



Hogs For Heroes Awards First Harley-Davidson To Disabled Wisconsin Veteran, Scott Kruchten of Sun Prairie

by Audra Thompson, VP & Co-Founder

HOGS FOR HEROES, started in 2015, is a nonprofit created specifically to get our injured Wisconsin Veteran riders back on The Road with a new Harley-Davidson of their choosing. Our mission is simple: we raise funds to purchase Harleys for Veterans injured, mentally or physically, during the course of active duty, in an effort to enhance their healing and readjustment to civilian life with a different form of therapy: that of the road.

For those who understand the power of the road and the freedom riding provides, there is nothing else like it. Even Sunday drivers on four wheels can appreciate the joy behind the drive. Hogs For Heroes believes that the freedom of the road, the collegiality of riders and the pride and peace found in ownership can support the healing processes for our returning injured Veterans. Presented as a gift from the donating public, the bike reinforces the collective gratitude of our Wisconsin citizens and the hope they make the rough road a little smoother for a deserving Wisconsin Veteran.

One Bike a time. One Hero at a time. That is both our motto and approach. First we raise the funds, then we find the Veteran. After only six months of fundraising, we hit the financial threshold for purchasing our first bike-- a full six months faster than hoped. In January of 2016 we put our processes in place, blasted the news of an open application period, and received more than twice the number of applications we had hoped for our first time out of the gate. Candidates came from across the state and across the branches of Armed Services. Our Advisory Board convened to review the applications and selected one stand-out Veteran from the many deserving. Without doubt, that has been the hardest part of the work we've done thus far.

Our application process uses a defined set of criteria to aid our applicants and Advisory Board in their decision making. We are looking to assist a Wisconsin Veteran who was injured in the course of active duty and honorably discharged. He or she must have a current motorcycle license, be capable of safe operations, and demonstrate a history of motorcycle enthusiasm and/or ownership. Financial need definitely plays a part in our decision making, as do other life hardships that our Veterans often face during their transition back into civilian life. The word Hero is definitely a subjective term, but we consider leadership, community involvement, and self development to be vital components. We require credentials be provided and ask some essay questions that help us better understand the individual. It is not a process for the faint of heart, and we think that helps differentiate candidates who are willing to put a little work and thought into the process. We had many deserving Veterans to choose from, but one stood out a little more.

The Hero.

In 2003, Scott Kruchten was 28 years old. He lived comfortably with a great job, he owned a home, a Harley and a Ducati. Still reeling from 9/11 and looking for his next challenge in life, he set his sights on serving our country and entered the Marine Corps. As a Reservist, he immediately found himself promoted, trained as an Assaultman, and deployed to Iraq. In 2004, after completing patrol in turbulent Lutifiyah, Scott, the vehicle commander of the last Humvee in a group of 8, gave the thumbs up to proceed. After all other vehicles had safely passed the same strip, an IED was remotely detonated under Scott's vehicle, killing 4 of the 5 Marines inside. Three of the five killed were from Wisconsin, and the fourth Wisconsinite, Scott, was the lone survivor.

Much of what Scott can relay comes from others filling him in. His last real memory of the incident is a 200 yard progression down the strip believed to be safe, and restarts 10 days later at Maryland's Bethesda Naval Hospital. The Humvee, an unrecognizable, twisted mass of burnt metal, laid at least 50 yards from where the IED was detonated, and left a crater 18 feet wide by 6 feet deep. The three Marines in the back of the truck died instantly while Scott and another were ejected from the front cab. Both were immediately cared for in field, loaded onto a Medivac Blackhawk and flown to Baghdad for life stabilizing care. His comrade died shortly after transport, leaving Scott to fight through the years of surgeries, procedures, rehabilitation and neuropsychological therapy that his fractured body and Traumatic Brain Injury required.

After returning from service and facing many medical and rehabilitative challenges, he relied on the strength of his family, friends, and Marine Brothers to augment his drive "to be better because of what happened". Scott had made a six year commitment to the Marines and he adamantly wanted to fulfill his term in lieu of disability retirement. He worked long and hard at recovery, he started classes at UW-Madison, and he focused on keeping skills sharp and leadership relevant. Reflecting on his desire to go back, Scott shares "It was my goal that rather than the Marine Corp say "Why keep this guy around?" they instead say "Why would we want to let this guy go?" A Purple Heart recipient, Scott has shared his story openly and volunteered many hours over the years, believing his role in surviving was to educate, support and inspire others in need.

Despite how he strengthened his physical and emotional being, Scott found himself face to face with personal turmoil in the years to come. Scott chose to leave his "best job ever" at Sauk Prairie Harley-Davidson when, a direct result of his injuries, he found himself unable to use the software program he created. He had to sell both motorcycles to accommodate doctor's orders and pay his bills. He found himself living with his parents and in financial crisis. He became self-employed as a Handyman. He married and subsequently found himself divorced, homeless and in further financial despair. The lengthy process of rehabilitation and the Marine Corps re-evaluation for service put Scott at the point where permanent retirement as a result of his disabilities coincided with the end of his contract to his country: he was no longer able to serve his country as he hoped he still could.

