



One Bike at a Time. One Hero at a Time. Introducing our 4th WI Veteran Receiving a Harley: John Bentley

Marine Sergeant John Bentley has always wanted to serve his Country and community. In 2007, at just 17, he chose the Marines to prepare him for his dream of becoming a Firefighter. He finished high school early, went to boot camp and returned to proudly walk high school graduation in his USMC uniform. Three years later, John re-upped his contract, sold his Yamaha R1 and deployed to Afghanistan. Almost four months in, he miraculously lived through his worst day: one that changed his life forever, earned him the Purple Heart and left him a 100% disabled Veteran.

Working Provisional Infantry in a highly volatile region, John was on foot patrol searching high risk buildings and people, engaging in gunfire, and gaining intelligence. He also did route security and while on convoy an IED was remotely detonated under his seat destroying the shock absorbing Mine Roller on his vehicle, launching his body within the massive truck and leaving him unconscious and critically injured. He was transported to base and diagnosed with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) with bleeding, fractured wrist, and shattered and compressed vertebrae. Two weeks later John was back out on patrol.

As combat experience grew, so did the toll it took...physically and mentally. John eventually returned home to his young family in Kronenwetter, WI, and his wife, Amber, quickly realized a different man had come home from the one she had married. A bright and caring woman, she advocated for the many services John needed and sought resources for their struggling family. Knowing his passion for motorcycling, she even saved to buy him a used Honda Shadow in an effort to return some joyful freedom to his life. Sadly, while waiting 17 months for disability approval and pay, they were without income, sold their home, grew in debt and sold his bike to make ends meet. It was an incredibly difficult time, and then John was medically retired despite his desire to continue serving.

After several years of extensive therapy, his scars of war are well managed and yet, unseen by most. Back pain and nerve damage to his legs are daily reminders of his worst day. A result of the TBI, frequent headaches and constant ringing in his ears plague him. His speech can be slow and thoughtful but he is smart and well versed. He is a quiet and reserved man who avoids attention, yet looks to be involved. PTSD is a part of his life: nightmares still affect his ability to sleep, and unfamiliar crowds and places can cause hyper-vigilance and anxiety.

And at just 27, with all he now lives with, John remains thankful the life-changing event happened to him instead of someone else. He's worked hard to rebuild his life and become the man he wants to be for both his family and community. He lights up when speaking of his wife and two young children, hunting and firefighting. He enjoys helping others and has trained therapy dogs for Veterans, worked fundraising events and taken Veterans hunting. To meet him you would not know the lengths he has gone through to persevere.

Last year he achieved the grueling certifications necessary for both Firefighter and EMT, but hasn't been able to find employment in his dream career and takes seasonal jobs in the interim. The challenges do get him down, but his character drives him to continue on. And though they've regained a stable life, buying a bike is not an option within the limited family budget, nor will he compromise his children's desires for his own. We were greatly impressed with John's fight to be better for himself and others. In a nod to his determination and strength, and in a nod to the love, pride and support of a military spouse, Hogs For Heroes felt it was time John had another life changing event... this time for the better... and selected him as our fourth Veteran to return to the healing of the road.

On September 1, 2017, we took John shopping for his first Harley at Harley-Davidson Wausau—WOW—they couldn't have been any more excited or supportive! He knew he wanted a preowned Street Glide to save money and almost immediately found his love: a 2014 Street Glide Special. Barely broken in at 10,000 miles, it's got a killer engine, custom pipes and radiates the Amber Whiskey glow. And if a dream come true wasn't enough to overwhelm him, between his choice to save money and the fabulous discount that H-D Wausau provided, John really became emotional when he learned a significant balance would be going to the next injured Veteran in need of road therapy.

John will be receiving his keys at a special celebration, generously hosted by his new Harley-Davidson Wausau family. Please join us **Saturday, September 9 at the H-D Wausau dealership, from 10:30-1, with the Ceremony at 11:30**, as we honor John and share in the gratitude we have for all of our Veterans.

