



## **Introducing Recipient #68: Army Veteran Shane Magelitz of Oshkosh, WI**

Sometimes the moments that shape our lives arrive without warning. For Shane Magelitz, that moment came while sitting in his middle school gym. Shane was born and raised in Oshkosh, Wisconsin; and like millions of Americans, he watched the events of September 11, 2001 unfold on his school's television. As the Twin Towers fell, and the terrorist act became blatantly clear to even his young mind, Shane's closest friend leaned over and said "we're going in". It wasn't a prediction...it was a promise. The two young friends made a pact that very morning that, when they were old enough, they would enlist together to serve their Country and head overseas to destroy the enemy that dared attack our nation. They were mere boys, unworldly and easily swayed emotionally...but unlike many childhood promises and dreams, this one lasted.

In June of 2005, Shane enlisted in the Army National Guard as a senior in high school and began a journey that would shape the rest of his life. Although the two friends entered together, they soon followed different paths. Boot camp at Fort Knox, Kentucky, proved a life-changing experience for Shane. He lost his shy nature quickly, gained self-confidence and discipline and became the adult version of his childhood dream. His mother still swears it was "the best thing for him" and, despite the challenges his time in service would create, it brought out the character that propels him today.

Shane then attached to the Army National Guard base in Oshkosh; and, wanting a skill he could use later in life, specialized as a truck driver. He worked as a loan officer during the week, hung out with family and friends, and looked forward to his drill weekends. Although he thrived in the culture, he grew bored with the Guard's lack of action. Wanting to do more in the folds of the Army, Shane transitioned to active duty in June, 2008.

With a shoulder dislocation from a basketball move gone wrong, he reclassified into Human Resources (HR) while healing and stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, to begin his next chapter. Without an HR opening at the time, Shane was assigned to their International Student Training Detachment (ISTD) to prepare military personnel from allied nations for our Army's 16 specialized training programs, such as Ranger School, Airborne School, Air Assault School, and Officer Candidate courses. He managed the program's administrative and academic needs, as well as prepared its students to meet the personal and professional demands of the high level offerings. In his four years there, Shane cared for his soldiers' needs, built up programs and enjoyed a 99% graduation rate: a clear demonstration of required patience, professionalism, and commitment to helping others succeed. Those same qualities would become a recurring theme throughout Shane's life.

While proud of his contributions, Shane wanted to deploy to a combat zone and was reassigned to Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington. Although he had little training to lend to war's needs, he had himself to offer. By volunteering for orders, Shane believed he could prevent another soldier from having to leave their family and he sought the advice of his Chaplain to do so. Roughly six months later, after limited combat training for his non-combatant role, Shane was in Afghanistan as an HR representative for his Brigade and to support his Chief Warrant Officer and Sergeants.

In service, just like in life, it takes different people doing different roles to make the collective work and outcomes happen. In June, 2012, our Country had begun to draw down efforts in Afghanistan, closing and consolidating bases and reducing military personnel. Shane's job was mobile support for this effort, and he travelled with leadership to restructure several bases within the lower corner of Afghanistan. For six months he lived out of a rucksack, moving base to base to support their soldiers, often on a moment's notice. They

rolled across terrain fraught with insurgents and hidden threats, took occasional small arms fire, and flew through skies often peppered with projectiles, multiple times a week. He never knew where he would find a bed, but he knew each of his soldiers there. He knew their names, jobs and hometowns. He managed their paperwork, their payroll and mail, their dog tags. He shared the hefty care packages his mother sent weekly with those who received nothing. In addition, as their wounded, and lost, Brothers and Sisters required care, visitation and transport, Shane was there to facilitate it and support communications home.

He saw it as his job to do whatever it took for his Family to be successful and supported: and every day, as his soldiers were adversely impacted, Shane felt that pain and loss personally. July of 2012 would prove exceptionally difficult as his Brigade experienced the highest number of casualties. Friends he'd made and see at breakfast would never come back. Teams of acquaintances, gone. Injured sent away to never be heard from again. The repeated losses, and the mere expectation of them, took their toll and created an anxiety, and depression, that would follow him home to affect his future attachments.

