

## Divide Camp finally wins nonprofit status

By Rocky Wilson

Wallowa County Chieftain | Posted: Wednesday, June 11, 2014 10:26 am

After an 18-month battle with the Internal Revenue Service, Divide Camp – a rural refuge for U.S. combatants scarred by war – has been granted 501(c)(3) status as a nonprofit organization.

Julie Wheeler, director of the camp located 20 miles east of Joseph that's heading into its second year of existence, says the biggest advantage to the new designation is that she and her board of directors now will be able to apply for grants from a new list of benevolent organizations.

Among those organizations are Wounded Warrior Project and the Paul Newman Foundation.

The elapsed time between filing one's application for nonprofit status and receiving a definitive answer from the IRS seems to be changing, said Wheeler. She said when her group's application was submitted Aug. 1, 2012, an answer was expected in 90 days. The average time now is about one year, she says, reiterating that her organization's wait was six months longer than that.

Near the end of Divide Camp's battle with the IRS, that federal agency sent the organization a questionnaire demanding that Wheeler and her board respond within two weeks or lose what standing they had with the ruling federal body, Wheeler said. At that point the organization, though it has little money, chose to hire an attorney. Its nonprofit status was granted shortly thereafter, Wheeler added.

A plus for Divide Camp is that the nonprofit designation is effective retroactive to the date that organization filed its original 23-page application in 2012.

There are no paid positions at Divide Camp nor for its board of directors, a fact that could work in the healing camp's favor because some benevolent organizations select projects to fund based on a score reflecting the percentage of a nonprofit's budget that is actually spent on



0611 wcc

DIVIDE\_bronco\_cabin.jpg

Although not all five log cabins are ready for use, this completed kitchen at Divide Camp hints at what awaits U.S. veterans scarred by war when, in small groups, they visit that secluded place of healing 20 miles east of Joseph.

its written mission.

Wheeler, formerly employed by the federal government to debrief individuals recovering from extremely stressful incidents, within the past two years inherited 40 acres of property with five old log buildings on it between Little and Big Sheep creeks, buildings that formerly had been an elk hunting camp. Then came the idea of developing a stress-free, rustic environment where no more than five vets – except on special occasions – could stay at one time.

On more than one occasion the director of Divide Camp has said, “I do believe strongly in small group effectiveness.”

Although she’s willing now to take in veterans with special needs, her intent today is first to utilize the efforts of volunteer labor to rehabilitate the last of those five cabins.

Wheeler’s tentative goal for this summer is to open Divide Camp on July 5, 6 and 7, when Portland-area writing instructor Jessica Lorenz is scheduled to instruct five to eight war-scarred veterans three hours a day on writing skills such as descriptive writing, storytelling techniques, and diversity of styles and voices.

“Writing is a very effective therapy,” says Wheeler.

The camp is only 20 miles from Joseph, but it’s a full hour’s drive because of rough roads.

Written into the bylaws of the just-recognized nonprofit is a provision that Divide Camp cabins can, when not in use or scheduled to be used by veterans, be rented out to provide revenue for Wheeler’s organization. A long-range goal is to open the camp for winter sports.

In 2013, one wounded Marine, Sgt. Tyler Andreatta, became Divide Camp’s first attendee, and the experience left him with unbounded enthusiasm for it. He now volunteers at the camp and has taken a seat on Divide Camp’s Board of Directors.

A new recruit to the Divide Camp team is rural Enterprise veteran James Nash. Awarded the Purple Heart on two occasions for his service in Afghanistan, Nash will coordinate hunting and fishing arrangements for veterans seeking solace at the isolated camp.