spent four days fishing with the angling legend and NFL All-Pros Sam Adams, Eddie Kennison and Tom Keating. Buich also had a role in former Dallas Cowboy Michael Irvin's Spike reality show, "Fourth and Long," throwing footballs for the show's participants.

In May, he was hired by the Atlanta-based Competitive Edge Sports, a high-profile athletic training company, to help with marketing efforts on the west coast.

"I just like staying busy," Buich said. "I don't want to get complacent."

Originally from Tiburon, Calif., near San Francisco, Buich now lives near San Diego with his wife, the former Tamara Schurch '01, who ran track at EIU.

"We each brought a little bit of Eastern with us," Buich said.

In 2008, she was stopped in the post office by a man who was intrigued by her Chicago Bears T-shirt. As it turned out, he was Don Johnson '49, a former EIU football and track star who was inducted into the Athletics Hall of Fame in 1987. The couple and Johnson have since become close friends, thanks in part to their EIU connection.

"Eastern's a great school, a great community," Buich said. "I just had a lot of fun there. It really is a special place."

• These stories originally appeared in the Fall 2009 issue of *Ola Main Line*, a magazine published for members of the [Eastern Illinois University Alumni Association](#).