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**DEDICATED TO THE MISSION: VETERAN FINDS ALIGNED VALUES, SECURITY AT
CONFLUENCE HEALTH A NATURAL CONTINUATION OF SERVICE**

Wenatchee, WA: Upon returning home from his tours of duty as a hospital corpsman for the U.S. Navy, James Herron knew that he wanted to continue to help others.

“That’s why I joined the military: I always saw it as a way to help people,” remarked Herron. “Though in the Navy, my role in emergency intervention and military tactical care as an EMT meant that I spent most of my time working in military hospitals with the Marine Corps in different areas around the world. I found the opportunity to help others really appealing.”

Growing up in Wenatchee, James had never been outside of the country and his first assignment to Spain was a wholly new experience since he found himself in a new culture and language. After a few transitions where he bounced around on different naval assignments, he found himself in Japan when the pandemic hit. As the country he was visiting and the military all were coming to grips with the needs of COVID-19, lots of the regular routines came to a standstill, with everything seen as ‘non-mission critical’ becoming essentially unavailable. As the pandemic raged, James would often have 12-hour shifts in the military hospital, though these often stretched longer since he found it hard to just walk away at the end of a shift if a lot of patients still needed care.

“In addition to the opportunity to travel, my favorite part of being in the Navy was the chance to step out of my comfort zone and build new relationships,” continued Herron. “One great example of this was the opportunity to treat entire families. After treating a servicemember and providing them with the care they needed, they would trust me to treat their family members as well, something that was necessary due to working occasionally in remote locations where standards of healthcare might have been different. If you stitch a servicemember’s eye after falling during a ruck march, you make a friend for a day. If you stitch his or her child after an accident and do a good job, you’ve made a friend for life.”

While his time in the military was fulfilling, the pandemic helped prompt thoughts about what came afterward. Thinking about future careers, James wanted something that allowed him to keep helping others. He’d always enjoyed taking charge during code responses in the hospital so he knew he wanted something where he could lead a group, eventually deciding to pursue his degree in project management. Doing this while on active duty, however, meant there were a few extra challenges: little free time, a lot of extra work, and class at odd times due to the time difference of taking online classes in the US while stationed in Japan.

“For quite a long time, my life pretty much consisted of attending school, working, and sleeping in an endless cycle,” Herron reflected. “Sometimes I wondered why I was pursuing this when it would have been easier to just stay where I was.”

But his hard work paid off. After returning home to Wenatchee, James applied to Confluence Health, hoping to put his new project management skills to use to help others and thinking the healthcare organization would value his experience in working in military hospitals. He applied for three different jobs, and got offered all three.

“For me, I knew I wanted to work in project management since our primary job is to assist in any way we can,” continued Herron. “Once I got on board, everything just clicked. It was an easy transition since the values at Confluence Health lined up with my military and personal values. It was all about helping, being dedicated to the mission. Also, they really seemed to reward me for all the work I had done to get there, valuing all I had done. Because of that, I now get to be in a role that helps support taking care of my friends, colleagues, and neighbors, but you can’t do that unless you take care of yourself, and the stability of this job has really allowed me to do that while pursuing a lot of the dreams I had.”

And, most recently, that was the dream of home ownership. Having been a renter his entire adult life, the stability of his position with Confluence Health allowed him to take the plunge and get a place of his own.

“Having grown up here, owning a home in the valley has been a lifelong dream for me,” explained Herron. “And it’s been everything I’d hoped for. I enjoy the ability to have a place to call my own, carving my own path in life in a constant effort to progress professionally and personally.”

Though the journey has hardly been easy at every stage, for James, it’s all a matter of perspective and resilience.

“One of my favorite quotes is from former US secretary of defense, and fellow Washingtonian, General Jim Mattis,” reflected Herron. “He said, ‘You don’t always control your circumstances, but you can always control your response.’ For me, I learned that if you treat everyone with respect and care – even during difficult situations and transitions – things have a way of working out and your hard work will be rewarded. And I think my life is a testament to that.”

About Confluence Health

Confluence Health serves the largest geographic region of any healthcare system in Washington State, covering over 12,000 square miles of Okanogan, Grant, Douglas, and Chelan counties. Confluence is one of only two locally-lead healthcare systems in the state with the purpose of maintaining availability and access to high-quality, cost-effective healthcare services for North Central Washington. The Confluence Health Board of Directors provides governance for Confluence Health, the Clinic, Central Washington Hospital, and Wenatchee Valley Hospital, and includes nine community board members and six physician board members.

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