

## Inaugural Lead The Way 5K highlighted by first recipient of funds to help military

By Fiona Green



The inaugural Lead The Way 5K in Roanoke on Saturday (June 25) morning attracted a decent sized crowd for a first time event. The race was one of several events, which were part of a national fundraising tour supporting the American Warrior Initiative (AWI).

Led by the very first recipient of the AWI campaigns, Ben Lunak (USMC) (pictured), the events raise funds for veterans, Active Duty Military and their families. Information on how AWI has changed the lives of many wounded heroes of America in 2014 & 2015 can be seen by visiting the group's website at:

[www.americanwarriorinitiative.com](http://www.americanwarriorinitiative.com)

The initiatives were funded by Fairway Independent Mortgage Company whose employees' involvement has not only changed lives but saved them. For more details, please visit the link below for an emotional video showing the impact of their work.

<http://militarymortgagespecialists.com/2016/01/13-months-of-giving-back-with-awi/#more-855>

Lunak thanked each participant in person for their support of the race. As a member of the Marine Corps he served in Iraq from 2004-2006. In 2006 he lost a leg as a result of a roadside bomb, a loss that threw him into a deep depression and eventually led to him contemplating suicide. He considers himself fortunate in having found the strength to overcome his issues and now feels compelled to pay it forward and help others suffering from PTSD, guiding them towards a healthy, happy life where they feel fulfilled.

Thanks to an AWI business grant, Lunak is the owner of a gym in Colorado Springs, which caters to teens. He is passionate about his work and stresses the importance of the team spirit, discipline and camaraderie that gym users experience. As well as being a motivational speaker to veterans Lunak is also an accomplished athlete and has qualified for the Paralympic team trials in the 100m.

Before the start of the race, he delivered an impassioned speech about those who are currently serving their country and those who have paid the ultimate price. This was

followed by the pledge of allegiance and the national anthem.

While conditions were a little less humid than last week, a 9 a.m. start meant that the temperature was already rising as runners toed the line. Unlike the majority of local races, the event was timed but no awards were presented. Participants were, however, able to enjoy delicious breakfast tacos and snow cones.

Editor's note: Fiona was first overall finisher.