And then came Amy. Perhaps through a series of fated life moments, Scott reconnected with his long time friend Amy Phillips. Their friendship strengthened, they fell in love, and they've been happily married since 2011. Together they share in raising her 9 year old son, Jacob, and two rescue dogs. In 2012 he began working for the State of Wisconsin as an HVAC Specialist. He seeks out additional training to improve himself as both a technician and leader. He loves stand-up paddle boarding,

fishing, is an avid Star Wars fan, and a staunch supporter of our men and women in service. And while they now own a home in Sun Prairie, WI and can make ends meet, the past continues to haunt their financial security and leaves little else for discretionary funds. In fact, just a few years ago when he found his old Ducati had gone on the market again, and despite the personal longing it stirred in Scott, he knew he still wasn't in a position to responsibly afford its return to him.

Scott's love for motorcycles started at an early age; he was 13 years old when his mother taught him how to ride. He bought his first Harley at the age of 18 and sold his last one a year after his injury. Working primarily in the Service Department at Sauk Prairie HD years before deployment, he developed a time-management program that improved their shop's efficiency and reduced costs. Smiling as he reflects back on the great family he used to work for, he remembers the daily joy in hearing the thunder, smelling the exhaust and appreciating the uniquely beautiful machines as the things he missed most in his motorcycle-filled past. Once or twice a season he's been able to return to the road on borrowed bikes, only temporarily filling the void. And while attending bike events on four wheels versus two was still fun, it was just not the same as rolling in on your own two. Nonetheless, he participated to remain involved in his community, stay close to the bikes and support those in need.

The Bike: Scott's Choice.

Determined to face his challenges, he worked hard to physically overcome a violent combat injury and not let his attackers have all five of them. Determined to be back on the road, he's been borrowing bikes from family and friends just to have the feel of the road again. Determined to put his family's financial needs first, he has forgone purchasing a motorcycle, but has never let go of the "someday" dream. Hogs For Heroes determined that "someday" was *now* for Retired Marine, Lance Corporal Scott Kruchten.

What you choose to ride is as personal as what you choose to wear. It's an expression of you; and one size does not fit all. That is why Hogs For Heroes lets the Veteran choose their new Harley. That's right, they choose, up to a set financial limit. We plan on purchasing new, but if our Veteran walks in and finds a preowned beauty on the floor they want, we are good with that, too. Our intent is to partner with the Harley-Davidson dealership where the Veteran lives in an effort to keep sales local, establish a relationship for future service needs and encourage HOG membership. In Scott's case, our decision to work with his former employer, Sauk Prairie Harley-Davidson, was easy. SPHD jumped at the chance to honor one of their own and generously worked out an especially sweet deal just for Scott. Scott chose a preowned 2016 FLTRXS Road Glide Special in Black Quartz with only 350 miles on it. While large Touring bikes aren't everyone's cup of tea, Scott saw no other bike in his dream. And just like any other owner, Scott immediately set out to add accessories and make that bike his own.

Publicly gifting the bike allows supporters the opportunity to celebrate and honor our Veteran. And on May 4, 2016, we did just that, and right in time for the start of bike season. Middleton's Quaker Steak and Lube's Wednesday Bike Night was not only a perfect venue for celebrating motorcycle enthusiasm, but it afforded us the opportunity to thank them for their continued support of our organization. The place was packed on a chilly, spring evening as we took the stage to honor our Hero. As his bike sat on display for all to see, Scott spoke emotionally and genuinely and then took

his keys with a gentle humbleness and deeply rooted gratitude for the life that was his and those that made it all possible.

Working on the next Bike.

There are many honorable causes and obvious community needs to support, but Hogs For Heroes wanted to make a large, impactful difference in a small number of lives rather than a slight difference across many. There is no right or wrong cause here; we are simply different in our approach to help. Our “one at a time” approach allows us to stay small and controlled. *Every dollar donated for the bike goes straight to the bike:* no overhead costs, no paid positions, no fancy gimmicks. We are committed to minimal operating expenses, and those we do have are covered by donations from our Founding Board and in-kind donations from businesses. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and contributions are tax-deductible. But enough about us, it is you who makes the difference here.

Because of your generosity, we are pleased to say that we are well on our way to awarding our next Harley! Every donation counts and is “the fuel” for our next Bike and Hero pairing. Donations can be processed electronically through Pay Pal on our website or mailed in to our business address. Citizens, businesses and clubs can host third party events, such as rides, golf outings, garage sales and BBQs, and then share the proceeds directly with Hogs For Heroes. Simply spreading our word helps us to grow and assist more Veterans in need.

We know people inherently want to help others; and if this cause hits your passion buttons we hope you will consider supporting us. It is an amazing feeling to know you are making a difference in the life of someone who served, and sacrificed, to make a difference in yours.

More information on the organization and how you can become further involved can be found at: www.hogsforheroeswi.org



Retired Marine Scott Kruchten and SPHD Owner Wolf Schulenburg reconnecting over Scott's pick: a 2016 FLTRXS Road Glide Special on the showroom floor of Sauk Prairie Harley Davidson.

May 4, 2016