There is no "front line" in war today: it surrounds and invades every base and every movement outside of it...leaving haunting memories and altered lives in its wake, and regardless of one's role. Just six weeks in, Shane watched a father place a vest on his son, direct him toward a crowd, then detonate that vest. He stood at a guard shack, reviewing paperwork with his soldiers, only to realize the presence of the armed insurgent across the street. He left a chow hall to retrieve an item and, within mere minutes, missed the RPG direct hit that would have taken him out. As the only one available, Shane held the nearly severed arm of a soldier as they transported him for care. And he was HR...and his memories are tainted with more than just paperwork. To manage it all while there, Shane adopted a defeatist mentality filled with dark humor to sustain him, never said a word about his own turmoil, and, like always, took care of his soldiers as best he could until returning stateside in October, 2012.

Shane separated in 2013 and settled back in Oshkosh along with struggles he wasn't prepared to address but immediately presented as panic attacks, migraines, social insecurities, and depression. The transition wasn't easy as he faltered through extreme variations in civilian life compared to what he'd known. With time, Shane pushed through to begin rebuilding a path forward. He found part-time work and pursued a college education in law enforcement. On a group date set up by his parents, Shane first met Kim, who would prove to be the steady and loving force that he would eventually marry. Shane knew something wasn't right about him and believed he needed something to boost his spirits. Over his years he'd fondly recall riding on the back of his father's motorcycle as a child; and desperate for the feeling of freedom he remembered, Shane got his motorcycle endorsement. And shortly after that, the other steady and loving force he needed came from the 2007 H-D Sportster 883 his mother bought him to celebrate his academic achievements.

That bike became Shane's daily transportation to school and work, but more importantly, it became his way to cope and regain balance in his mental health. He thought he needed the adrenaline rush and thrill from curves and speed...but he found the calm release it provided him, the controlled focus it required and the mind-clearing attention the road demanded. He put thousands of miles on that bike, moving through life stressors and moving through his own mind. It didn't, however, stop the anxiety and depression.

Shane graduated in 2016 and obtained a security position at Madison's Truax Air Force Base. While working twelve hour night shifts, and commuting from Oshkosh, Shane's riding time decreased, as did his mental health. After years of denial, it was Kim who was finally able to reach him and urge him to seek mental health care; and in 2017 he begrudgingly went to his first appointment. He's worked for years with a trusted psychologist, found support in medication therapy and spent hours in Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to literally arrive at a point where he can say his efforts changed his life for the better.

Along the way he and Kim married, bought a home and comfortably settled into their roles as “the cool Aunt and Uncle” to their nieces and nephew. Realizing his security job was triggering his mental health struggles, Shane took a position as a Veteran Benefits Specialist for Winnebago County in 2022. To many people, that sounds like a job; but to Shane, it is much more than that. He immediately found joy and purpose in helping his fellow Veterans navigate the often confusing process of obtaining the benefits, services, and support they have earned through their service. And when the workday ends, Shane’s commitment doesn't stop. He often spends 10 plus hours a week volunteering his time and expertise on a Discord online platform for roughly 95,000 Veterans, answering those same questions, listening to their struggles and guiding them to care. He takes great comfort in knowing he’s helped redirect someone’s life. Where he no longer finds comfort, however, is on his 19 year old Sportster that is currently in disrepair.

Shane last rode in 2024, somewhat guardedly and with others, traversing only 200 miles as his bike became unreliable. The aging Sportster developed more issues and repair demands than their budget could accommodate. Several large, unforeseen home expenses, medical expenses and the passing of his emotional support dog had drained their savings and strained their lives; and frankly, the bike was now worth less than the cost of its repairs. Amongst the hardships faced, not having his healthy outlet magnified Shane’s mental health struggles and recently made them much harder to manage. Just as hard, saving for the touring bike that he dreams of, the one he can travel with his wife on, the one that answers his prayers... has become a tenuous, someday dream for Shane. Hogs For Heroes believed his someday was now.

Shane never saw us coming and was deeply grateful for the healing tool that would soon be in his life once again. He test rode models and landed on a Street Glide for his best fit. Then his heart took over: and he found a gorgeous, 2025 Street Glide Ultra in Whisky Fire and Black, barely broken in with just 4,500 miles on her. Conveniently for us, it was at Reel Brother H-D in Mauston, Wisconsin...about a half hour from where he would be receiving its keys.

Bragging rights for this bike’s full sponsorship go to Wisconsin’s International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 139. After handing us a check from last year's fundraising that would support the purchase of four bikes this year alone, Shane’s beautiful ride is their third one to roll out. Shane’s Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Saturday, June 27 at 4:30 p.m. at Summit Ridge in Wonewoc, WI. It follows the IUOE Poker Run benefitting Hogs For Heroes.

Have your Saturday free? Join the Run on either their motorcycle course or their UTV course and help return freedom to those who fought for ours.