



Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger

**NOVEMBER HARVEST:** Blair Perkins hauls a scallop dredge up to be emptied onto the culling board of his boat Monday in Madaket Harbor. Perkins has scalloped Nantucket waters for over 30 years and said he has never seen a scalloping season as bad as this year portends to be. The commercial season opened last Thursday, Nov. 1 and extends to March 31.

## Afghan war vet finds peace in traditional restorations

By **Brian Bushard**  
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Nantucket Memorial Airport was crowded with family, friends, even his dog, as the plane touched down on the runway, bringing Hollis Webb home.

“She leaped into my arms,” he said of his white collie named Beow. “It was like something out of a movie.”

It was October 2014. Webb’s military service included multiple deployments as a staff sergeant in the Army’s Special Forces, commonly known as the Green Berets. His time in combat spread across seven years, mostly in Afghanistan.

After the hugs and handshakes, the smiles and tears, of homecoming, Webb now had to figure out how he would readjust to civilian life.

“The most difficult part was right after I got out,” Webb said. “You’ve been with the same bunch of guys for years and now you’re leaving behind a community. It’s hard.”



Courtesy of Hollis Webb

**Nantucketer Hollis Webb, right, with medic Andy Weathers, who was killed in action in 2014 in Afghanistan.**

Four years after that plane touched down, Webb has found a sense of purpose in carpentry, restoring historic buildings and using traditional methods to build new ones.

“The transition out of the military hasn’t always been easy,” Webb said. “Having a trade that will put you in the zone like carpentry does, it helps. And the community is incredible out here. That helps, too.”

Soon after his return, Webb applied to the North Bennet Street School in Boston’s North End, which specializes in woodworking and preservation. He received assistance

from the military’s GI Bill and the Mary Helen and Michael Fabacher scholarship, sponsored by the Nantucket Preservation Trust, which is awarded to islanders who want to pursue a career in woodworking using preservation techniques.

Webb graduated from the school in June 2018.

“I’m really into sustainable farming and sustainable development,” he said. “I wanted to learn how to make a house. A lot of those skills are dying and it’s a shame.”

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# Veteran: Attention to detail prominent in his work

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Growing up on Nantucket, Webb said he had always admired the town's historic homes and buildings.

"We do such a good job keeping up our historic homes, and by preserving these historic homes in town, in Sconset and in Madaket, you're preserving history," he said. "Every building has a story."

"In Nantucket, our standards in building and construction have always been really good. There are a lot of talented carpenters here and I wanted to join them. In a lot of places I've traveled before, I haven't seen anything like it."

Preservation Trust executive director Michael May said he saw this talent and attention to detail particularly prominent in Webb's work. This year, Webb received the organization's scholarship for the second year in a row.

"There's a special skill needed to work on historic houses," May said. "The idea of knowing how to duplicate a historic molding or looking at a historic piece of wood and knowing how to slice and repair it appropriately – I felt it's a lost skill."

"There are a lot of people off-island who wouldn't use the same techniques, who would just take out a historic beam on a house. People on the island who work in preservation are in really



Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger

Hollis Webb next to a hand-crafted pergola he finished recently for a customer.

high demand."

Carpentry has also given Webb a sense of camaraderie he misses from his Army days. He finds it easy to transfer that teamwork ethos into his building projects. He often partners with island carpentry companies, including Kohner Fine Carpentry.

"We work together. I really try to learn from other carpenters on Nantucket," he

said. "You learn something new every day. I couldn't learn enough in a lifetime."

Webb got his first taste of the trade as a child watching his father, who was also a carpenter. In the back yard of a friend's house off Hummock Pond Road, Webb works with his father on his most recent project, a pergola (a porch with vertical posts and cross beams at the top for shade),

made of eastern hemlock and magnolia. They built it using a strict traditional design.

Beow, watched as they worked.

"There's no metal in this," Webb said. "No nails, no screws – just wooden tenons and joints."

Working with his father and with other carpenters reminds Webb of the teamwork mentality he learned from his time in the Special Forces.

"I've been a soldier way longer than I've been a carpenter," he said. "The Army was really important for me for the team aspect of it, and learning how to work in a group."

Webb, 31, said that moving into carpentry upon his return home was an obvious choice.

"I can't imagine getting myself into any other hobby or profession on Nantucket," he said. "It would have to be carpentry because there's just so much there to learn."

At times, thinking back on his time in Afghanistan can be painful, Webb said. But a welcoming community on the island and his dedication to his trade helps him move on.

"When I look back at an old frame (house) from the 1700s or 1800s, I see craftsmanship involved in making it. That's really inspiring," Webb said. "I would hope that people years on look back at the work we're doing in town and appreciate the work we did."